

Protesters at Donald Trump Rally in Arizona Met with Teargas



Phoenix, August 23 (RHC)-- In the U.S. state of Arizona, thousands of protesters flooded the streets of Phoenix to denounce racism, neo-Nazis and the Donald Trump administration. As the rally ended, police fired teargas into the crowd of protesters in an attempt to break up the demonstration.

The U.S. president was in Phoenix for a campaign rally, the first since his administration was engulfed by mass outrage following his remarks about a white supremacist riot in Charlottesville, Virginia.

During what protesters called Trump's 'Make America White Again Tour' his speech was filled with barnstorming campaign-style "America First" rhetoric. The U.S. president touted his stringent anti-immigrant measures, lodged defensive comments toward the "fake news media" in reaction to his controversial statements equating neo-Nazis with anti-racists, and expressed his support for law enforcement agencies. Trump also made vague pledges to "terminate NAFTA" and possibly pardon notorious anti-immigrant ex-Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who was charged with criminal contempt last month for racially profiling Latino residents.

About 4,000 to 5,000 protesters flooded the streets around the convention center where Trump spoke. The protesters came from cities across the state and were seen carrying signs with slogans such as "Black Lives Matter," "No Trump, No KKK," and other signs representing social causes such as the immigrant rights movement.

Members of Redneck Revolt and the John Brown Gun Club, Phoenix-based anti-racist community defense organizations, also attended the protest armed with rifles in case the protesters came under attack. Arizona is an open carry state where the exercise of Second Amendment gun rights isn't considered controversial.

Approximately 1,000 Trump supporters, including anti-immigrant nativist and white supremacist groups, also amassed outside of the crowded hall.

In messages posted to social media as well as to the event pages of the protests, Trump supporters James A. Cobo and Graham Carlise made threats -- allegedly in jest -- that they would plow their cars into the protesters, as happened on August 12th, when a neo-Nazi drove full-speed into anti-racists, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer and injuring 19 others.

However, later in the evening, the two groups confronted each other, primarily with chants like "Racist go home" and "USA, USA, USA." A few small skirmishes and shoving matches also broke out as neo-Nazis taunted local residents and Latino youth with white racist slogans and gestures, nearly resulting in fights.

Jeri Williams, the police chief in Phoenix, said in a statement that the department would have "maximum staffing" during the rally and was working "24/7" to prepare for any possible clashes. According to protesters speaking to teleSUR, the police were "hovering around, on standby."

According to some witnesses, as protesters were trying to leave the area, police blocked the route and used tear gas and less-lethal munitions on protesters after someone threw a water-bottle. Phoenix Police Department spokesman Sergeant Jonathan Howard confirmed later that "police have responded with pepper balls and OC (oleoresin capsicum)," to the alleged "assaults."

Earlier this month, Trump told Fox News that he was "seriously considering" granting a pardon to Arpaio, who was found guilty of criminal contempt for having "willfully violated" a 2011 court order barring his officers from stopping and detaining Latino motorists on suspicion that they were in the country without authorization.

While the White House ruled out any such move shortly before Trump's rally, Trump "predicted that (Arpaio would) be just fine" and hinted at a potential pardon further down the road so as not to cause any "controversy."

Migrant justice advocates were enraged by the comments, which they saw as a slap in the face. "What he said is the same thing as a pardon, he's basically uplifting Arpaio's legacy of terror in our communities and spreading it nationally," Lucia Sandoval Canela, communications director for Puente Human Rights Movement, told teleSUR.

Arpaio, 85, was found guilty last month of criminal contempt for violating the terms of a 2011 court order in a racial profiling case, earning praise from Donald Trump during his election campaign. Despite his frequent appearances alongside Trump on the campaign trail, Arpaio lost a re-election bid last year.

Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton, a Democrat, had asked the Republican president to postpone Tuesday's event in light of his response to the right-wing attacks earlier this month at a protest against the removal of a Confederate statue in Charlottesville.

"Trump's Phoenix speech and his own suggestion on Fox News that he may very well pardon Sheriff Joe Arpaio should be viewed in the proper context -- as the next stop in his base-burnishing, race-baiting, white nationalist 'Make America White Again' tour," America's Voice Education Fund said in a statement.

Earlier in the day, Trump visited a U.S. Customs and Border Protection facility in Yuma along the U.S.-Mexican border as he seeks congressional funding for his proposed border wall. Events are also planned

in support of Trump, including a Young Republicans meetup and a motorcycle ride, the Arizona Republic reported.

The visit comes after last weekend's white supremacist riot in Charlottesville. The violence triggered the biggest domestic crisis for Trump, who was widely criticized for not immediately condemning the white supremacists and for ascribing equal blame to anti-racists for the violent melee. Anonymous White House officials have expressed their concern that Trump may wade back into the Charlottesville issue as he's cheered on by thousands of supporters at the rally.

"At a moment when the president should be reaching out to all Americans, he will undoubtedly speak to whites as if they are the only Americans that count -- and as if all others are a threat to their future," said Frank Sherry of America's Voice.

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