

Honduran doctors and teachers end strike, call for transparent talks



Tegucigalpa, June 7 (RHC)-- The Honduran Platform for the Defense of Health and Education -- the main organizers of the nation's protests that began in late April over government public education and health care reform laws -- are returning to work.

Platform leaders say they are willing to dialogue with the administration of President Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH), but only if government representatives are knowledgeable about the situation and the talks are "transparent and televised."

President of the Medical College of Honduras (CMH), Dr. Suyapa Figueroa, main spokesperson for the Platform told local media: "We are going to keep our word, (we will) return to normal activities." Dr. Figueroa added: "We want dialogue that leads to conclusions, solutions. We cannot continue accepting the intermediaries the government sends in who we don't know to the talks."

The doctor said the government's negotiators need to have sufficient technical skills to craft proposals with them and create quickly solutions, stressing the sessions need to be transparent and "televised" to the public. "Only when the government wants to accept these rules, (we will) dialogue, if not, no" said

Figueroa to the press.

On April 25, the National Congress of Honduras the controversial Law of Restructuring and Transformation of the National Education and Healthcare System, which was nullified some five days later after continual nationwide protests and strikes took place by healthcare professionals, teachers, students, doctors and the public in general.

Educators and health professionals said the law would allow the government to privatize the education and health systems and lead to major cutbacks and layoffs in the already highly defunded public sectors.

"We have no library, no computer classes, no English teacher; I'm fighting so these children can have better future," one teacher told The Guardian during more protests. Demonstrations and major repression by the national police continued throughout May until President Hernandez and Congress put enforce two decrees last weekend, PCM-026 and PCM-027. The decrees declared a state of emergency over the public health and education sectors, respectively. These kinds of orders are traditionally used in times of war, epidemics, or during "disturbances to peace."

The orders would have given the administration a blank check to transform the education and public health areas and to reassign their funds, until they were revoked days later.

Most protesters just want JOH out of office after a highly controversial and internationally-recognized fraudulent 2017 elections put incumbent Hernandez back in the presidential palace. "The people are on the streets because the crisis is extreme, and they have been betrayed too many times by this government, which is no longer recognized as credible or legitimate," said Dr. Figueroa.

Seventy five percent of schools are in shambles, says Ovenir Flores, vice-president of the Honduran Teaching Professional Association to teleSUR. In the health system, levels of corruption in the area have reached 49 percent, according to the National Anticorruption Council.

And once again, Honduran National Police have been cracking down on peaceful demonstrators. "The state has become a punitive and repressive entity," said human rights defender Dr. Juan Almandarez to local radio media.

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