

# *Protests in Honduras leave at least two dead, 21 injured in Tegucigalpa*

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Tegucigalpa, June 20 (RHC)-- At least two people were killed and some 21 others were left injured after massive demonstrations that took place overnight into Thursday morning in several cities throughout Honduras, calling for the removal of President Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH). The president reportedly left the country with his wife for the United States late Wednesday evening.

Since April, demonstrations have been taking place across the country against government measures to privatize the nation's already weak education and health systems, and to demand JOH's resignation. They've been met with violent crackdowns by the militarized National Police. On Wednesday night, rather than repress protesters, police members joined the ranks of protesters, saying they would no longer follow orders to violently crack down on protesting citizens.

In a statement by the National Police, the institution said it will "not repress (people) and will respect their human rights." The national security force, known for its violent tactics against the population, apologized to the Honduran people for the damage it had done. The police force is also demanding better working conditions and labor rights from the right-wing government.

"We affirm our support for the people since we are part of it and we benefit from the causes for which they are fighting. ... We reiterate to the government that we are not going to repress the Honduran people anymore," said a masked police officer who read a statement flanked by colleagues in a video tweeted by La Red21.

According to local media, the secretary of finance has been analyzing National Police funds since January to consider a salary increase, but no solution has been offered. The police began to strike on Tuesday.

Also leading the late night protests was the Platform for Defense of Healthcare & Education (PDSE), a social movement of teachers, students, doctors and nurses who have been demanding the repeal of a national law passed in late April they said would lead to massive layoffs in both sectors. The law was later repealed along with presidential "emergency" decrees that would have taken over the health and education areas, but massive protests have continued for the removal of JOH that many in Honduras and internationally say stole the 2017 presidential elections.

Amid the worsening economic, social and political crisis in the country and the medical sector over the past two years, the dengue epidemic has also increased.

In Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras and in San Pedro Sula, the country's second largest city, demonstrations turned violent when some police who have remained on the job tried to disperse groups who blocked the streets with burning tires.

Road and street blockades were also set up in cities like El Progreso, La Lima, Santa Barbara, Santa Rosa de Copan, La Ceiba, Comayagua and Danli. Because of newly proposed transportation taxes, trucks have also largely stopped in Honduras, generating shortages of food, water and other vital products. This situation generated desperation and looting.

"At 9:25 p.m., Tegucigalpa continues in chaos, with looting businesses, burning property, while the police walk by without repressing protesters," Gilda Silvestrucci, Telesur correspondent reported from the capital.

"Tegucigalpa: due to the absence of police on the streets, people burn fast food businesses."

Thursday morning it was revealed that the presidential plane left early Wednesday morning for the United States and the Honduran first lady, Ana Garcia is meeting with Kevin McAleenan, the United States acting Homeland Security Secretary.

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