

Ecuadorean President Lenin Moreno declares curfew and militarization of Quito



Quito, October 12 (RHC)-- Ecuadorean President Lenin Moreno declared Saturday afternoon, with a 30 minute warning, that his government was putting the capital city of Quito under a curfew starting at 3:00 p.m. local time and declared the city and its surroundings a "militarized" zone.

At 2:30 p.m., in a press conference flanked by Vice President Otto Sonnenholzner and Defense Minister Oswaldo Jarrin, the president said the measure was being taken to "facilitate the use of public force in the face of intolerable excess of violence," that has occurred in the city since protests began 10 days ago.

But at the stroke of 3, when the curfew went into effect, protesters remained at the barricades. TV camera crews interviewed an angry group of demonstrators, who vowed to stay in the streets and continue their protests of the government's policies. Scenes from across Quito, the Ecuadorean capital, showed protesters completely ignoring the curfew order as police forces stood back.

Several recalled the deceptive move that Moreno made the day before. On Friday afternoon, an hour after Moreno invited the Indigenous groups and other civil society groups to "dialogue" for the first time since massive protests began against the government's austerity measures, the military and National

Police bombarded the peaceful protesters with live ammunition and tear gas who had gathered in front of the National Assembly to support the beginning of the talks. The violence on part of security forces on Friday sent masses of demonstrators running toward the historic center to protect themselves.

Since the demonstrations began, over 1,000 people have been detained nationwide, with 76 percent of them being released because they had "committed no crime whatsoever," according to the oversight state agency, Public Defense.

The move by the president on Saturday comes as demonstrators began to march in all parts of the city -- from the historic center where anti-government protests are typically localized—to the more affluent parts of the city in the north.

At the offices of Teleamazonas television outlet in the northern end of Quito, a van belonging to the company was set on fire within the facility's parking area. Tweets about the incident say that employees are inside the building. It's unclear who began the fire. Firefighters tweeted that they are having a hard time reaching the van to put out the flames.

The Ecuadorean Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities (Conaie), which has organized the main protests near the National Assembly this week, tweeted that its group was not responsible for the vandalism at Teleamazonas or the state agency that was ransacked the morning of Oct. 12.

State helicopters have been circulating the skies of Quito since Saturday morning and videos taken from residents in the historic center of the city show military armored vehicles firing unknown explosives at protesters in the street.

Protesters are out against the controversial 'Decree 883' that ended fuel subsidies and reduced workers' rights as of October 3rd. The austerity measures are being implemented at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in exchange for a \$4.2 billion loan negotiated by the Moreno administration last March. At that time, the president's approval rating registered 17 percent.

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