

Chileans reject Piñera's measures to criminalize social protest



Santiago de Chile, November 8 (RHC)-- Chile's President Sebastian Piñera on Thursday announced a package of bills whose purpose would be to halt protests through further criminalization of citizens who barricade streets and hide their faces during demonstrations.

His bills are also aimed at enhancing surveillance of political opponents, increasing punishments for looters and providing "more protection" to the military and police in case of legal complaints.

"This agenda represents a significant and important contribution to improve our ability to control and safeguard public order," Chile's president said and asked lawmakers for the "urgent and necessary" approval of his bills.

Piñera also called a meeting of the National Security Council (Cosena) at the Palacio de La Moneda on Thursday, which generated immediate rejection of Chileans because a similar measure had not been implemented since at least five years ago.

Opposition lawmakers also rejected the call to a Cosena meeting and asked Piñera to summon a plebiscite to elaborate a new constitution. "From the Communist Party to the Christian Democracy, lawmakers closed ranks and pointed out that Piñera's meeting with the high command does not respond to the demands which the citizens have been raising in their demonstrations over the last 20 days," local

outlet El Desconcierto reported.

The "anti-hooded law" and the other measures were announced in a televised speech made at a time when, according to the latest opinion polls, only 9 percent of the Chileans approve Piñera's decisions.

"After three weeks of the social outbreak, anyone would have expected the President to have listened, at least to some extent, what people are demanding. But he did not," outlet Pousta commented.

"Flagrant human rights violations figures, stories, videos, and photos have reached high levels. For instance, the world's record of people who have lost an eye as a result of police shooting... But Piñera chose to use most of his TV time to present his 'Agenda for Strengthening Public Order'."

According to local analysts and politicians, Piñera's package of bills will not reduce human rights violations, which in turn will intensify the social conflict. "When we asked Piñera to listen, we meant to listen to the people and not to his ultra-cons. With these announcements, he is 'putting out' the fire by throwing fuel at it," the Broad Front lawmaker Giorgio Jackson said. "We need him to amend the route and focus on the social requests and substantive changes which Chile is claiming."

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