

Chilean lawmakers reject move to impeach President Piñera



Valparaiso, December 14 (RHC)-- Chilean lawmakers have rejected a bid to impeach conservative President Sebastian Piñera over accusations he failed to guarantee human rights during weeks of deadly riots despite mounting evidence about the alleged abuses.

After hours of debate, the Chamber of Deputies tossed the impeachment motion out 79-73 on grounds that it did not meet the Constitutional threshold for impeaching a sitting president.

Chile has been rocked by nearly two months of chaos and protests over inequality and social injustices. Police repression has left 26 dead, and widespread allegations of abuse, torture and rape by security forces.

Piñera is accused of declaring early in the crisis that Chile was "at war with a powerful enemy," and being slow to stamp out police abuses, among others. He is the first president to face impeachment in Chile in more than 60 years.

Piñera's approval rating has plunged to 10 percent - the lowest for a sitting president since Chile's return to democracy in 1990.

The hours-long debate quickly turned raucous, prompting house president Ivan Flores, of the centrist Christian Democrat party, to temporarily suspend the session by mid-afternoon. "It's hard to erase from memory images of troops deployed throughout the capital, repressing protesters," said socialist lawmaker Gaston Saavedra.

Right-leaning supporters of Piñera's hung placards that said "Care for our Democracy," threatening that a politically-motivated impeachment could have long-term consequences. Leftist lawmakers, in turn, mounted a sketch of a bloodied eye on their desks, in homage to more than 200 people who suffered severe eye trauma in the demonstrations, mostly due to police rubber bullets.

Several international rights groups have condemned widespread police abuses. More than 800 police officers are under investigation, authorities said, and officials have promised deep reforms to protocols.

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