

Bolivian prosecutors request six months of pre-trial detention for Jeanine Añez

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La Paz, March 14 (RHC)-- Bolivian prosecutors say ex-president Jeanine Añez must spend six months of pre-trial detention behind bars as a “precautionary” measure over her role in a coup against former president Evo Morales.

On Sunday, prosecutors filed an indictment seeking the extended provisional imprisonment of 53-year-old Anez and two of her ministers in her year-long caretaker government in 2019. The indictment came just a day after the trio was arrested over terrorism, sedition and conspiracy charges linked to the ousting of Evo Morales, describing it as a coup d'etat.

On Friday, Public Prosecutor Alcides Mejillones issued arrest warrants for Anez and five ministers of her cabinet. Four military chiefs, including General Williams Kaliman and former police commander Yuri Calderon, also received arrest warrants.

On Saturday, a government minister said that Bolivian police had arrested Anez on the charges. Rodrigo Guzmán and Alvaro Coimbra, who served in Anez's 11-month caretaker administration as Bolivia's energy and justice ministers, respectively, were detained in the northern city of Trinidad later on Friday.

Añez has already rejected the accusations and the ensuing arrest warrants as "political persecution." Bolivian authorities issued arrest warrants for ex-president Anez and nine others over 2019 coup against ex-President Morales.

Evo Morales, who came to power as the president in 2006, won Bolivia's presidential election for a fourth term in October 2019. However, the Bolivian military and opposition claimed that the election had been rigged, a claim that was later debunked, inciting deadly street protests against Morales and his ruling party, the Movement for Socialism (MAS).

Amid fierce protests, the military publicly called on Morales to resign. The embattled president under pressure, particularly from Calderon, eventually stepped down in November that year and was forced to go into exile to Mexico and then to Argentina.

Later on, Anez, a former senator, assumed power as the interim president. However, she withdrew her candidacy from the next presidential election in October last year, one day after polls revealed that Luis Arce, the pro-Morales candidate, in the lead.

Arce, who had served as Morales' minister of economy and public finance, won the elections, ousting Anez and ending her government's attempts to prosecute Morales' supporters. The presidency and congress are now under the control of MAS.

Following the arrest warrants, Evo Morales came to Twitter and said the "authors and accomplices of the dictatorship" that succeeded him must be "investigated and sanctioned", referring to his ouster as the "coup d'etat."

Previously, Evo Morales had warned that the coup would purportedly open Bolivia's lithium reserves to international exploitation. "In Bolivia, we could define the price of lithium for the world... Now I have realized that some industrialized countries do not want competition," Morales said after the coup. He had been seeking to nationalize the extraction of lithium reserves in order to "secure the country's future."

Estimated to be at around 900 million tons, Bolivia's reserves are believed to contain 70 percent of the world's known lithium, representing a lucrative market for international investors and competitors. The mineral is essential in the manufacturing of long-lasting batteries and electric cars.

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