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Lima, July 16 (RHC)-- The interim president of Peru has warned that the country is on the brink after supporters of Keiko Fujimori, a right-wing candidate who refused to concede defeat in a presidential election, went on a rampage in the capital.

“We cannot and we will not tolerate any acts of violence,” Peru’s interim president Francisco Sagasti said on Wednesday evening in an interview with Canal N news channel. Speaking about a day of violence in the capital Lima, he described it as a “breaking point” and pledged to use his power to “maintain tranquility and peace without incurring excesses” in policing.

The warning came after supporters of Keiko Fujimori, a right-wing presidential candidate from the Popular Force party, caused a disturbance in Lima. Near the city’s main square, they intercepted the cars of two cabinet members, Health Minister Oscar Ugarte and Housing Minister Solangel Fernandez, who were on their way to the Government Palace to brief the media about the ongoing fight against COVID-19.

The protesters stopped the vehicles and hit them with stones and other weapons, before the politicians were rescued by the police. Neither minister was harmed, but Ugarte said the incident constituted an attack against the government, since the cars were clearly marked as official government vehicles.

The episode was part of a larger unrest involving people identified as members of a radical group called La Resistencia. They attempted to tear down barriers surrounding the palace in a bid to reach President Sagasti. The police deployed tear gas and mounted officers to quell the rioting.

The demonstrators also harassed members of the press who were covering the protests. Canal N correspondent Fatima Chavez was accosted in the middle of her live report from the scene. Other journalists were reportedly targeted by the protesters too.

The unruly demonstration in Lima was in support of Fujimori’s claims of election fraud, which prevented her rival, leftist Pedro Castillo, from being confirmed as the next president of Peru. The official count put Castillo 44,000 votes ahead of Fujimori, but she filed multiple challenges with a special election jury, resulting in weeks of delays.

All of those appeals have been rejected by jury members due to lack of proof, but Fujimori also refused to accept those rulings. She has accused Sagasti of taking Castillo’s side due to his refusal to invite a foreign audit of the ballot as she requested. International observers said the June 6 election in Peru was legitimate.

After Wednesday’s violence, Fujimori blasted the actions of her supporters, saying on Twitter that her party only accepted peaceful protests. Popular Force distanced itself from acts attributed to La Resistencia in the past. For example, it condemned the vandalism of a memorial to two young people killed during anti-government marches in Lima in November 2020. Local media identified one of the cars involved in the vandalism as being owned by Popular Force.

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