

*Bolivia sets census for 2024 as
U.S.-backed anti-government
riots persist*



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La Paz, November 12 (RHC)-- Bolivia's President Luis Arce has set the date of the country's next census for 2024, a year later than demanded by US-backed opposition groups that have waged anti government riots in recent weeks. "We have a responsibility to carry out a quality census in which everyone participates," Arce declared on Saturday during a midnight speech amid continuing violent protests crippling part of the Latin American nation. "We call for the return of calm, peace and normality in the department of Santa Cruz."

The nation's largest city of Santa Cruz, a relatively wealthy farming hub and opposition bastion, has grounded to a halt in recent days amid a general strike – sponsored by opposition groups and supported by the United States -- demanding that the census be held next year, prior to next elections due in 2025.

In an apparent effort to calm the restive situation instigated by opposition groups, Arce further said the census would be held on March 23, 2024, adding that distribution of benefits based on census results would begin in September 2024, a month before the original proposed date.

This is while the U.S.-sponsored regional and opposition groups in the Andean nation claim that the socialist government in La Paz delayed the census as part of an effort to gain more seats in Congress and more state resources. The development came a day after opposition-led rioters clashed with pro-government groups, with local TV images showing violent altercations featuring Molotov cocktails, motorcycles, firecrackers, stones and sticks.

The three weeks of rioting have so far left four people killed and more than 170 injured, the government said, blaming the surge of violence on Santa Cruz Governor Luis Fernando Camacho, who began the strike on October 22, along with other opposition groups. The strike has exacerbated food shortages and sent already high prices soaring, costing about \$700 million, Economy Minister Marcelo Montenegro stated on Friday.

In November 2019, a U.S.-sponsored unrest purportedly against alleged electoral fraud in Bolivia forced re-elected president at the time, Evo Morales, to flee the country, installing right-wing opposition member Jeanine as the interim president.

The U.S.-led and Washington-based Organization of American States (OAS) falsely claimed at the time that it had found "clear evidence" of voting irregularities in favor of Morales, a popular president who was re-elected into office in a democratic process.

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