

Peruvian judge denies former President Pedro Castillo's bid to end detention

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Lima, December 14 (RHC)-- A judge in Peru has rejected ousted President Pedro Castillo's appeal to end his detention as authorities build a case against him on "rebellion" and "conspiracy" accusations, which have sparked protests across the country.

Supreme Court Judge Cesar San Martin Castro's decision on Tuesday could further inflame the ongoing political crisis, as demonstrators have demanded Castillo's freedom and called for his successor, former Vice President Dina Boluarte, to step down.

Peru's Congress voted to remove Castillo from office last week in the third impeachment vote of the left-wing leader's embattled presidency. The move came just hours after Castillo, a former teacher and union leader from rural Peru, announced plans to "temporarily" dissolve the legislature and rule by decree.

Boluarte was sworn in as Peru's first female president shortly after Castillo's removal, but she has faced growing public anger and calls to immediately schedule general elections.

In his decision rejecting Castillo's appeal on Tuesday, the judge said the former president's effort last week to dissolve Congress was "not a mere act of speech, but the concrete expression of a will to alter the constitutional system and the configuration of public powers."

Earlier, Castillo had argued in remarks broadcast online by the court that he was innocent of the charges against him. "I've been unjustly and arbitrarily detained," he said. He also thanked his supporters for taking to the streets since his removal from office and called on the national police and armed forces to "lay down their arms and stop killing these people thirsty for justice".

The Ombudsman's Office of Peru reported on Monday that at least seven people have died in the ongoing demonstrations, which have spread to several cities across the Andean nation, most notably in rural areas that make up Castillo's stronghold.

On Monday, Amnesty International urged the Peruvian authorities to avoid using "excessive force" in response to the demonstrations, which it reported had so far injured dozens of people, including police officers.

"State repression against protesters is only deepening the crisis in Peru. The authorities must put an end to the excessive use of force against demonstrations and guarantee the right to peaceful protest," Erika Guevara-Rosas, the group's Americas director, said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Dina Boluarte, the country's new president, on Tuesday promised to work with Congress to see if the next election could be held sooner than previously proposed.

Some protesters have torched public buildings, attacked police stations, and blocked highways while demanding Boluarte's resignation, a new constitution and the dissolution of Congress. Three airports, in Apurimac, Arequipa, and the tourist hub of Cusco, remained closed on Tuesday due to the unrest. In the capital, Lima, there were no classes and at least one key court in the city said it would also close for the day after rocks were hurled at the building.

The country's defense minister Alberto Otarola said on Tuesday that the country's armed forces would take control of the "protection" of key infrastructure like airports and hydroelectric plants amid the protests. The government will also declare the country's highway system under a state of emergency in order to guarantee free transit, he added.

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