Hundreds of thousands march in Madrid against state of healthcare

Primary health workers and residents protest against the public health care policy of the Madrid regional government, which they say is destroying primary care, in Madrid, Spain, on February 12, 2023. (Photo by Reuters)??

Madrid, February 13 (RHC)-- Hundreds of thousands of health workers took to the streets of Madrid on Sunday for the largest demonstration yet against the conservative regional government's mismanagement of the public healthcare system.

More than 250,000 people flooded the city center, according to the central Spanish government, chanting vociferous slogans and carrying signs with messages in Spanish reading "The right to health is a human right. Defend the health service." The regional government said 250,000 took part in the march, but organizers put the number at closer to one million.

The protest was led by health worker associations and supported by left-wing parties, unions and ordinary citizens. Protesters said the conservative Madrid government was dismantling the capital city's public health services in favor of private health providers.

"They have cut our wages instead of raising them. We are overwhelmed with work and do not have any support. We are in danger of extinction," Lilian Ramis, 61, a matron at the El Molar health center in Madrid, was quoted as saying by Reuters.

These groups have stormed streets on a regular basis in recent months, and their movement is growing in numbers. Sunday's demonstration was the largest protest yet against the regional government's mismanagement of healthcare services.

Thousands of health workers also staged a protest in Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain, calling for the preservation of the public health system. Police put the number of protesters at 20,000.

Isabel Diaz Ayuso, the right-wing leader of the Madrid regional government, denied accusations, saying in a tweet on Saturday: "We all believe in public health." Critics of her government say Ayuso's administration produces long waits for patients and overworked doctors and nurses.

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