

Panamanians celebrate rejection of mining contract



By Roberto Morejón

Panamanians are celebrating the upcoming closure of a mine run by a Canadian company, the focus of angry protests for several weeks, enough so that the Supreme Court had to intervene.

After initially pushing through the contract with the mining company First Quantum Minerals, the president of Panama, Laurentino Cortizo, promised a process to close the largest copper mine in Central America.

He will do so in compliance with the ruling of the highest court of justice, which declared the agreement unconstitutional.

Photo: La Estrella de Panamá It is not an insignificant agreement, since it contemplated the concession of operations for 40 years to a company with close to 50 thousand direct and indirect workers.

As of 2019, the mine produces some 300 thousand tons of copper concentrate per year, representing 75% of Panamanian exports.

There seems to be agreement that the closure of the mine will reduce substantial income to the economy of the Isthmian nation, but many emphasize that other sectors, such as tourism, can be boosted.

Now, when the road blockades used by the protesters to condemn the rapprochement with the Canadian entity are lifted, union leaders, indigenous groups that went on strike and environmental activists point to the court's verdict as transcendental.

Environmental defenders denounced the pact because in their opinion the operations severely damage the environment.

Photo: 800Noticias The unions and indigenous people also considered the contract as detrimental to national sovereignty.

Recall that the protest erupted after Congress expeditiously approved the new transaction with the company, initiated after the Supreme Court in 2017 declared the original 1997 agreement unconstitutional.

From now on, the executives of the foreign entity will not remain with their arms crossed, as they foresee a front of international arbitrations in charge of the concessionaire, the company Minera Panama, a subsidiary of the Canadian First Quantum Minerals.

But it is also expected that the Panamanian popular forces will remain alert, as did thousands of teachers, who went on strike since October 23.

There are many Panamanians who assure that the course of events guarantees the conservation of an extensive forest area and the country's control over water, since the Canadian company would manage it for its operation.

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