

Peru Farm Worker Protests Add to Wave of Social Conflicts



Lima, April 08 (teleSUR-RHC) Peruvian farm workers marched and went on hunger strike in protest of a mining project by the Southern Copper Corporation in the province of *Islay*, a region of *Arequipa* on Tuesday.

Islay is one of Peru's most fertile regions, with significant agricultural production, employing thousands of people. However, most residents of the area believe Southern Copper's project will contaminate the land making it infertile, as has occurred in other parts of Peru.

One of the farm workers who has started a hunger strike, Catalina Torocahua, told teleSUR English, "My hands have calluses because we work the land. For what? To produce food for everyone, for those businessmen, for the miners that loot our land, they eat it. If it wasn't for the farm works, there would not be food."

The Peruvian economy has slowed down recently as commodity prices have fallen. In this political climate, private companies, the media and large business associations have pushed for the removal of environmental restrictions and overseen social demands in large extractive industries.

Analyst Jose de Echave, from the Observatory of Mining Conflicts in Peru, argues the current social conflicts result from the government taking the side of private interests instead of social movements: "The

population is seeing that their economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights are being cut.

Local authorities are also seeing that their possibilities to have a certain level of choices to confront these investments are seriously being limited, therefore this is a scene that explains the reactions that we are seeing in several parts of the country."

In addition to the farmers' protests in *Arequipa*, 2015 has also seen protests against: mining projects in *Cuzco* and *Cajamarca*; oil explorations in the central and northern Amazonian regions; and undermined labor rights in all major cities, among others. All of these social conflict situations are rooted in the government's decision to follow a neoliberal economic model.

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