

At Least 35 Injured in 42nd Day of Protests in Peru Against Mining Project



Lima, May 5 (teleSUR-RHC)-- New clashes on Sunday left 20 civilians and 15 police officers injured after authorities tried to clear roads blocked by demonstrators who oppose the Southern Copper Corporation's Tia Maria mining project.

Most of protesters are local farm workers from the Valley of Tambo, Arequipa region, who do not trust the company and want to prevent environmental damages that hinder agriculture.

Jorge del Carpio, President of the Assembly of Peoples of Arequipa, explained that the police reached the areas of La Curva, Boquron, Santa Maria, Bonbon and Cocachacra, and left several civilians injured who are now in hospitals of Mollendo and Arequipa. Del Carpio stated "it has really been a completely repressive deployment of police, with tear gas, bullets and all that, and the people of Arequipa have to express themselves in support of those who want to remain as farm workers even though the president did not comply with his words and his electoral promises."

Del Carpio referred to the campaign promises Peruvian President Ollanta Humala made to the people of the Valley of Tambo during elections in 2011. Videos of Humala making those promises on the campaign

trial are circulating widely on social media.

For economist Epifanio Baca Tupayachi from the non-governmental organization Citizens Proposal, this drastic change in Humala's stance has been caused by the influence of economic elites. Baca estimates that Tia Maria would only contribute 0.2 percent of the expected economic growth of the country, a figure that is not significant enough to justify the social conflict it is causing.

The economist also said that the real reason behind the government's decision to push for Tia Maria is business elites' pressure to favor industries as the only means for growth. The activist argued that those elites "claim that after Tia Maria, other [mining] projects will be stopped, paralyzed like Las Bambas or Constancia. I believe that [the economic elites] say that with the goal of instigating fear in public opinion and pressure the government to make the project go through at any cost."

The official position of the government as of Monday is that it will only engage in dialogue with demonstrators if they lift the road blockades and that it is "absolutely not negotiable". With a total of 3,000 police officers deployed as of Monday and locals continuing to mobilize, the clashes are likely to continue.

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