

Peru to Decide President's Fate in Corruption Scandal



Lima, December 21 (RHC)-- Peru's Congress is set to vote on whether President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski will be impeached on grounds of moral incapacity in connection with the sprawling Odebrecht scandal. Former anti-corruption prosecutor and lawyer Julio Arbizu notes that the embattled head of state is accused of concealing bribes he received from Brazilian construction giant, Odebrecht. If convicted, he will be the highest-ranking public official felled by the scandal so far.

Arbizu explained that corruption accusations levelled against Kuczynski don't derive from the regular preliminary investigation conducted by the Public Ministry, "but information handed directly to the Parliament by a subject related to a public statement by the representatives of the investigating committee in the Parliament."

The lawyer went on to note that "accusations against PPK (Pedro Pablo Kuczynski) in respect to Odebrecht corruption are quite strong and he has not been able to respond to them." Arbizu stressed that despite repeated denials, the president's claims of innocence hold little weight due to a lack of trust, according to La Radio del Sur.

Peru's opposition, having accused the president of favoring Odebrecht for construction contracts, has also called on Vice-President Martin Vizcarra to govern the country if his boss is ultimately removed from office. A 79-year-old former Wall Street banker, Kuczynski was part of a rightward shift in South American

politics when he was elected last year. His fight for survival underscores the risks facing wealthy political leaders with shady business ties and extensive business interests as graft scandals roil the region.

Kuczynski, for his part, described the impeachment process as an exaggeration by the opposition, an attempt to wrestle "control of the state without having won the presidential election." Such maneuvering will result in "terrible" consequences for "Peru and for the economy of all Peruvians," he said.

However, at present, over 100,000 Peruvians are unemployed, a direct consequence of stonewalled construction projects headed by Odebrecht. That number will double, according to Peru's Civil Workers' Union, if national construction companies, also accused of corruption, are halted.

"It doesn't matter if businessmen steal if they are in jail; they will always have money," said Alberto Hidalgo, one of the unemployed workers. "Meanwhile, we, the people, must live out of their salaries and don't have a steady job. How are we going to live? We'll have to survive selling candy or anything that we can."

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