

Hundreds of thousands gather against Piñera administration in Chile



Santiago de Chile, November 9 (RHC)-- As Chile begins the third week of demonstrations against the government of President Sebastian Pinera, hundreds of thousands gathered in the Plaza Italia amid fierce police repression.

"Violence can never be the answer to social and political demands of people," tweeted UN Chile on Friday, recalling in a statement that the government had the obligation not only to respect human rights but protect citizens from abuses.

This Friday, the anti-government protesters were joined by about a hundred of workers from the healthcare system. "Healthcare for the streets," is a group that emerged almost spontaneously, its members say, as the need for urgent, on-the-spot medical assistance during the protests became clear.

The official statistics tell a grim story, as more than 20 dead and nearly 2,000 protesters injured in skirmishes with security forces. "We alone have assisted at least 500 injured people, and that's with limited capacity," Dr. Juan Villagra told Reuters.

The group has focused its activities around Plaza Italia, a central Santiago square where the country's largest protests have taken place. Along dead end streets and sidewalks, they pile medical supplies, cart the injured to safety and help in any way they can. "We've seen how the response has gotten out of control, and it's led to hundreds of injuries," said Patricia Mieres, the group's director.

Michelle Bachelet, the U.N. human rights chief and former Chilean president, has sent a fact-finding mission to Chile to interview alleged victims, as has Amnesty International.

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