

Chilean Senate Commission rejects government anti-looting legislation



Santiago de Chile, December 11 (RHC)-- The Security Commission of the Chilean Senate has decided to make corrections to the text of an 'anti-looting' law, a draft bill proposed by right-wing Sebastian Piñera's government to more harshly punish the crimes committed in the context of social protests.

The initiative, which was approved last week by the Chamber of Deputies, will be debated by the Senate starting from zero because they considered that it establishes "excessive" penalties for those who set up barricade, obstruct traffic, throw stones or participate in looting. The offenses would be punished with three to five years in prison.

For lawmakers on the commission, the official text, "criminalizes protests," so they asked the government to withdraw the bill so that it can be dealt with in greater detail. Senator for the Party for Democracy Felipe Harboe explained that the initiative "did not differentiate enough between the sanction for violence and the sanction for social protest."

On the other hand, the president of the Constitution Commission indicated that "it incorporated elements such as the usurpation of agricultural land that has nothing to do with public disorder, and what is worse,

the sanction even reduced the criminal punishment for the crime of arson."

In early November, as part of the response against anti-government protests that began on October 18th, Piñera announced a security agenda, which included the anti-looting and anti-mask bills. "One of the responsibilities of the state is to protect public order and citizen security," Piñera said at a press conference in which he asked Parliament for an "immediate discussion" of both bills, in order to "punish more rigorously" those crimes.

The popular uprising in the South-American country was sparked by a government's decision to increase metro fees but quickly spread to incorporate other social issues such as income inequality and swelling costs of living. The state's response to the popular grievances has since led to the death of 23 demonstrators while around 3,000 have been injured.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) along with numerous other rights groups condemned the constant violations of human rights by police and military against the population in Chile.

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