

Protests continue as talks with Colombian government fail

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Colombia protests continue in the streets

Bogota, June 3 (RHC)-- Thousands of Colombians have taken to the streets again amid a deadlock in talks between the government and leaders of anti-government protests that are stretching into their second month. Mass demonstrations were sparked at the end of April against a now-withdrawn tax reform proposed by President Ivan Duque's government, but they have continued with protesters now demanding a basic income, opportunities for young people, and an end to police violence.

An umbrella national strike committee made up of unions, student groups and other civil society organisations is currently in discussions with the government. Last week, the two sides reached a so-

called pre-agreement, the details of which have not yet been released. But the committee later accused the government of backtracking and talks on Tuesday ended without further advances.

The government said protest leaders need to condemn roadblocks that have caused shortages around the country and hit exports of coffee, coal and other products, adding the point was non-negotiable. The committee has said it does not have sway over all the protesters.

“All these actions are to pressure the government into starting negotiations,” Maltes told the Reuters news agency. “The government lacks the political will to seek an agreement. We are waiting for the government to sign the pre-agreement for guarantees.”

While protesters count the withdrawal of tax and health reforms and the resignation of the former finance minister among their victories, they plan to keep marching to force more concessions from the government. “We’ll keep fighting until the government is conscious of the poverty, inequality, and injustice, and of the groups calling for change,” Andrea Sandino, a 40-year-old teacher, told Reuters.

Security forces have gradually lifted some blockades, but 38 remain, according to the defense minister. The death toll related to the protests remains unclear.

The attorney general’s office says 20 deaths linked directly to demonstrations have been reported to date, while Colombia’s Human Rights Ombudsman said at least 42 people have been killed in the protests. Rights groups say dozens have been killed by security forces.

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