

New Panamanian President Takes Office, Vowing to Fight Corruption and Impunity



Panama City, July 2 (Xinhua-RHC) -- Juan Carlos Varela was sworn in Tuesday as Panama's new president, pledging to fight corruption and impunity in the Central American nation.

"Starting today, nobody is above the law... Corruption will not be tolerated in our government," Varela affirmed during his first speech as president following the inauguration ceremony.

After taking the oath of office, administered by the president of the National Assembly of Deputies, Adolfo Valderrama, at Panama City's Rommel Fernandez Stadium, Varela said his government will be "honest, transparent and efficient."

The inauguration ceremony was attended by dignitaries, including six presidents -- Juan Orlando Hernandez of Honduras, Luis Guillermo Solis of Costa Rica, Salvador Sanchez Ceren of El Salvador, Otto Perez Molina of Guatemala, Michael Joseph Martelly of Haiti, Danilo Medina Sanchez of the Dominican Republic, and Spanish Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, as well as U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry.

Varela, who takes over from outgoing president Ricardo Martinelli, said "it won't be an easy task. The damage done to our democracy and our institutions was serious. However I am convinced that we will find social peace through justice, truth and the rendering of accounts." Varela was vice president under Martinelli of the conservative Democratic Change Party.

Varela ran for president for the Panamenista Party, beating the ruling party candidate in May 4th presidential elections with nearly 40 percent of the vote.

In addition to fighting corruption, Varela also promised in his campaigning platform to strengthen Panama's institutions, bolster environmental protections, and improve quality of life for the country's 3.5 million people.

Panama is currently in the midst of expanding the Panama Canal, a major public works project.

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