

France says willing to discuss autonomy for Guadeloupe

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Demonstrators stop vehicles at a filtering road block on fire in Le Gosier outside Pointe-a-Pitre on the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe on November 23, 2021. (Photo by AFP)

Paris, November 28 (RHC)-- France says it is willing to discuss autonomy for its Caribbean territory of Guadeloupe if it is in the interests of the people who live there following days of protests on the island.

Guadeloupe and the nearby French island of Martinique have been the scene of demonstrations and violent clashes triggered by COVID-19 regulations but rooted in long-running concerns over the high cost of living, low wages, youth unemployment and mistrust of the Paris government.

France has postponed implementing a COVID-19 vaccination mandate for health workers in the two Caribbean islands after the measure spurred widespread protests on the French territories in which police officers were injured and journalists attacked.

In a YouTube video posted late on Friday, Sebastien Lecornu, the French minister responsible for the country's overseas territories, said that certain elected officials in GuParis, November 28 (RHC)-- France says it is willing to discuss autonomy for its Caribbean territory of Guadeloupe if it is in the interests of the people who live there following days of protests on the island. adelooupe had raised the issue of autonomy.

"The government is ready to talk about this. There are no bad debates, as long as those debates serve to resolve the real everyday problems of people in Guadeloupe," he added.

That was one of a series of initiatives he said the government in Paris would be taking in Guadeloupe, including improving healthcare, infrastructure projects, and a scheme to create jobs for young people.

In Guadeloupe, there is a historic mistrust of the French government's handling of health crises after many people were systematically exposed to toxic pesticides used in banana plantations in the 1970s in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

The incident exposed a significant part of the population to health dangers and related cancers and polluted the soil. The product was banned in the US in 1976 and in France in 1990, but special provisions were made for its continued use in the Caribbean territories until 1993.

Guadeloupe was colonized by France and is an overseas department of that nation and, therefore, as a part of France, it is a member of the European Union. There have been numerous attempts at autonomy since the Second World War, although none have been successful. The anger of people living in Guadeloupe is because a country 7,000 kilometres away is governing them, constantly treating them as second-class citizens.

Guadeloupe is economically dependent on France and people living in Guadeloupe rarely enjoy a quality of life comparable to that of mainland France. Guadeloupe receives 972 million Euros from the EU each year, but its youth-unemployment rate has hovered around 50 percent for decades.

Throughout history and during centuries, France, as a so-called human rights defendant, has been one of the world's colonizing countries that after many years of slavery still controls countries spread over more than 12 territories and treats their people as second-class citizens.

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