

France sending more security forces to Guadeloupe amid unrest

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A woman waits surrounded by gendarmes deployed in front of some protesters at the sub-prefecture of Pointe-a-Pitre, in the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, on November 29, 2021 [Christophe Archambault/AFP]

Paris, November 30 (RHC)-- France is sending additional security forces to the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, as the country's minister responsible for overseas territories met with union leaders to try to defuse days of unrest over COVID-19 restrictions.

In a statement on Monday, Sebastien Lecornu said he met with four union representatives, who handed him a list of their demands. But the ministry said the union leaders failed to denounce recent violence, including attacks on police and other security officers.

"The condition for dialogue is for all political and trade unions to condemn the violence, and more specifically, attempts to murder" the officers, the statement reads.

Protesters in Guadeloupe and neighbouring Martinique have erected barricades and blocked roads this month as anger mounted over an order also in place in mainland France requiring health workers to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Earlier, France postponed the mandatory vaccination requirement until December 31 to allow for dialogue. "If the law of the Republic is to apply to all French departments, and therefore to Guadeloupe and Martinique, the details of its application must be adapted to the health and social situation of these two territories," the health ministry said in a statement announcing the move.

But the unrest has continued, and later on Monday, Lecornu said 70 additional officers, as well as 10 more members of a special SWAT-like unit, would be deployed to Guadeloupe as of Tuesday to help respond to the situation. Numerous arrests have been reported in Guadeloupe and Martinique since the protests began.

Shots also were fired at police last week in Martinique, where a coalition of 17 trade union organisations launched a general strike this month in protest of the COVID-19 curbs. They are also calling for salary increases and lower gas prices.

Martinique and Guadeloupe, islands of 375,000 and 400,000 people, respectively, are considered formal parts of France whose inhabitants hold French citizenship and are allocated representation in the French National Assembly.

But the territories suffer higher poverty and unemployment rates than mainland France, and the protests have put a spotlight on local anger over broader issues with the French government.

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