

Bolsonaro breaks silence, says he'll follow Brazil's constitution without conceding election

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In brief statement, far-right leader avoids conceding election to Lula da Silva but his team says transition to begin.

Brasilia, November 1 (RHC)-- Jair Bolsonaro has said he will respect Brazil's constitution after his election defeat to Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, breaking nearly two days of public silence that fuelled concerns the

far-right leader was planning to reject the results.

In a brief statement to reporters at the presidential palace in Brasilia on Tuesday afternoon, Bolsonaro did not reference his loss in Sunday's run-off or concede defeat to Lula, but he thanked his supporters for their backing.

"I have always been labelled undemocratic, and unlike my accusers, I have always respected the framework of the Constitution," he said. "As President of the Republic and as a citizen, I will continue to respect all the commandments of our Constitution."

Taking the podium after Bolsonaro's address, his chief of staff, Ciro Nogueira, said the president had "authorised" a transition process to Lula's government.

Bolsonaro was narrowly defeated on Sunday, garnering 49.1 percent of the vote to Lula's 50.9 percent and becoming the first sitting president to lose a re-election bid in Brazil's post-dictatorship era.

For months, he had falsely claimed the country's electronic voting system was vulnerable to fraud – an allegation rejected by judicial experts, but which raised fears the former army captain could be preparing to contest the outcome.

Many of Bolsonaro's key political allies had already publicly acknowledged Lula's victory, putting pressure on him to do the same. Some, including Nogueira, have begun to establish contact with the Lula camp to discuss a transition while others, including the speaker of the lower house of the National Congress, had publicly said the Bolsonaro government should respect the election result.

Reporting from Rio de Janeiro on Tuesday, Al Jazeera's Monica Yanakiew said "it was a very, very long wait and a very brief statement" from Bolsonaro, "but he used the statement to project himself as the leader of the conservative right in Brazil".

Lula had criticised Bolsonaro for not immediately conceding defeat or calling him after the election results were announced on Sunday evening. "Any place else in the world, the defeated president would have called me to recognise his defeat," he said in his victory speech in Sao Paulo.

While Bolsonaro had remained silent – both in public statements and on social media – many of his supporters erected road blockades in anger about his defeat. Brazilian truckers, a key Bolsonaro constituency, have used burning tyres and vehicles to block key routes across the country, including outside the international airport in Sao Paulo, forcing several flight cancellations.

Protesters wearing the yellow and green of the Brazilian flag, which the outgoing president has adopted as his own, shouted slogans and hung banners emblazoned with Bolsonaro's image. "We will not accept losing what we have gained. We want what is written on our flag, 'order and progress'. We will not accept the situation as it is," Antoniel Almeida, 45, told the AFP news agency at a protest in Barra Mansa, in Rio de Janeiro state.

During his brief speech, Bolsonaro described the protests as the fruit of "indignation and a sense of injustice" over the vote. He said the demonstrators should avoid destroying property or "impeding the right to come and go".

Brazil's Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered the Federal Highway Police to take "all measures" to clear the blockades, warning that it would levy fines against the force's director general if he fails to act.

The executive director of the highway police, Marco Antonio Territo de Barros, told reporters there were 267 road blockages in place and that 306 had already been dispersed since Sunday. "It's a complex operation, involving more than 75,000 kilometres of federal highways," he said.

Meanwhile, Lula has leaped into action to tackle a long list of priorities, including strengthening state agencies tasked with protecting the environment and Indigenous territories in Brazil, as well as uniting a deeply polarised nation.

The head of Lula's Workers Party, Gleisi Hoffmann, said on Tuesday that Brazil's Vice President-elect Geraldo Alckmin will coordinate the transition to the next government, which is expected to take office on January 1. That process is aiming to start on Thursday, Hoffman said. She also said she will speak again about the transition with Nogueira, Bolsonaro's chief of staff.

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