

Colombia Teachers Strike Ends with Major Victories



Bogota, May 8 (teleSUR-RHC)-- Teachers from the public sector reached an agreement with the Colombian government on Thursday to increase salaries and provide added benefits ending a two-week strike of marches that left 9 million students out of school.

The deal includes a gradual 12 percent increase in salaries, improvements to the teachers' health care system, and added bonuses for senior teachers. The salary increase gained by the 330,000 organized teachers striking since April 22nd is a major change from the 3.6 percent usually added to wages due to inflation.

Teachers are expected to return to work on Friday. "This will benefit educators and will allow us to advance the search of scholarly success that our children need," said Luis Gruber, president of the national teachers' union Fecode.

Preliminary talks and agreements had thus far failed forcing both sides to be more flexible in their demands. One of the more contentious issue was the elimination of teachers' examinations, which educators characterized as demeaning and based on unjust parameters.

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos refused to eliminate the teachers' evaluations, calling them "essential to progress and to have better quality in education." While the teachers' examinations has not been scrapped, the Minister of Education Gina Parody conceded that "the evaluation can be transformed,

changed and improved, but not eliminated.” The teachers also demanded that the Colombian government invest more in public education across the country.

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