

Peru Protests Against Mine Leaves Two Civilians Dead



Lima, May 13 (teleSUR-RHC)-- Protests on Tuesday against the Tía María mining project were marked by violent clashes between demonstrators and police, leaving at least 2 more civilians dead. Confrontations began after the start of a 72-hour general strike called by protesters, which also led to the closing of schools and businesses in the area.

Roads leading into and out of the regional capital city of Arequipa were also blocked by protesters, as were other major roads in the region. On Saturday, the government sent in 4,000 police officers plus additional military forces but fell short of declaring a state of emergency. The army is scheduled to remain in the area until June 7 in order to patrol bridges, tunnels, and petrol stations.

Jorge Del Carpio is one of the protesters and a member of the organization People's Assembly of Arequipa. He opposes the use of the military in the region, arguing that "our soldier brothers do not know how to take care of a social problem. All they know is how to shoot people and that is it. [But,] as a doctor, I can say that a bullet that penetrates an organism breaks arteries, veins, lungs, destroys the brain, and causes death."

Del Carpio is clear that there is only one solution to the conflict: stop the mining. As he contends, "the solution is the one given by the Valley of Tambo: the Project Tía María has to stop."

For Cesar Bazán, Citizens Security Coordinator of the Institute of Legal Defense, the move by the

executive government to use military force is unconstitutional. He explains that the constitution permits the use of armed forces only when a national emergency is declared, which has not been the case in the Tía María protests.

Currently, Law 29166, which was issued by the previous government, continues to authorize the use of the military in internal struggles against drug trafficking and terrorism, and to protect installations that are deemed vital to the functioning of the state. However, according to Bazán, the prerequisites required for Law 29166 to come into effect have not been met in the current situation. The Institute of Legal Defense is also challenging the constitutionality of this law. Bazán warned that methods to stop protests through the use of force will result in increased loss of life.

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