

Peru General Strike Against Mining Project Ongoing

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Lima, May 14 (teleSUR-RHC)-- Wednesday marked the second of a three-day general strike against the mining project of transnational Southern Copper Corporation in the southern region of Arequipa. The project is planned to take place in the fertile *Tambo* Valley in the province of Islay in the western parts of the region. The transnational company is the third largest copper producer in the world.

University students in the capital of Arequipa joined the strike. One of the students, Pedro Marquez, explained why they mistrust Southern Copper Corporation, arguing “the students are conscious that the only thing the mining company wants is to take away the resources of our country. [The company] does not care if, in the process, it destroys the valley. It doesn't care if it destroys the agriculture, and it doesn't care if it trounces the lives of those in the province of Islay. That is why we are here protesting so that there are no more deaths.”

Congressman Justiniano Apaza, representative from Arequipa, has visited the area twice in the past week to assess the events. He argues that the track record of the company having contaminated other regions such as Ilo, Moquegua and Tacna has convinced the great majority of locals that the project should not continue. Apaza also explains that the mistrust of the people extends to the president, who changed his stance on the project after elections were held.

As a parliamentarian of Arequipa, he further accused the state of “acting as the negotiator for Southern [Copper]. Southern no longer shows its face and has disappeared from the scene.”

Apaza explained that the government, instead of advocating for the transnational company, should “be the guarantor...which ensures the health of its people. Because the people have chosen the government so that it can defend and represent them.”

The congressman also denounced the freezing of the bank accounts belonging to the municipalities of Punta de Bombón, Dean Valdivia and Cocachacra, all in Islay. The government is attempting to prevent the mayors of these towns from accessing funds, citing the possibility that they might use this money to finance the protests.

Apaza argues that such a move is instead an attempt to put more pressure on the people of Islay to accept the mining project and undermines “the autonomy of local authorities.” Violent confrontations are likely to continue in the coming days with the government set on pushing the project forward.

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