

Honduran Government Represses Hunger Strikers Protesting Fraud



Tegucigalpa, July 17 (teleSUR-RHC)-- Honduran human rights defenders on hunger strike to protest government corruption attempted to gain access to the presidential palace in a peaceful demonstration in Tegucigalpa on Thursday, but police and military forces brutally responded to block their entry, local media reported.

The 20 hunger strikers who tried to enter through the main doors of the presidential palace were beaten and repressed by police and military forces. Two of hunger strikers who sustained blows were taken to emergency and hospitalized for their injuries. Others also received medical attention in the streets.

Hunger striker Wilfredo Mendez of a Honduran human rights organization said activists were not seeking to speak with the president, but to move their strike to the presidential palace to pressure the government to prosecute those involved in the massive corruption scandal in the country's Social Security Institute, Honduras' *La Prensa* reported.

"We moved toward the presidential palace because we have a right to be there," Mendez told *La Prensa*. Activists have also signaled that they expect an eviction of their strike by authorities may be imminent.

At least 50 special police forces officers are stationed in the area in case of a perceived need to evict the demonstrators, teleSUR correspondent Gilda Silvestrucci reported. As the hunger strikers faced

repression, other human rights defenders forced a human shield around the protesters to protect them from further violence.

The hunger strikers have decided to take action because the government is making the struggle of farmers, indigenous communities, and other movement invisible, farm leader Vitalino Alvarez from the northern Aguan Valley land struggle told teleSUR.

Activists have been on hunger strike for over 20 days after starting their protest on June 22 to demand to creation of an independent U.N. anti-impunity body in Honduras, known as CICIH, to investigate widespread government corruption. Honduras' popular "Outraged" movement was sparked about two months ago when a massive corruption scandal in the country's Social Security Institute, known as IHSS, came to light implicating President Juan Orlando Hernandez and his ruling National Party.

A diverse coalition of opposition parties has formed an alliance with the grassroots movement protesting in weekly torch-lit marches to strengthen calls for independent action to tackle widespread corruption and impunity in the government.

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