

Thousands March to Defend Peru's Public Education



Lima, December 14 (RHC)-- Thousands of students and other protesters have taken to the streets in Peru's capital Lima to defend public education and reject what many see as attempts to silence the main leader of education reform in the South American country.

According to local media, the massive march spanned 20 blocks of the city at one point with thousands of demonstrators. Riot police dispersed protesters with teargas and an unknown number of arrests.

The march boasted participation of various social movements, and former presidential candidate and leader of the left-wing Broad Front party, Veronika Mendoza, also joined it, leading a small rally along the protest's path.

The march comes amid a growing rift just months after the elections between President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski's government and the Congress, controlled by the conservative Popular Force party of former jailed dictator Alberto Fujimori and his daughter Keiko, Kuczynski's top rival in the presidential race.

The Congress sparked controversy with a move to launch a no confidence vote against Education Minister Jaime Saavedra, widely seen as the leader of education reform in the country. The Congress, set to vote on the issue this week after the motion was put forward Monday, is expected to pass the no confidence vote, which would force Saavedra out of office.

Renzo Fernandez, president of the Federation of Catholic university students, spoke out at the march, arguing that the move to oust Saavedra puts the future of young people seeking quality education in jeopardy.

"Today we come to defend the educational reform," said Fernandez, adding that students will not stand idly by and allow Fujimori's control of Congress to steamroll education and the rights of youth. "We come today to show that we will not allow them to continue trampling society's social and cultural instruments and the state so they can watch out only for their interests."

Saavedra, who has headed education since 2013, is the most popular figure in Kuczynski's cabinet. The minister has spearheaded education reform over the past three years, including an increase 88 percent increase in education spending between 2011 and 2016.

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