

Colombian president tries to stop the protests... but can't

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Colombia's Duque says he recognizes protesters' concerns

Bogota, May 10 (RHC)-- Colombia's President Ivan Duque said on Monday that issues raised by young demonstrators would be included in national discussions meant to curb nearly two weeks of anti-government protests, as he made a brief visit to Cali, the scene of violence over the weekend.

But while the Colombian president was obviously trying to calm the waters, protest organizers and strikers said they the work stoppage and demonstrations against Duque would continue until their demands are met.

Demonstrations began on April 28, fueled by outrage at a tax plan which would have raised sales taxes. That proposal was canceled but protesters' demands now include a basic income and the withdrawal of a long-debated health reform that opponents say is too vague to correct inequalities.

"We know we must prioritize a series of interventions that are necessary to generate hope and a future for our youth," Duque said, listing free tuition at public universities, political participation and entrepreneurship as issues to be discussed.

The human rights ombudsman has reported 26 people killed since protests began, but says seven were unrelated to the marches themselves.

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