Peru adjusts COVID-19 death toll, now highest per capita overall

A Bolivian woman walks past a stand that provides information on diets in relationship to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Desaguadero, Bolivia. (Photo: Claudia Morales/Reuters]

Lima, June 1 (RHC)-- Peru announced on Monday a sharp increase in its COVID-19 death toll, saying there have been more than 180,000 fatalities since the pandemic hit early last year, making it the country with the worst death rate per capita in the world.

The announcement was made in the presidential palace during the presentation of a report by a working group commissioned to analyse and update the death toll. The results of the study put the new toll at 180,764 in a population of about 32.6 million, compared with recent data indicating that 69,342 people had died from COVID-19.

"What is being said is that a significant number of deaths were not classified as caused by COVID-19," Health Minister Oscar Ugarte said, adding that the criteria for assigning the new coronavirus as a cause of death were changed.

Ugarte said that previously only those who "had a positive diagnostic test" were considered to have died from the virus, but other criteria have since been incorporated   Mateo Prochazka, one of the researchers, said the team used four different methods to determine cause of death. "The first criterion is the one with the greatest certainty, the virological one, in the case of people who have a positive test, the second is the rapid test," Prochazka reportedly said.

"We also used serological [tests] because, in the beginning of the pandemic, this system was used a lot," Prochazka said. "Then there are radiological and epidemiological [tests], through which there is no proof, but compatible symptoms are found," he said, "we considered that they should be accounted for."

The new toll from COVID-19 includes deaths reported between March 2020 and May 22 of this year. Among Latin American countries, only Brazil and Mexico have reported higher overall death tolls from the disease. Based on population, however, Peru's per capita death toll is now the highest in the world and now more than doubles that of Brazil, according to Johns Hopkins data.

According to the data, Hungary had the worst number of per capita COVID-19 deaths at about 300 per 100,000 people. With its updated death toll, Peru now stands at more than 500 COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 people.

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