

Honduran Police Crack Down on Protesting University Students



Tegucigalpa, July 2 (RHC)-- Honduran riot police have arrested at least 24 students out of hundreds who had occupied a building of the National Autonomous University of Honduras to protest against the privatization of universities across the country.

Administrators at the national public university in Honduras canceled the third academic term in over a dozen departments in response to the protests at two main campuses that have lasted nearly a month, a move that the Honduran student movement -- which has struggled against what it sees as the privatization of public education -- has strongly criticized as "arbitrary."

"This is an education center, it belongs to the Honduran people, and we are defending it," said Fausto Calix, leader of the student movement. "We propose a dialogue, they answer with bullets."

Student protests started to heat up at the beginning of June on campuses of the National Autonomous University of Honduras, also known as UNAH, in the capital city of Tegucigalpa and the second largest city of San Pedro Sula.

The movement has criticized the neoliberalization of the university, demanding new student representation in decision-making structures and more transparency about how the institution is spending money on educational services. They are also demanding an end to the criminalization of the movement

and respect for their right to protest.

But while authorities have been unresponsive to the occupation's core demands, UNAH Vice Rector of Academic Affairs Rutilia Calderon announced that the number of days lost during the second academic term means that the third term will be canceled across at least 14 disciplines most affected by the protests, including engineering, social work, journalism, mathematics, and several other departments.

Calderon argued that even a condensed, intensive third term would not be possible given the 24 days already lost that will need to be made up for in the second term, the Honduran daily La Prensa reported. Additional departments racking up lost days could face the same fate.

According to UNAH's academic calendar, the second term, which began in May, is scheduled to end in August, with the third term running from September until the third week of December.

But the University Student Movement, known as MEU, argued that the cancellation is "arbitrary" and an abuse of the rector's authority. The movement claims that only the University Council — which, according to the Unah website, approves the annual academic calendar among other duties — has the power to take such a decision.

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