

Brazilians Protest Against Congressional Vote on Anti-Graft Probe



Brasilia, December 5 (RHC)-- Thousands of people have poured into the streets of Brazilian cities, including Rio de Janeiro, to express their opposition to alleged attempts by the scandal-plagued Congress to shut down a huge anti-graft probe.

Last week, Brazil's lower house of congress approved a measure that would largely prevent prosecutors and judicial authorities from going after crooked politicians by allowing defendants to sue investigating bodies who abuse their power.

According to the measure, investigators could be fined and jailed for alleged offenses, including damaging the "honor, dignity and decorum" of their offices.

On Sunday, demonstrators, dressed mostly in the national colors of yellow and green and infuriated by the lawmakers' vote, accused them of primarily targeting Operation Car Wash, a leading anti-corruption investigation body that has put scores of top politicians and billionaires behind bars since 2014.

Protesters, carrying signs and placards, also chanted slogans in support of the operation. "Car Wash,

protected by the people,” read one placard held by a man who had wrapped himself in the Brazilian flag.

The concessional vote, cast in the early hours of Wednesday, also angered prosecutors. They threatened to resign and called the measure a direct attack. Critics of the vote also believe that it would potentially set back Brazil's fight against widespread corruption.

Demonstrators also criticized President Michel Temer's administration for not pushing back hard enough against the lawmakers who are trying to end the Car Wash probe. Temer's six-month-old administration has been engulfed by political turmoil from the beginning. Temer, who himself has faced allegations of corruption at the government level, has lost an average of one minister a month since taking power.

On Saturday, the Germany-based Transparency International announced that Operation Car Wash had been selected as the winner of the 2016 Anti-Corruption Award.

Brazil is currently in the midst of its biggest anti-corruption push, which has seen prosecutors charging nearly 200 people, including top executives and politicians. Over 80 people have already been found guilty and sentenced.

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