

Chileans march for and against new constitutional referendum



Santiago de Chile, February 17 (RHC)-- Thousands of Chileans that support and reject a new constitution in Chile had a tense clash in the streets of Santiago Sunday, as the country prepares for the upcoming referendum on April 26th.

Nearly 300 people who reject the project of a new constitution gathered yesterday at the Military School in Las Condes and marched to the Carabineros School holding banners with the photograph of dictator Augusto Pinochet. While a second march in support of the dictatorship-era constitution began in Paseo Bulnes and joined the first one.

These people demand the continuity of the document inherited from the dictatorship in the face of the social demands to change it.

Meanwhile, near Apoquindo Avenue a demonstration was called through social networks with supporters of a new constitution. Upon arrival at the Military School, there was an exchange of words between the two groups of demonstrators. The tension boiled as protesters from both sides blocked traffic and police had to diffuse the confrontation with water cannons and tear gas.

Mayor of the Central Station commune in the Chilean capital Rodrigo Delgado told local media that if the plebiscite were held this Sunday, he would vote for a new draft constitution. The politician added that the

government must guarantee the conditions for a free deliberation of a constituent convention, which in his opinion are not yet guaranteed.

"We must listen to the people and not be afraid of massive participation. Many people want a new constitution born from democracy, they believe that is the only way to achieve peace in Chile," he added.

Massive demonstrations against the Chilean government and its right-wing president Sebastian Piñera began in Santiago on October 14th due to a 30-cent increase in the subway fare. While this measure was revoked by Piñera, social unrest increased in magnitude as the Chileans began to question "30 years" of neoliberal policies, which have implied a systematic withdrawal of economic and social rights for millions of people.

Since the start, the response of the security forces has been internationally condemned for its blatant disregard of human rights. Currently, prosecutors are investigating a number of deaths in the context of the crisis, including assassinations by the military and police forces.

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