

Protests in Panama continue amid police repression

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Panama City, May 15 (RHC)-- Now in their third consecutive week, protests in Panama continued with more clashes between riot police and protesters, resisting projects promoted by the government of President José Raúl Mulino, including a social security reform.

The overall number of protests is 196 people arrested in a work stoppage led by public sector teachers, the Suntracs construction union, and banana farm employees, according to information from the National Police (PN).

Police repressed indigenous groups using tear gas on a section of the Inter-American Highway, which connects the entire country, in the town of Viguí, in the central province of Veraguas. Similar conflicts

have also been documented in other regions of the country, especially in Chiriquí, a province bordering Costa Rica, and Panama City.

According to the Association of Teachers of the Republic of Panama (Asoprof), the clashes have resulted in the arrest of several protesters, many of them unionized teachers, in various regions of the country.

National Police Chief Jaime Fernández stated on social media that since the conflict began 21 days ago, "more than 480 road closures" have been recorded nationwide, with "196 people arrested."

"So, I ask: Who is blocking the road, the teachers or the National Police? The police aren't letting cars through," exclaims Fernando Ábrego, a teacher from Asoprof (Asoprof) leader, in front of the police cordon in the heart of Panama City to prevent teachers from passing before the skirmishes, according to a video released on social media by the Suntracs construction union.

Yesterday, the demonstrations resulted in at least 12 arrests, most of them indigenous people from the Ngäbe Buglé ethnic group, following conflicts in the Panamanian town of Ojo de Agua in the central province of Veraguas.

Since April 23, teachers have held an indefinite work stoppage against a law that modifies the Social Security Fund, claiming it negatively impacts the pension system. Indigenous groups, the Suntracs construction union, employees of the prestigious Chiquita banana company, as well as pharmacists and doctors, have gradually joined the protests.

In addition to the social security reform, the opposition rejects a security pact signed by the Panamanian government with the U.S., claiming it undermines national sovereignty.

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