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Protests in Chile continue as Piñera sets April vote to draft new charter

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Santiago de Chile, December 30 (RHC)-- Protests continued in Chile, despite the signing of a decree to set the date for a referendum on a new constitution for April. Chilean President Sebastian Piñera signed a decree on Friday that set the date for the vote on April 26, 2020.

The drafting of a new constitution is a key demand of demonstrators who have taken to the streets against the government since October. The current constitution dates back to 1980, when the country was under the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet.

The demonstrators have also demanded better access to health care and education and a departure from the neo-liberal economic system.

During the protests, at least 26 people were killed in clashes with security forces and in looting.

According to the presidential decree, during the plebiscite next April, voters will first have to decide whether they want a new constitution and who should draft it. Later, the draft will be put to another vote in a referendum.

Even as Piñera signed the latest decree, anger continued to brew on the streets of the capital, Santiago de Chile, with protesters clashing with police. A fire also broke out at the historic Centro Arte Alameda, an iconic building in the capital which houses a cinema.

It was unclear whether the protesters set the fire and authorities have yet to identify the cause. Protesters are also angry at Piñera after he claimed in a television interview that "many" videos

on social media showing alleged police abuse were "fake news", and that the unrest was being fomented by foreign governments.

Protests have occurred daily for over two months with thousands injured in clashes with police who have fired pellet guns at protesters, leaving at least 300 people with severe eye injuries. Some 2,210 police have been reported injured during the protests and 188 police stations along with 971 police vehicles have been damaged.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recently released a report based on a three-week fact finding mission to Chile concluding that police and army committed "serious human rights violations" against protesters.

Edited by Ed Newman

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