

Hundreds protest in Santiago against Chilean president



A demonstrator holds a sign reading 'Pinera you're fired' next to riot police during a protest against President Sebastian Pinera in Santiago, Chile, on November 18, 2020 JAVIER TORRES AFP

Santiago (AFP)

Hundreds of people protested in Chile's capital Santiago on Wednesday to demand the resignation of President Sebastian Pinera over police repression of the country's social protests.

Police fired tear gas and water cannon to keep around 500 protesters from approaching the Moneda presidential palace.

The demonstrators blocked the capital's main Alameda thoroughfare near the palace for about two hours, leaving rush-hour commuters affected by the tear gas.

The protest came three weeks after Chileans voted overwhelmingly in a referendum to replace the constitution inherited from the 1973-1990 dictatorship

of Augusto Pinochet, blamed for the South American country's glaring inequalities.

The referendum was a key demand after months of demonstrations that left more than 30 dead broke out in October 2019, initially against rising public transport fares but quickly mushrooming into wider anger at social inequality.

Despite an almost 80 percent approval for the change, 37-year-old Alex Acuna told AFP he was taking part in the demonstration because "nothing has been achieved" yet.

"Pinera has always been asked to resign from the beginning because of everything that has happened in the social explosion, like the systematic human rights violations," he said.

"There have been deaths, a number of people left with eye trauma, and no one is responsible! The high command never goes to court or to prison," he said.

Interior Minister Victor Perez resigned earlier this month after Congress approved a constitutional charge against him over police handling of the protests, after it was widely condemned by human rights organizations.

Danae Cariqueo, another protester, said the anti-government demonstrations would continue.

"You can't let go of the street, it's where the people make themselves heard," the 27-year-old said.

"That is why they are so afraid of us and repress us as they are doing. We'll continue until it's over and everything changes."

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