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Ex-president Fujimori to Run Again

by LADB Staff
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Fugitive ex-President of Peru Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) has announced his intent to run in next year's presidential election, although Interpol still maintains a warrant for his arrest. In an Oct. 6 press conference in Tokyo press conference, Fujimori stated his intent to stand in April's ballot, although he did not say whether he intends to return to Peru.

New passport is part of attempted comeback

Fujimori has been living in self-imposed exile in Tokyo since November 2000. Peruvian authorities have indicted Fujimori on more than 20 counts, including involvement in the military's killing of civilians and corruption during his ten-year term in office (see NotiSur, 2001-09-07). He is also on Interpol's wanted list. Since he was born to Japanese immigrants in Peru, he was granted Japanese citizenship and a Japanese passport on his arrival in Japan in 2000 (see NotiSur, 2000-12-22). Fujimori has repeatedly vowed to return to Peru, where he faces arrest on charges of human rights abuse and corruption.

The former president has been accused of involvement in the death-squad killing of 25 suspected members of the Sendero Luminoso guerrilla group, and also of misusing public funds. His former intelligence chief, Vladimiro Montesinos, is currently imprisoned on multiple corruption convictions and faces more trials on other charges (see NotiSur, 2004-01-30). Fujimori denies any wrongdoing and believes he can win the vote. He was given a new Peruvian passport at the Peruvian consulate in Japan on Sept. 13, an event that led to great political controversy in Peru. His old passport was revoked when he fled to Japan.

Peruvian Consul General in Tokyo Hector Matallana said the consulate could not deny Fujimori a passport simply because of the charges pending against him. Matallana's failure to have Fujimori arrested led to fierce criticism in Peru. Fujimori's September trip to the consulate apparently was part of his effort to pave the way to a political comeback.

On Aug. 12, Kenji Fujimori, the former president's youngest child, said in a brief television address that his father would return to Peru next year and run under the Si Cumple party banner (see NotiSur, 2005-08-26). Peru has banned him from office until 2010 and has requested his extradition. Japan, which has no extradition treaty with Peru, has refused demands to hand him over, citing his Japanese citizenship. It is not clear whether he is eligible to run in the election, given that he is likely to face instant arrest if he sets foot in Peru and that the Peruvian Congress has passed a resolution against his holding public office until 2010. The candidacy-filing deadline is in January, and Peruvian election authorities should determine his eligibility then.

Polls have shown Fujimori to be the most popular candidate for president at the moment. His support is only a plurality of less than a third of survey respondents, however, and likely made up of
people disgusted with the ineffective rule of President Alejandro Toledo or nostalgic for Fujimori's successes against Sendero Luminoso. A majority of Peruvians, however, hate the ex-president for his authoritarian policies and the widespread corruption during his term.

Peruvian authorities call for trial, but where?

Justice Minister Alejandro Tudela called Fujimori's candidacy announcement a challenge to the state of law. "The announcement made by Fujimori...constitutes a challenge to the state of law and the sovereignty of the Peruvian state," said Tudela after Fujimori's press conference. "Fujimori knows perfectly well that he is prohibited from exercising any public office by the Congress." Peru has two extradition orders out for the ex-president, but Tudela pointed out that "disgracefully there are interested people [seeking] to sell the idea that the Peruvian government has no strategy" for the extradition of Fujimori. "Peru is waiting on Japan to evaluate the latest responses that have been made to the questions" that the Tokyo government made.

Tudela claimed that the final quarter of 2005 is "a sufficiently reasonable period" to wait for Japan's response. He said there were two options if Japan refused extradition: try Fujimori in Japan or take the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague.

Prime Minister Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, however, called for a trial to take place in Peru, saying he was against allowing Japan to try Fujimori because that option would abdicate Peruvian sovereignty. "I am not a constitutionalist, but there do exist crimes that were committed in Peru. What is logical would be that the authors of the crimes be tried in Peru," he said, adding that his government would not ask Japan to try Fujimori.

Amnesty International (AI) put out a press release stating that Japan did not offer the guarantees necessary to try Fujimori there. According to AI, Japanese authorities have made repeated pronouncements favoring Fujimori and have not responded with sufficient clarity to Peru's claims. The group called for the trial to be taken to The Hague.

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