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LADB Staff

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by LADB Staff

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Bolivia's political landscape is experiencing rising tension and crisis as different groups have entered into conflict. Organizations seeking autonomy for the nation's departments from the central government conducted a 24-hour strike on Aug. 28 in the departments of Beni, Chuquisaca, Cochabamba, Pando, Santa Cruz, and Tarija.

The government reported that the strikes resulted in violent clashes between opposing groups, with President Evo Morales and Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera accusing the US of sponsoring separatist elements in the nation's wealthier regions.

Separatists claimed in May to have assembled an army half the size of the standing military to defend their claims.

The ongoing Asamblea Constituyente that has been meeting for months in Sucre to rewrite the Constitution (see NotiSur, 2006-08-04 and 2006-12-08) has been the focus of much protest both inside and outside its chambers, with supporters and opponents of relocating the national capital from La Paz to the historic capital of Sucre pressuring the body for results.

**Strikes organized in six of nine departments**

The Aug. 28 strike brought autonomist "civic groups" into conflict with Morales supporters. The autonomy movement, focused in the country's wealthier, whiter regions (see NotiSur, 2004-11-12), wants greater control of funds from the nation's natural-gas resources, which now go to La Paz to be distributed nationwide.

Morales has made a counterproposal, saying that there should be autonomous regions for 36 indigenous groups in the country. Government Minister Alfredo Rada described the 24-hour civic strikes against the Morales government as "marked by violence," while strike organizers accused the government of promoting acts of aggression.

In a press conference, Rada accused the Union Juvenil Crucenista linked with the umbrella group Comite Civico de Santa Cruz of committing acts of vandalism in the early morning hours against those who did not appear disposed to join their strike.

Rada said opposition groups blocked streets and highways in several cities and, especially in the cities of Santa Cruz and Cochabamba, confronted those who wanted to go about their daily business. He said police used tear gas in Cochabamba to separate fighting groups, among them pro-government groups of coca-growing campesinos. He said one police official was wounded in the activity.
Rada accused members of the Union Juvenil of beating a merchant, sacking businesses, and stealing furniture. Nonetheless, Rada claimed the strikes were "partially observed," with participation in some of the strikes not exceeding 20% of the population. But regional civic committee vice president Luis Nunez of Santa Cruz called Rada's claim a lie and said that in Santa Cruz department the observance was "overwhelming."

Nunez said the acts of violence were perpetrated by infiltrators, and the strike was "in defense of democracy and liberty." He said the vandals "are not from Union Juvenil....They are some maladjusted people who don't belong to our movement."

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