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Barbara Khol

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Peru: Update On Public Health & Education Employee Strikes

by Barbara Khol
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On May 21 in Lima, the local television media reported that leaders of striking health sector workers have decided to include hospital emergency rooms in their walkout. Striking nurses, however, promised to staff emergency rooms. About 65,000 health workers have been on strike, mainly over wages, since mid-March. The average worker earns less than $50 a month. Riot police have crushed daily labor protest marches in Lima with tear gas, rubber truncheons and arrests. Health workers have organized demonstrations at the Health Ministry, Congress and the presidential palace. President Alberto Fujimori has not raised public employees' wages since he took office last July 28. Health workers say they cannot survive in Lima, with a cost of living higher than in New York City. On May 22, Health Minister Victor Yamamoto announced plans to contract new personnel to replace strikers. Meanwhile, during a street demonstration in Lima, Ricardo Arrazada of the National Struggle Committee (Comite Nacional de Lucha), said 10,000 strikers were on their way to Lima to step up the pressure on the government to meet wage increase demands. Next, about 20,000 public school principals announced plans to join 200,000 teachers in a strike which began three weeks ago. Nearly 35,000 administrative employees of the Education Ministry are also participating in the strike. The average monthly wage of teachers and administrative staff is about $60. (Basic data from AP, 05/21/91; AFP, 05/22/91)

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