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Colon, Panama: Protesters Clash With Police

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 12-13, members of the Colon Unemployed Movement clashed with anti-riot police during protests to pressure the government into addressing high rates of unemployment in Colon department. Felipe Cabeza, general coordinator of the Movement, said demonstrators demand that the government hire local residents to fill 80% of jobs created in public works projects in Colon. For two days protesters set up barricades blocking main streets and highways throughout Colon department and lobbed molotov cocktails at police who responded with tear gas and birdshot. Colon police chief Maj. Milton Castillo told reporters that three demonstrators were arrested. In response to charges that police used excessive force to disperse protesters, he said, "We have no way to measure whether we are using too much force here or there to resolve these situations." Castillo added that he was unaware of any injuries inflicted by police officers. (Basic data from Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 03/13/92)

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