Nicaragua Gov’t to Help Sugar Workers After Deadly Protest

Villagers observe as the sugarcane fields belonging to Ingenio San Antonio, ISA, burn for the harvest in Chichigalpa, Nicaragua, Sunday, Jan. 19, 2014. Former workers of ISA, clashed violently with police demanding compensation. A former sugarcane cutter died Saturday, after allegedly being shot by police during the confrontations. The former sugarcane cutters were demanding compensation for damages to their health resulting from alleged exposure to agrochemicals and pesticides when the protest turned violent. **(AP Photo/Esteban Felix)**

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (AP) — The Nicaraguan government said Monday it has assigned a high-ranking official to mediate between sugar workers and their employers after police killed a farmer over the weekend during a protest at a sugar mill.

Deputy Interior Minister Carlos Najar will present possible solution to the workers' demands by next week, the government said in a statement.

Sugar workers have been protesting the last two weeks to demand employers pay for medical care for those who have chronic kidney disease that they say is caused by working in cane fields. They also want compensation paid to the families of workers who have died from kidney problems.

Police sent in to remove about 300 farmers who had taken over the entrances to the San Antonio sugar mill fatally shot one farmer and wounded another Saturday.

Authorities said the officers involved in the shooting have been detained and are under investigation. Officials said police fired their weapons after being attacked by protesters armed with stones and homemade mortars.

Nicaragua's highest rates of chronic kidney disease show up around the Ingenio San Antonio, a plant in the town of Chichigalpa owned by the Pellas Group conglomerate, whose sugar mill processes nearly half the nation's sugar.

Paulo Najera, a sugar workers leader, said the protesting employees wanted to take to the streets again to demonstrate over the death of their colleague but most agreed to wait for the government to try to find a solution.

"We are tired of being deceived," Najera said. "This time we want real solutions because there is indignation. There are people who want to use violence against the police, but we will wait."

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