

Peruvian police clash with artisanal miners' protests

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17 July 2025

Since July 11, riot police have been clearing roads blocked by Peruvian artisanal and informal miners, who are demanding the repeal of REINFO, the Comprehensive Registry of Mining Formalization, which is set to expire on December 31, 2025. They claim that it has imposed bureaucratic hurdles that prevent legal registration, forcing many to operate outside the law.

Violent confrontations have resulted in at least one death and many injuries. After a week of protests outside Congress, artisanal and informal miners were met with violence from police using tear gas to disperse them from Lima's Abancay Avenue. The police then closed the avenue. The miners have since relocated to Parque Universitario, half a mile away, while continuing their protest with banners.

The road blockades, which began on July 4, have affected major highways in the departments of La Libertad, Ica, Arequipa, Cuzco and Ayacucho, with over 300 vehicles stranded in Arequipa and around 2,000 buses stuck near Nazca (Ica). Protesters have used burning tires and rocks to block traffic, resulting in injuries, including of a child and a man with facial injuries.

Over one thousand tourists canceled sight-seeing flights over the Nazca Lines, a group of pre-Columbian geoglyphs etched into desert sands, and a mother with her children had to walk for hours to continue their journey to Talara, located in Peru's northernmost area, and paying 300 soles. A tragic incident occurred on July 8 when a truck driver drove off a cliff while trying to navigate around the blockades.

Interprovincial transportation companies in Lima suspended services to the affected regions, and the prices of some food products increased by 30 to 60 percent due to supply uncertainties.

The most violent clash with the police occurred in Chala, Arequipa, where miners initially dispersed them by throwing rocks and using sticks. After regrouping, police cleared the Panamericana Sur highway with tear gas and rubber bullets. Tragically, 27-year-old civilian Alexander Checa was killed by police gunfire.

This week, the government announced a 60-day dialogue, hoping for an end to the roadblocks. *La República* reports that, despite claims of goodwill from both sides, no consensus is in

sight.

Artisanal mining involves manual work with basic tools, often in impoverished areas. Informal labor circumvents some legal requirements without violating laws, whereas illegal labor operates outside the law.

Gold mining is vital to Peru's economy, accounting for 32 percent of the country's mineral exports. In 2024, formal mining operations accounted for US\$8.5 billion in gold exports (60 percent), while informal, artisanal and illegal mining combined accounted for US\$6.8 billion (40 percent), mostly from illegal mining operations.

Nationally, nearly 300,000 are directly or indirectly involved in the illegal/artisanal/informal gold-mining sector. Larger illegal mining operations often involve criminal networks that evade government regulations and use violence to protect their interests. Particularly in Madre de Dios, a remote department in Peru's southeastern Amazon basin with extensive gold-rich rivers, areas have been turned into a no-man's land, where unregulated mining has caused severe ecological damage, polluting rivers with mercury and other toxic materials. Indigenous leaders report that the criminal groups kidnap children for labor and exploit girls for prostitution.

The income of artisanal/informal miners varies widely, estimated between US\$800 (2,850 soles) per month, and US\$1,200 (4,250 soles) approximately the salary of a skilled construction worker. The informal miners work without any health or other benefits.

After the failure to extend the REINFO program and the rejection of the MAPE (Small and Artisanal Mining) law, a last-minute proposal that would benefit just 86,000 artisanal miners, President Dina Boluarte claimed, "Only illegal miners are on the streets," and falsely asserted that protesters do not seek legalization.

Criminalizing the artisanal miner protests is part of Boluarte's broader repressive agenda that increasingly aligns her with extreme-right leaders like Javier Milei in Argentina and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. While the government invokes criminal gangs and environmental concerns to justify the repression, the gold-mining operations run by criminal gangs enjoy protection from powerful officials and the police.

Máximo Franco, president of the Mining Confederation

(Confemin), declared “the government has taken a measure without understanding the reality of artisanal miners.”

As usual, the government showed a double face. Prime Minister Eduardo Arana calls for dialogue, while threatening that “the protest will not be allowed to affect air travel or trade in the country.” Six hundred troops had already been deployed to conflict zones.

The situation underscores Peru’s complex political landscape, where mining accounts for nearly two-thirds (63.9 percent) of the country’s US\$75.9 billion exports. Although Peru is the third-largest exporter of copper worldwide and the largest gold producer in South America, the REINFO program had registered only about 1,100 miners by June 2025, which amounts to 2 percent of the total applicants. The formal mining sector employs over 254,000 people as of April 2025.

The REINFO program is beset by obstacles for miners, from the inability of miners to secure contracts from land owners, to the lack of clear regulations on surface mining and environmental management and the difficulty of miners in remote areas obtaining authorization from the Ministry of Energy and Mining in Lima.

Adding to the complexity of the situation is Peru’s high level of inequality, particularly in education. Many artisanal and informal miners are former peasants seeking better incomes in mining and lack the education required to comply with the REINFO regulations. Thus, ultimately, REINFO acts as a stumbling block.

The current situation benefits formal miners and the significant investments made by multinational corporations. At the same time, it drives artisanal and informal miners, who do not meet the required qualifications, into illegal mining. As frustration mounted among these miners, they chose to take action.

The failed attempt to pass the MAPE law highlights the Peruvian bourgeoisie’s inability to govern democratically and its fear of a nationwide uprising, leading them to rely on the police and military to suppress miners’ protests..

Sympathy for the miners’ plight is widespread, as it was with the transport strikes against extortionist mafias and the murders of drivers and other workers, and conditions are increasingly favorable for a nationwide general strike. In both cases, however, the protests have included illusions that the government can be pushed to act in the interests of workers, this is false. The state represents the interests of the ruling class, which includes big mining companies. Historically, the government has ignored the needs of poor peasants and small miners, especially those living in the Southern Andes and the jungle regions.

President Boluarte is one of the most unpopular political figures in Peru, and for good reason. Recently, she raised her salary from 15,600 to 35,568 soles per month (US\$10,020), even as 27.6 percent of the population lives in poverty—about 9.4 million people. A low-income family of four survives on

just 1,784 soles (US\$502) a month, meaning Boluarte earns what 20 such families do.

While miners were blocking roads, citizens protested her salary increase during the inauguration of the “9 de Julio” school in Junín. In response, Boluarte criticized the miners without proposing any solutions, claiming that the protesters were not seeking formalization but wanted to operate outside the law.

When Boluarte arrived in Iquitos for the closing of the VIII Regional State Council, nearly a thousand construction workers from the CGTP confronted her, expressing their dissatisfaction and unresolved grievances. A clash with the Civil Guard occurred, leaving two people injured by rubber bullets.

Boluarte’s legacy includes the deaths of 50 individuals during protests in the Quechua-speaking Southern Andes, following the December 7, 2022, coup that removed President Pedro Castillo. Her “shoot-to-kill” policy led to the deaths of mainly young protesters. The families of those killed under her orders are now among the miners encamped in Lima.

Criminalizing miners will only increase resentment towards the bourgeois state. “Dina, Murderer!” was one of the most prominent banners during the transport workers’ strikes. Another popular slogan was “They All Must Go!”—referring to the three branches of government, which are all seen as corrupt interests of the ruling oligarchy and foreign capital.

The central question remains: if “they all go,” who will replace them? Artisanal and informal miners, as part of the working class, need a leadership that won’t subordinate them to the machinations of the Congress and the Executive Branch.

The Lima Chamber of Commerce estimates that roadblocks are causing daily “losses” of 622 million soles (US\$175 million). Copper accounts for 28 percent of total exports, averaging US\$ 56.6 million per day, less than a third of “losses” due to road blockades.

Labeling the 622 million soles as “losses” reflects bourgeois accounting practice. In truth, it represents the daily value generated by the working class, highlighting workers’ economic power and the potential for a workers’ government to reorganize the economy through scientific planning and on socialist foundations.



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