

Won't quit, says Brazil President Dilma Rousseff after impeachment vote

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Brasilia: Brazil President Dilma Rousseff has said that she is "indignant" over a congressional vote to open impeachment proceedings against her and vowed to fight what she called the injustice. She again categorically ruled out resigning.

In her first public appearance since the Chamber of Deputies voted 367-137 late Sunday to send the impeachment proceedings to the Senate for a possible trial, Brazil's first female president appeared shaken but delivered a message of defiance.

Rousseff repeated the words "indignant," "injustice" and "wronged" dozens of times during her news conference in the presidential palace. She also repeated her long-stated position that she hasn't done anything illegal and is the victim of a "coup" orchestrated by her political foes.

"Today more than anything I feel wronged" "wronged because this process doesn't have any legal basis," she said. She said the feeling of being unjustly accused is among the worst sensations.

The impeachment proceedings against Rousseff are based on accusations that illegal accounting tricks by her administration allowed her to use government spending to shore up flagging support before elections.

Rousseff says previous administrations used such fiscal maneuvers without repercussions and insists the accusations are a flimsy excuse by Brazil's traditional ruling elite to grab power back from her left-leaning Workers' Party, which has governed for 13 years.

She slammed the impeachment effort as an act of "violence against democracy."

"I'm not going to cower; I won't let myself be paralyzed by this," Rousseff said, adding: "I have the energy, strength and courage to confront this injustice."

Rousseff lashed out at her nemesis, Chamber of Deputies Speaker Eduardo Cunha, the driving force behind the impeachment move. As No. 2 in line to succeed Rousseff, Cunha has been charged with taking \$5 million in bribes in a sprawling corruption scheme at the state-run Petrobras oil giant.

The Petrobras investigation has also implicated many other top political players, including Vice President Michel Temer, who would fill in for Rousseff if the Senate decides to put her on trial. Rousseff herself has not been implicated in the case.

"There are no bribery accusations against me, no accusations that I accepted illicit payouts. I wasn't accused of having foreign banks accounts," she said.

Rousseff said it was an injustice that those leading the charge against her do face such allegations. "For that reason, I feel wronged."

Sunday's vote plunged Brazil into further uncertainty as it struggles with the worst recession in decades and the corruption scandal while preparing to host the Olympic Games in August.

It also left the country more deeply divided than ever.

Many hold Rousseff responsible for everything from the spiraling recession to chronic high taxes and poor public services and have long rooted for her ouster. But others credit the Workers' Party with lifting tens of millions of poor Brazilians from destitution over the past decade and they decry the impeachment process as anti-democratic.

With the impeachment documents handed over from the lower house to the Senate on Monday, Rousseff's fight for survival will now focus on winning support in that legislative body, where an initial vote on the impeachment is expected in about around two weeks. If a majority there votes to put Rousseff on trial, she would be suspended while the vice president took over her duties.

While Rousseff insisted her relationship with the Senate is much better than with the Chamber of Deputies, the administration appears to have its work cut out. According to news reports, 45 of the 81 senators have indicated they intend to vote in favor of an impeachment trial.

Under the complicated guidelines for impeachment, it would be at least 40 days until Rousseff's fate is decided. However, the speed of the process depends on Senate leader Renan Calheiros, who could potentially drag for months any trial and final decision on whether she should be removed from office.

Rousseff acknowledged meeting on Monday with Calheiros but didn't provide many details about their talks.

Solicitor General Jose Eduardo Cardozo said Sunday night that Rousseff would fight impeachment in the Supreme Federal Tribunal, Brazil's highest court, and Rousseff said Monday she wasn't ruling out using any tools at her disposal.

Analysts seemed skeptical that she will be able to hold onto power, noting her spectacular failure Sunday to win the support even of parties that had long been part of her governing coalition.

Editorials in Brazil's top newspapers highlighted the danger posed by the political instability. The Estado de S. Paulo newspaper warned of "the threat of strikes and daily demonstrations." Folha de S. Paulo urged speed in resolving the crisis.

Rousseff was picked by once highly popular former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva to succeed him. She had never held elected office before becoming president and quickly gained a reputation for a prickly leadership style and perceived reticence to play the political game.

Eight years of galloping economic growth under Silva began to flag after Rousseff took office in 2011, and she only narrowly won re-election in 2014. Her popularity has plunged in step with the economy, and opinion polls suggest most Brazilians support her ouster, though many have reservations about those in line to replace her.

Temer, Cunha and Calheiros are all implicated in the Petrobras scheme. Plus, because Temer signed off on the some of the same allegedly illegal fiscal maneuvers Rousseff used, he also could be subject to impeachment.

With the country's leadership besmirched by corruption, calls for general elections have been growing. Rousseff, however, said that wasn't something she was thinking about at this point.

Gerivaldo Oliveira, a taxi driver in Brasilia, said he would applaud such an initiative.

"I want to see all the corrupt politicians in jail," he said. "Brazil needs a clean slate; otherwise we're lost."

- AP