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ECUADOR

REPRESSION OF INDIGENOUS-LED PROTESTS

On 14 June around 0:29 a.m., security forces detained Leónidas Iza, president of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, in the province of Cotopaxi. He was held incommunicado and criminally charged with “blockage of public services”, before being released that night. His detention could have been arbitrary and the criminal proceedings against him could constitute criminalization of protest. Human rights organizations have made allegations of more arbitrary detentions, excessive use of force and criminalization against protesters. We urge President Lasso to stop stigmatizing, repressing, and criminalizing peaceful protests, to disclose the whereabouts of and charges against all detainees, and to release those arbitrarily detained.

Since 13 June, Amnesty has received alarming allegations of arbitrary detentions, criminalization, and excessive use of force against protesters, human rights defenders, and journalists in different provinces. Ecuador’s Human Rights Alliance has identified at least 36 people detained between 14 and 15 June in Quito and Cotopaxi in the context of the protests. The government has also issued stigmatizing statements against demonstrators and threatened them with prosecution.

Write to the President urging him to:

- immediately to stop stigmatizing, repressing and criminalizing peaceful protests, to disclose the whereabouts of and charges against all detainees and to release those arbitrarily detained

Write to:

Guillermo Lasso,
President of Ecuador
Palacio de Gobierno
García Moreno N10-43 entre Chile y Espejo
170401 Quito
Ecuador

Email: atencionciudadana@presidencia.gob.ec
pozof@presidencia.gob.ec

Salutation: Dear President Lasso:

And copy:

Mrs. Marisol Del Carmen Nieto Cueva
Minister & Chargé d'affaires, a.i.
Embassy of the Republic of Ecuador
99 Bank Street, Suite 230
Ottawa, ON K1P 6B9
Fax: 613 235 5776
Email: embassy@embassyecuador.ca

Additional information

On 20 May 2022, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and other organizations announced that they would start mass protests on 13 June in response to austerity measures and alleged failures by Guillermo Lasso's government to guarantee their economic, social, cultural and environmental rights. They also published [an agenda with their main demands](#). On 11 June, the Minister of the Interior, Patricio Carrillo, [stigmatized demonstrators](#) even before protests had taken place, stating that "The announced mobilization or demonstration, in practice, is a week of blocked highways and oil wells, kidnappings of police and military personnel, looting, etc. They will disguise it as a social struggle to provoke victimization. Who benefits from another protest without limits?"

On 13 June, CONAIE and other Indigenous, farmer peasant, labour, education, student, feminist, LGBTI and environmentalist organizations started protests. Many of these protests included blocking roads in different provinces. Since that day, human rights organizations in Ecuador have made allegations of arbitrary detentions, criminalization, and excessive use of force, including indiscriminate use of tear gas, against protesters, human rights defenders, and journalists across the country, including a student who was allegedly shot in the leg in Quito.

On 14 June at 0:29 a.m., [a live streaming showed](#) officers in Police and military uniforms detaining Leónidas Iza, president of the CONAIE, near Pastocalle, in the province of Cotopaxi, and pushing him into a white unmarked vehicle that later left the scene. Later that morning, Ecuador's Human Rights Alliance complained that the officers who detained him failed to present an arrest warrant and to inform him of the grounds for his detention, that authorities concealed his whereabouts and kept him incommunicado, preventing him from contacting his family and lawyers, and that the plates of the vehicle (PTR-3246) in which he was transported did not appear on publicly available databases. This may indicate that his detention was arbitrary.

At 1:18 a.m., [President Lasso posted a video](#), accusing protesters of committing crimes and threatening them with prosecution: "The detention of intellectual and material authors, who executed these violent acts, has started (...) We cannot be victims of vandals who only want to cause chaos (...) Now that we have begun reactivation, we cannot stop. Those who commit acts of vandalism will answer to justice and to the Ecuadorian people".

At 3:20 a.m., [the National Police informed](#) that it had detained Leónidas Iza in the parish of Pastocalle, Cotopaxi province, on "presumption of commission of crimes", without specifying the alleged acts he committed or the actual charges against him. The National Police also stated that he was being held at a "temporary custody room, for in flagrante delicto hearings".

At 9:22 a.m., [the General Prosecutor's Office informed](#) that it had only become aware of Leónidas Iza's detention through social media, and that the National Police had not presented him to its institution, nor had it provided the corresponding police report to explain the motivation of his detention. Finally, it stated that the General Prosecutor had issued guidelines to provincial prosecutors to coordinate actions and proceedings with "corresponding authorities" to prevent illegal or arbitrary detentions.

At 10:47 a.m., [the General Prosecutor's Office informed](#) that it had received the police report of Leónidas Iza's detention in flagrante delicto (detained at the very moment a crime is being committed) that early morning in the Cotopaxi province, and stated that the institution would follow the corresponding proceedings.

At 11:37 a.m., [the National Police informed](#) that Leónidas had been detained while he allegedly "directed and encouraged actions for the escalation and radicalization of violence", and that it had delivered the police report on his detention to the Prosecutor's Office "first thing in the morning". Later that day, Iza's lawyers complained that them and his family ignored his whereabouts, but that information available on social media indicated he may have been transported from the Cotopaxi province to Quito in the unmarked vehicle, and then to a military facility in Latacunga, Cotopaxi province, in a military vehicle.

That night, Leónidas Iza's in flagrante delicto hearing was held at the Specialized judicial unit for violence against women or family members and offenses against sexual and reproductive integrity, in the city of Latacunga. The judge ruled that his detention was legal and initiated criminal proceedings against him for the "blockage of public services", for this alleged participation in the obstruction of roads during the protests. This could constitute criminalization of the right to protest.

Ecuador's Human Rights Alliance has identified at least 36 people detained between 14 and 15 June in Quito and Cotopaxi in the context of the protests.