

International Organizations Stand in Solidarity with Indigenous, Labour and Civil Society Organizations in Ecuador Protesting Austerity Measures

(October 16, 2019) Since October 2, Indigenous organizations, along with trade unions, social movements and campesino organizations have been demonstrating across Ecuador against a set of economic austerity measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international lending institutions that have resulted in increases of up to 120% in fuel prices; labour reforms that seriously undermine worker protections in Ecuador, such as job precarization, a downward “harmonization” of wages resulting in a 20% cut for new contracts in public sector jobs; and imposition of extractive projects (mining, oil, and gas) in a misdirected effort to solve the debt crisis. These mobilizations are indicative of a broad, decades-long opposition of Indigenous and campesino communities in particular to the imposition of extractive projects in their territories.

The government of Ecuador has responded with extraordinarily repressive violence, including using tear gas, rubber bullets and even live bullets on protesters. Organizations have reported that more than 700 people have been arrested, at least 5 protesters have been killed, and more than 100 are seriously injured. Ecuadorian organizations insist that the official statistics belie the gravity of the situation and underestimate reality.

We condemn and call for an immediate end to the “State of Exception” declared by the Ecuadorian President on October 3rd, granting the police and military exceptional powers to “maintain order and peace.” In practice, this has meant imposing a state of terror on Indigenous, campesino, labour, student, and civil society organizations who are exercising their right to protest.

We reject the IMF-imposed “Paquetazo”, a grotesque package of economic austerity measures, and recognize them for what they are: heavy-handed, neoliberal structural adjustment policies which seek to privilege private, foreign investment over the public good at the expense of working peoples’ livelihoods and the self-determination and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples and rural communities. There is ample experience of the catastrophic impact that these kinds of reforms have had in Latin America, and strong evidence demonstrating that rewarding banks, investors, and elites ends up exacerbating poverty and inequality for the majority with devastating impacts on the socio-ecological fabric of communities and irreparable impacts on climate-critical ecosystems.

We denounce the exorbitant use of state-mandated force to quell protests. The Ecuadorian Ombudsperson’s office reported on October 7th that the repression and criminalization of protesters, especially Indigenous peoples and youth, is unprecedented when compared to other protests in recent years. They report that 485 protesters were detained between October 3rd and October 7th, many of whom have serious injuries and faced abuse.

We denounce the foreign mining companies who, in attempting to assure their shareholders of the benefits of investing in a country where mining is overwhelmingly opposed, are using Ecuador’s foreign debt crisis to argue that their projects will have strong government support. Similarly, we condemn any actions of mining companies to use the State of Exception to further any activities in areas where they have otherwise been unable to advance due to organized resistance. Mining will not solve the foreign debt crisis.

We call on the Ecuadorian government to repeal the recently announced austerity measures, cancel the

agreement with the International Monetary Fund and respect the self-determining decisions of Indigenous peoples, rural communities and local governments to keep their territories free of extractive industries in defense of life and nature. The vast majority of mining concessions in Ecuador should be cancelled in accord with the 2008 Mining Mandate, of constitutional rank, where they were granted without prior consultation with affected communities and/or if they overlap with water sources or protected areas, among other criteria.

We call on the international mainstream media to report on the state-ordered abuses and repression in Ecuador with the same rigor and attention as their reporting on the protests in Hong Kong or Venezuela. We stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Ecuador who are currently risking their lives opposing this predatory economic model. We hear you and are with you in spirit.

Endorsing Organizations:

Amazon Frontlines (USA)
Amazon Watch (USA)
Committee for Human Rights in Latin America (CDHAL)
Common Frontiers (Canada)
The Gaia Foundation (UK)
Hellenic Mining Watch (Greece)
Institute for Policy Studies - Global Economy Program (USA)
London Mining Network (UK)
Mining Watch Romania (Romania)
MiningWatch Canada (Canada)
PNG Mining Watch Group Inc. (Papua New Guinea)
Rainforest Action Group (Australia)
Rainforest Information Centre (Australia)
Save Our Sperrins (Northern Ireland)
War on Want (UK)

Timeline of recent events

March 2019 - IMF executive board approves 4.2 billion dollar loan to Ecuador, on top of billions already loaned by IDB , World Bank, and IMF.

Mar 24 - Overwhelming “No” vote resounds in Giron against metal-mining in territory affecting Canadian mining project.

Sep 20 - Intag declares territory free of mining, demand exit of mining companies

Sep 23 PHSA Declare Shuar Arutam territory free of mining, demand exit of mining companies.

Sep 23 - IMF reaches agreement at second review of program; notes that structural adjustment legislation should be implemented in the near future.

Oct 1 - President Moreno informs the public that the government will be implementing a series of economic austerity measures (Presidential Decree 833).

Oct 2 - IMF applauds government for the measures to improve Ecuadorian economy

Oct 2 - Frente Unitario de Trabajadores (FUT), Frente Popular, CONAIE, and other organizations call for nation-wide protests against the economic austerity measures, demanding the revocation of the Presidential Decree.

Oct 3 - President Moreno declares “State of Exception” (State of Emergency) granting military and police exceptional powers to “maintain order and peace”. Repression of protesters ensues. Acts of violent repression are recorded across the country and continue over the weekend.

Oct 5 - Indigenous organization CONAIE announces its own “state of exception”, demanding immediate withdrawal of military and police from communities or they will face “Indigenous justice”.

Oct 6 - Repression continues. In some regions where Indigenous organizations take the lead, like Morona Santiago and Imbabura, it intensifies.

Oct 7 - Media reports that 20,000 Indigenous members of CONAIE arrive in Quito to continue the protests; they are welcomed by the city, but attacked by the police.

Oct 7 - The Ecuadorian Ombudsperson’s office releases a report on “The State of Exception 2019” noting this week’s events to be the most intense in recent years. They note excessive use of military and police force, especially against Indigenous peoples; the use of physical violence against protestors; evidence of torture of detainees; and a total of 485 reported detentions between October 3 and October 6.

Oct 8 - President Moreno imposes a nation-wide curfew, Decree 888

Oct 8 - The Organization of American States releases statement condemns acts of “violence” by protestors; says nothing of State-ordered repression, detentions, and killings.

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Oct 10 - Ecuadorian Ombudsperson’s office laments at least 5 deaths related to the protest, one of whom was a leader for CONAIE Cotapaxi. Urges government to guarantee right to protest.

Oct 10 - CONAIE ratifies position against extractivism and economic austerity measures, demands freeing of political prisoners; cancelling of D883 and immediate dismissal of Ministers of Defence and Interior as basic conditions for dialogue.

Oct 14 – After massive protests, Indigenous leaders and the government reached an agreement officially repealing the cuts to fuel prices.

Summary of IMF conditions to reduce fiscal spending to more effectively pay the foreign debt include (not exclusive)

1. Reduce government fuel subsidies (the spark that ignited the strikes)
2. Tax reform to make more favourable for foreign direct investment (FDI), lowering taxes paid by foreign companies
3. Increase labour market “competitiveness” to favour FDI
4. Rationalize wages to favour FDI (wage cuts around 20%)
5. Substantially reduce vacation time for public-sector employees
6. Restructure fiscal management
7. Prioritize debt repayment
8. Promote mining and oil extraction by foreign companies (factored into the anticipated national budget)

Mining Companies Currently in Ecuador (not exclusive)

- Aurania Resources (Canada)
- Adventus Zinc (Canada)

- BHP (Australia/UK)
- CRCC-Tongguan (China)
- CODELCO (Chile)
- Cornerstone Capital Resources (Canada)
- Core Gold (Canada)
- ENAMI (Ecuador)
- Goldgroup Mining (Canada)
- Grupo México (Mexico)
- Hancock Prospecting (Australia)
- Fortescue Mining Group (Australia)
- INV Metals (Canada)
- Junefield Ecuagoldmining (China)
- Lucky Minerals (Canada)
- Lumina Gold (Canada)
- Luminex Resources (Canada)
- Lundin Gold (Canada)
- Newcrest Mining (Australia)
- Salazar Resources (Canada)
- Solaris Copper (Canada)
- SolGold (Australia)
- Sunstone Metals (Australia)
- Tempus Resources (Australia)
- Titan (Australia)
- Toachi Mining (Canada)
- Tongling Nonferrous Metals Holding (China)