

Ecuador on the brink of the abyss

An immense wave of violence has been unleashed throughout the country: more than ten dead so far; police officers kidnapped; 329 detained; burning cars, shootings in shopping centres, bombs in different cities, the takeover of Channel 10 television station, highway robberies. The country's main prisons remain under the control of criminals who are holding 142 prison guards, employees and officials hostage. Two of the main leaders of the mafia groups escaped from prison. Throughout the educational system, in-person classes have been suspended. Almost all commercial establishments have closed their doors. Traffic in the cities has been chaotic, as people leave their jobs and run to take refuge in their homes. Fake news have proliferated on social networks, with neither public nor private media clearly indicating what had happened. Ecuador is going through a moment of very deep crisis, perhaps the most serious in its history.

The immediate background to this situation is:

1. Revelations of the penetration of drug trafficking and organised crime in state agencies: administration of justice, police, armed forces and political parties. Investigations have brought to light audios and documents that have clearly exposed the way organised mafias operate, including by corrupting officials and politicians in order to put them at the service of drug trafficking.
2. Changes in the leadership of the police and the armed forces, and the decision to transfer mafia bosses from certain prisons where they had complete control, to others where they would not have the same power to operate or confront other criminal groups. To this we can add the announcement of possible extraditions, the construction of maximum security prisons and the government's decision to regain control of the prisons.

3. The government's announcement that it was declaring war on the mafias and that the army would be part of this fight. In fact, the central axis of the possible questions for the Popular Consultation [being proposed by president Daniel Noboa] focus on the participation of the army in the fight against organised crime.

The government's first reaction was to decree a state of emergency, which involves a curfew and the mobilisation of the police and the armed forces, and subsequently a state of internal war against 22 organised crime groups, which it describes as terrorists. The government is seeking to regain control in this way . But it is not possible to know the course that this confrontation will take. Prisons remain in the hands of organised crime, the country cannot return to normality yet, in several cities commerce has only partially opened and classes continue to be held online. From the beginning, the Noboa government has not only adopted a discourse of internal conflict against criminal organisations that have broken the state's monopoly over force. It has also raised the heat by declaring that Ecuador is in a state of internal war, or civil war, and that its objective is the elimination of these 22 criminal groups. But these groups have tens of thousands of combatants, are heavily armed, control prisons and neighbourhoods in the country's main cities and have built, by force and money, social support bases while holding important sectors of the population hostage to its reign of terror and extortion.

The mafias have achieved what they wanted and put the state and the population on the ropes, even beyond the effective magnitude of the attacks and criminal actions. We are clearly facing a population without any experience with these types of violent attacks. Nobody knows what to do, nobody knows how to react, nobody knows what to propose.

The first effects of the situation have been negative for the Ecuadorian people: a wave of fear runs through the country,

businesses have closed, transportation is paralyzed, the economic damage is enormous, hopelessness grows, people turn their sights, once again, towards migration, everyone wants to flee. The leaders of the extreme right are attempting to fish in troubled waters, while social organisations are cornered and prevented from operating and demonstrating against neoliberal policies.

The fundamental question now is what to propose and how to act from the working class sectors and social organisations. These moments are very dangerous, when far-right discourses, such as that of [El Salvadoran president Nayib] Bukele, are strengthened because the conscience of the population is easily manipulated in moments of so much anxiety and fear, where a viable future seems impossible and pessimism spreads. Likewise, this will also be used as an opportunity by the right to pass its most repressive laws and implement its neoliberal project against workers. The defeat for the popular camp could be profound.

Faced with this, it is essential that social organisations, especially the FUT (Unitary Workers' Front) and CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), together with feminist, environmental and neighbourhood organisations, stand up and propose working class solutions to the crisis. Here are some elements that we propose:

As soon as the state of emergency passes, call for a large demonstration for peace and against the violence of organised crime, to show that the Ecuadorian people will resist the onslaught of crime and that the cities, streets and highways belong to the people and not to crime.

This mobilisation will also demand that the government take actions, not just immediate but also fundamental ones, that strike at the structural causes of the problem we are experiencing, because military intervention will never be enough; and not allow these tragic events to be used as

pretext to launch measures against the poor who are the ones who pay the consequences of the economic crisis and insecurity.

Demand the immediate repeal of the decrees that forgave the debt of capitalists, force them to pay and clearly indicate that this is also a form of corruption, in this case in the private sector. This money from unpaid taxes should be immediately allocated to social programs aimed especially at young people from the most impoverished working class sectors.

Immediately suspend payment of the external debt to stop the economic crisis and obtain resources to confront organised crime, meet the urgent needs of the population, pay the state debt with the IESS (Ecuadorian Institute of Social Security), resolve the energy crisis, pay debts to municipalities and provincial governments, and improve the quality of healthcare.

In working class sectors, it is essential to strengthen community organisations, peasants, neighbourhoods, small producers, feminists, environmentalists, rural and urban workers, as the best way to resist the penetration of crime, as well as drug mafias and drug trafficking. We urgently need to develop a national plan for these organisations to fully participate in self-organised resistance against crime. Without the active participation of the population nothing will be resolved, which is why strategies must be designed from below. Only in this way will we win our young people away from organised crime.

Launch a campaign against all forms of violence, which ultimately feed the macro-violence of organised crime. This means combating gender violence, which is generated on social media networks, a place where hatred and fake news are incubated, and rejecting the symbolic violence that is present at every step in political struggles. To the extent that the causes of insecurity are not only national but also international, the government should request the formation of

a United Nations commission for solidarity and support for our country. Likewise, a Latin American commission will have to be established for the same purpose.

A POPULAR RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS AND VIOLENCE OF ORGANIZED CRIME IS URGENT

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