Ecuador: National Mobilization suspended
and an uncertain dialogue is established

The Act for Peace marked a truce between the Government and the Indigenous organizations that promoted the National Strike that paralyzed the whole country. However, the political environment has not calmed down and society is waiting for President Lasso to comply with the 10 agreed demands. After reducing the price of gasoline and diesel, the Ecuadorian people expect a moratorium on financial debts, food at a fair price, job creation and investment in health. The waiting time is running out and the Indigenous peoples will not return to dialogue if the Government does not comply with what has been agreed.

By Alfredo Vitery Gualinga - August 1st 2022

With the signing of the Act for Peace on June 30, 2022, the nationalities and social movements of Ecuador suspended the national strike on the condition that the Government of Guillermo Lasso complies with the agreement within 90 days. The National, Popular and Plurinational Mobilization have ten demands to overcome the crisis caused by neoliberal policies implemented in recent months.

This great uprising of historic magnitude lasted 18 days and was led by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), the Council of Evangelical Indigenous Peoples and Organizations of Ecuador (FEINE), the National Confederation of Indigenous and Black Peasant Organizations (FENOCIN), Afro-descendant communities, women’s, feminist and dissident organizations, students, artists, doctors and health personnel.

The demands of the strike

Mobilizations were activated in all provinces of Ecuador. In Quito, thousands of women and men from the nationalities of the Amazon, the Andes and the Coast gathered in
solidarity with the universities. At the same time, the neighbors of the popular
neighborhoods of the Capital provided food, water, medicines and coats to support the
resistance. The Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana became the headquarters of the
permanent Popular Assembly from where the organizations led the historic uprising.

CONAIE, together with other organizations, demanded direct, effective and concrete
answers to ten demands that were presented to President Lasso in meetings held on
June 11, August 5, October 4 and November 10, 2021. After the Government ignored
the claims during more than a year of dialogue, the Indigenous organizations insisted
again with their demands:

1. Reduction (and no more increases) in fuel prices and targeting of subsidies to farmers,
peasants, transporters and fishermen.

2. Moratorium and renegotiation of debts with the financial system for more than
4,000,000 families.

3. Fair prices for agricultural products.

4. Generation of employment and compliance with labor rights.

5. Moratorium on the expansion of the extractive mining and oil frontier, together with
the audit and comprehensive reparation for socio-environmental impacts. Repeal of
Decrees N° 95 and 151 that benefit the hydrocarbon and mining sector.

6. Respect for the 21 collective rights of Indigenous peoples: intercultural bilingual
education; Indigenous justice; free, prior and informed consultation; organization and
self-determination of Indigenous peoples.

7. A stop of the privatization of strategic sectors.

8. Policies to control prices and curb speculation in basic necessities.

9. Investment in health and education.

10. Effective public policies to curb the wave of violence in Ecuador.
The Act for Peace

Having received no response from the government, the nationalities and social organizations called a national strike in exercise of the right to resistance established in the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador. The mobilization, of an indefinite term, began on June 13, after a year of unsuccessful dialogue. With the purpose of demobilizing the strike, the Government acted with contempt towards the nationalities, declared a State of Exception, accused the organizations of being terrorists and ordered the illegal detention of the President of CONAIE, Leonidas Iza.

During the 18 days of the strike, Ecuador experienced a fascist and racist dictatorship regime: the President hid in the Carondelet Palace and handed over control of the country to the Armed Forces and the Police. Far from appeasing the conflict, they unleashed a brutal repression that caused six deaths, 331 wounded and 152 arrested. The State Attorney General’s Office, controlled by the Government, initiated a political persecution and opened 261 preliminary investigations and 29 prosecutorial instructions. The accusation against the leaders and participants of the mobilization was the same used by authoritarian governments: terrorism and rebellion.

For its part, the International Solidarity and Human Rights Mission, which was in Quito to monitor the protests, concluded that the Ecuadorian State committed "crimes against humanity": forced disappearance of persons; completed (or attempted) homicides; crimes against physical integrity and eye injuries; illegal deprivation of liberty, arbitrary detentions and torture; crimes against freedom of assembly and the free exercise of protest; and crimes against property.

Faced with the serious social and political commotion caused by the inability and unwillingness of the Government of Guillermo Lasso to respond to social demands, the organizations requested the mediation of the Ecuadorian Episcopal Conference. A well-known member of Opus Dei, the intervention of the Catholic Church was fundamental in bringing about a meeting between the delegates of the National Government and the Indigenous leaders. After the meeting, the Act for Peace was signed.
Agreements signed to guarantee peace

Among the agreements signed, Decree No. 452 is noteworthy, which provides for the governors of all provinces to strengthen the necessary control mechanisms to prevent and eradicate economic speculation, especially those who illegally raise prices subject to official prices. On the other hand, Decree No. 456 establishes a series of compensatory public policies aimed at rural and urban areas that have suffered the most from the high cost of living following the Covid-19 pandemic and the international logistics crisis.

To address one of the main demands that motivated the strike, the Executive signed Executive Decree No. 462 reducing the price of premium and EcoPaís gasoline and diesel by 10 cents per gallon. As the measure was considered "insufficient" by CONAIE, the Government was forced to issue Decree No. 467 which added a further reduction of 5 cents. Thus, a total reduction of 15 cents was achieved in the cost of a gallon of diesel and gasoline, which are the most commonly used in Ecuador.

In environmental matters, the issuance of Executive Decree No. 466 repealed Executive Decree No. 95 on hydrocarbons, which had been enacted on July 7, 2021, and promoted the expansion of the oil frontier throughout the country, particularly in the Ecuadorian Amazon. This decree affected the ancestral territories of Indigenous peoples. In turn, Executive Decree No. 151, which contains the Action Plan for the Mining Sector, was modified: it was established that this activity may not be developed in protected areas and ancestral territories, areas declared as intangible, archaeological zones and water protection areas.

Finally, prior, free and informed consultation of Indigenous communities, peoples and nationalities was guaranteed, considering the standards dictated by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the Ecuadorian Constitutional Court. Also, following the pandemic, Decree No. 454 declared an emergency in the health sector. The organizations and the Government resolved to set up a 90-day dialogue table with the objective of determining new agreements on the ten demands.
A dialogue with an uncertain future

The plurinational mobilization broke out in a historical context marked by the unsustainable structural crisis of the colonial state of Ecuador, deepened by the neoliberal policies of the current government. The political atmosphere following this national strike is not one of peace as expected by society. On the contrary, an authoritarian and fascist regime has been installed that intends to impose its neoliberal agenda with blood and fire.

Currently, organized crime has taken hold in Ecuador. Drug trafficking cartels have permeated state entities to such an extent that the military and police institutions themselves are plagued by "narco-generals," according to reports from the U.S. Embassy in Quito. At the same time, hundreds of people deprived of their freedom have been massacred in prisons during the last year. Hitmen dominate the streets of the cities, sowing insecurity and fear throughout the territory.

In this context, no one believes in President Lasso's word anymore. A year has passed in the exercise of power and he has not fulfilled a single one of his commitments promised during the electoral campaign. Even less the promises made during the dialogue with social organizations, which shows a tremendous inability to manage the complex situation in which the country finds itself. Double talk, lies and demagogy are the only tools of this government.

Instead of guaranteeing a transparent dialogue and compliance with the agreements signed in the Act for Peace, Guillermo Lasso and his ministers are determined to delegitimize the nationalities and social organizations: without any proof, they try to link them to drug trafficking and international terrorism. As long as the President continues to boycott the talks, the Peace Act has no future. If it fails, the Indigenous peoples will not return to dialogue with a government stained with blood, devoid of truth, authoritarian and illegitimate. September 30, 2022 is the deadline.

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