



*Paz y  
Esperanza*



## EMERGENCY IN ECUADOR

In January, we normally reflect on the previous year and provide a round-up from the Paz y Esperanza offices across Latin America about what they achieved in 2023 and their plans for the year ahead. However, as you may have seen in the news, the situation in **Ecuador** has deteriorated significantly and a nationwide state of emergency was declared by the government. Families and communities have been shaken as organised criminal gangs coordinate attacks against private, public and government institutions. We spoke to **Jose Vinces** from the PyE Ecuador team who updated us and asked us to pray as a matter of urgency.

For years there has been a decline in safety and stability in Ecuador, specifically in the most vulnerable areas of Guayaquil where PyE is located. Many factors have led to this. These include **corruption**, the country's **location** and **prison insecurity**. Firstly, there is a lack of political and economic stability and the justice and education systems are failing. Secondly, Ecuador's location means it sits between cocaine producers in Peru and Colombia. Gangs outside of the country see its potential for drug trafficking which is then linked to gang violence. Thirdly, most prison wings are controlled by violent gangs and there have been numerous prison riots between gangs in recent years resulting in many deaths. There has also been building tension in the country with 7,600 violent deaths recorded in 2023.

The most recent violence started on 7 January when a gang leader known as Fito escaped from prison. This triggered prison riots across the country. The following day President Daniel Noboa declared a 60-day state of emergency and curfew. On 9 January, organised gangs launched attacks across Ecuador, including taking over a live broadcast of national news. The president declared an 'armed internal conflict' and named 22 gangs as terrorist organisations. He ordered the armed forces to 'neutralise' them and they were given the authority to enter prisons and the homes of suspected gang members. There are concerns over an excessive use of violence and abuse of power by the police and military with videos circulating on social media taken by soldiers themselves, showing them stripping and humiliating people they have

taken prisoner. On 17 January, prosecutor Carlos Suarez, who was investigating organised crime, was murdered. Local media reported that two suspects accused of his killing belong to a criminal gang linked to one of Mexico's powerful drug cartels.



José Vincés

Jose said: *"We are living in a state which has almost failed and wasn't prepared for this level of violence. It is very difficult to confront the leaders of these drug gangs and these mafias have infiltrated many institutions, including the judiciary and police, leading to corruption. They recruit vulnerable young people who are living in poverty and have missed out on education during Covid. People don't feel safe in public spaces at the moment and the churches don't know how to react as it is so confronting."*

Please join us in praying for:

- **The government** - for wisdom for President Noboa, a comprehensive security plan, respect for human rights during the state of emergency, judicial reform and an end to corruption amongst the highest ranks of the security forces and judiciary.
- **People** - for strength and comfort for the families of the victims of the internal conflict, protection and security for families living in vulnerable communities, for the economy as people struggle living in poverty exacerbated by the conflict and for the 54,000 Ecuadorians who have crossed the Darien Jungle through Colombia to flee poverty, extortion and violence.
- **Violence** - for the cessation of violence caused by organised crime, murders, kidnaps and extortion and the dismantling of narcoterrorist groups who control prisons.
- **Intervention** - for comprehensive international aid. may churches become agents of peace and hope, for inclusive education programmes, job opportunities for young people and help with mental health problems.
- **PyE Ecuador** - for the families, churches and communities of the team (Jose and Loida, Paulina, Danny, Alfonso, Yesenia, Tania and Oscar, Senia, Susana, William, Maria Eugenia, Cesar, Sam and Emma), for wisdom for the team about how to use their resources in the best way in response to the overwhelming need

If you want to read more on the current crisis, here is an [article that gives a broad overview](#)

Thank you so much for your prayer and financial support. The need is great in Ecuador and across Latin America. Please consider making a regular or one-off donation at

<https://www.justgiving.com/pazyesperanza>