



'Young people call for change in Ecuador'

'The Lord's justice will dwell in the desert, his righteousness live in the fertile field. The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever.'

Isaiah 32:17-18

Situated between Colombia and Peru, Ecuador used to be recognised as an oasis of peace. But in recent years, drug trafficking and associated gang violence have tragically fractured this peace. Much of the world's cocaine, from coca leaves grown in Colombia and Peru, leaves the continent through Ecuador's ports, and powerful gangs battle to control the route.

In 2020, Ecuador's murder rate was one of the lowest in the region. Now it is the highest, with young people particularly badly affected. Gang members kidnap people for ransom and use violence, or the threat of violence, as a way to exert their dominance.

Guayaquil

Paz y Esperanza has been working in the major port city of Guayaquil for nine years. This is one of the cities most badly affected by the rise in violent crime, significantly affecting the daily lives of Paz y Esperanza staff and partners.

José Vínces Rodríguez, Director of Paz y Esperanza Ecuador, told us, *'We are in a state of conflict and internal lawlessness. There is no guarantee that we can move and work freely without being detained. The criminal gangs fight to take over territories, including in the north-west of Guayaquil.'*

'People are being hurt and killed; it is a heartbreaking situation. Even young people from churches are being drawn into gangs. When we talk with the pastors, they are suffering a lot.'

Voices of Justice

Against this incredibly difficult backdrop, the Paz y Esperanza team is inspiring and equipping young people to choose a different path to the violence they see around them, and to use their voices to call for change



Teenagers Jonathan Cárdenas and Arelys Pozo are part of Paz y Esperanza's 'Voices of Justice Network', based in the north-west region of Guayaquil. After receiving training in 2020, they have been boldly and enthusiastically speaking up for the children and young people in their communities.

This year, Jonathan and Arelys were elected by their peers to be part of the city's Advisory Council for Children and Teenagers. These advisory councils are spaces for the mayor, the highest authority in the city, to consult with citizens on relevant issues.

Jonathan, who was elected Coordinator of the advisory council, says, *'I see this as a great responsibility and an opportunity to defend the rights of children and teenagers, so they no longer feel vulnerable.'*

Arelys adds, 'Being a representative on the advisory council means helping to transform realities and break the silence that many still maintain, as I once did. I am not content with observing. I want to act, propose, build, and continue to show that, despite the difficulties, change is possible. I want the children in my city to shine, and never lose their dreams.'



Some figures from Ecuador:

- In 2024, the police arrested 3,086 minors for various crimes.
- This figure is almost double that of 2023 (1,889 arrests).
- In four years, 8,201 minors have been apprehended nationwide

- Please pray for Jonathan and Arelys, and all the other young people who are using their voices to stand up against injustice and call for change in Ecuador
- Please also pray for safety for Paz y Esperanza staff and their families, as they continue their life-giving, transformational work in communities shaken by rising levels of violence.

If you would like to support the work of Paz y Esperanza in Ecuador and other parts of Latin America, please click on the link below.

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