

Violence gives no respite in Ecuador



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"Esmeraldas is bleeding to death" has been a recurring headline in the press in recent months, reflecting the situation in this province of Ecuador, which has become one of the most violent in the Andean country.

Inhabitants of the region have repeatedly demanded that the authorities put an end to the insecurity. Hundreds of people wearing white shirts as a symbol of peace marched in recent days through the streets of the city of Esmeraldas, in the province of the same name.

Last year, the coastal province registered more than 400 violent deaths, with a homicide rate of 63% per 100,000 inhabitants.

Murders, robberies, kidnappings and extortion are part of the daily life of the population of Esmeraldas, which like the rest of the country suffered the incidence of COVID 19 and for months has been plagued by violence, which prevents an economic recovery.

Last March, President Guillermo Lasso decreed a state of emergency in the area, where a significant number of police and military personnel have been deployed since last year.

But the number of violent deaths continued to rise. These measures do not address the root of the problem. The region has been totally neglected for years.

Residents in that border zone with Colombia point to poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and the government's unwillingness to implement effective policies for their socio-economic development as the real causes of the current situation.

According to the specialists, Esmeraldas has a majority Afro-descendant population and has 50% of the highest poverty rate in the Andean nation, while extreme poverty affects 25.3% of its inhabitants.

Unemployment exceeds 15%, housing is precarious and there is a lack of basic services such as health and education, with a gap of almost two years of schooling compared to the national average.

Esmeraldas lives a critical situation, which although to a lesser extent is also the reality of most of the provinces of Ecuador, where very little has been done in favor of the citizens by the government of President Lasso, currently the subject of an impeachment trial in the National Assembly for accusations of embezzlement.

It is not by chance that the disapproval of the president's administration, who has faced popular protests since his arrival to the presidency in 2021, stands at 85%.

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