

# *Ecuador's President Takes Pay Cut to Help Fund Medical Programs*

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Quito, February 24 (RHC-teleSUR) -- Ecuador's President Rafael Correa has announced a measure to cut his own salary and those of public servants earning more than US\$6,000 per month by 5 to 10 percent, to help finance the hiring of 2,187 medical professionals and programs to combat maternal mortality.

"So, my friends, we are doing a study to reduce the salaries of this personnel, of what is called the 'superior hierarchy' of the public sector. A reduction of 5 to 10 percent ..... would free up US\$21 million to be able to contract all the doctors that the Ministry of Health needs," said President Rafael Correa on Saturday in his weekly television address.

Ecuador has a workforce of approximately 580,000 people in the public sector, and according to the Ministry of Economy 1,787 of these employees earn more than US\$5,000 per month.

17 health centers will be built throughout the country, and 13 more are planned for the province of Guayas, which is most effected by maternal mortality.

The total estimated cost of hiring medical professionals and developing programs is US\$41 million and the state is able to cover US\$20 million within the annual budget. The remaining US\$21 million is to be obtained through measures such as reducing the salaries of top earning public servants.

While Ecuador has made significant improvements in recent years to lower levels of the often preventable deaths, official figures reveal that 160 maternal deaths occur per every 100,000 live births. The plan to combat maternal mortality is divided in 4 parts, which include prevention and education, obstetric attention, management of statistics, and keeping effective records of mothers.

Vice President of the Medical Federation of Ecuador Victor Alvarez said in an interview with teleSUR English: "Maternal mortality is a global issue, as the World Health Organization estimates that 800 women die daily from pregnancy complications, which are often preventable. By reducing salaries to contract qualified doctors and develop effective programs, Ecuador is taking necessary action to democratize access to quality care, working towards the elimination those preventable deaths."

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