

Ecuador suspends recount in presidential polls

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The recount would involve about six million ballots, representing about 45 percent of Ecuador's registered voters. (Photo: Reuters)

Quito, February 17 (RHC)-- Ecuador's National Electoral Council has suspended a recount of votes from the first round of the presidential election requested by Indigenous candidate Yaku Perez, who has alleged fraud denied him a place in the runoff.

The count was put on hold after the five-member council could not reach a majority in favor of Perez's request after holding a vote late on Tuesday, with two for and one against, one abstention and another absent.

"This plenary session of the National Electoral Council, unfortunately, does not respond to the request, nor does it approve or deny the report presented in the technical area" on the request for a recount, council head Diana Atamaint said.

Perez, a 51-year-old environmental lawyer, had formally submitted the request for a recount in 17 of the country's 24 provinces. The recount would involve about six million ballots, representing about 45 percent of Ecuador's registered voters.

Perez won 19.38 percent of the vote in the February 7 election, just 33,000 votes behind his second-placed rival, right-wing former banker Guillermo Lasso, 65, who has also called for a recount.

Economist Andres Arauz, a 36-year-old protege of former President Rafael Correa, won 32.7 percent, which was not enough to win outright, and the race is now on to see who will face him in the April 11 runoff.

Perez alleges fraud had been committed to keep him out of the runoff after he was narrowly displaced by Lasso from second to third place in the middle of the count.

"They are not going to defeat us, they are not going to annihilate us, the resistance continues. Today (the electoral council) has just made a decision that is left in limbo," Perez, the son of farmworkers, said after the council's announcement.

Indigenous groups supporting Perez have called for rallies on Wednesday and a march to Quito to denounce alleged electoral fraud against their candidate.

Incumbent President Lenin Moreno's term in office ends on May 24.

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