

A Joint Alert System: Colombia and Ecuador to work to Protect Indigenous People

written by Ezba Walayat | March 20, 2023



Introduction

A joint alarm system between Colombia and Ecuador has been established to safeguard indigenous people (Awa communities) from attacks by armed organizations that operate near their shared border. The new system, which is intended to notify government and military officials in each country of possible threats, was unveiled at a news conference in the Colombian capital Bogota by human rights ombudsmen of the two countries. The office of the Colombian ombudsman, Carlos Camargo said “the presence of illegal armed groups and organized crime in the cross border area of Ecuador and Colombia has caused humanitarian consequences, especially against the nearly 29,000 members of the great Awa family who live in the area.”

Flashback

Prior to the “Joint Alert System” the two countries Ecuador and Colombia made an effort for the protection of hared border. There is approximately 586 kilometers of porous border between Colombia and Ecuador, which is used for drug trafficking and smuggling by criminal gangs and illegal armed groups. President Gustavo Petro’s administration in Colombia urged bordering nations to work together against illegal armed organizations in November 2022. Therefore, at the end of December 2022, the authorities of Ecuador and Colombia announced that the military forces of two countries signed a “Border Protection Plan” to stop

drug trafficking and organized crime in the cross border area. The two countries decided that the plan activities will be implemented on different levels i.e. on an operational, tactical and strategic level. For that matter, the military's general commander, General Helder Giraldo of Colombia said in a statement "Efforts currently under our responsibility to eliminate drug trafficking, environmental crimes, smuggling, and other areas will not decline."



The Ongoing Challenge

One of the biggest challenges along the Colombia-Ecuador border is armed groups. Dissidents from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN) rebels operating close to the Ecuadorian border are among these groups, along with drug trafficking gangs. Despite the 2016 peace accord between Colombia's government and the major armed group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), violence has continued to wreak havoc in the country. According to Colombian ombudsman, communities in the Awa region have reportedly experienced murders, evictions and the threat of landmines. Children are a target for recruitment by these armed groups. Additionally, 14 members of an indigenous village were murdered last year and 10,000 people were either displaced or imprisoned as a result of the violence.

In the conclusion, both the plan of action i.e. Joint Alert System and the Border Protection Plan are commendable to deal with the armed groups that are causing humanitarian consequences. These plans will help to protect the indigenous and local communities particularly. Therefore, effective implementation of these plans is crucial to attain the desired results.