

Ecuadorian Indigenous Movement Secures Economic and Climate Justice Victories, Ending National Strike

Saturday 2 July 2022, by [JARRIN HIDALGO Sofia](#) (Date first published: 30 June 2022).

On June 13, 2022, a National Strike was launched by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), the National Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous, and Black Organizations (FENOCIN), the Council of Indigenous Evangelical Peoples and Organizations (FEINE), alongside social and environmental organizations aligned with the Indigenous Movement.

Although many minimized the mobilizations to be solely about the rising cost of fuel, the protests kept their momentum due to the rising cost of living, which was one of the root causes of the movement. The people of Ecuador have faced immense poverty and unemployment for many months. For 18 days, the national protest sought to generate government action to address the deep systemic crisis that Ecuador is going through, marked by the lack of economic, political, and cultural rights. **Today, the Indigenous movement was victorious in securing commitments from the president to address their economic and environmental reality.**

In their demands, Indigenous communities sought the implementation of policies to protect the planet and secure a just and ecological transition. One of their key requests was the repeal of Decrees 95 and 151, which were intended to advance extractivism in Amazonian Indigenous territories. In August 2021, the Confederation of Amazonian Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador ([CONFENIAE](#)) [had already spoken out against implementing these decrees](#); however, President Lasso decided not to heed this call. Among their main arguments was that the government failed to guarantee protection and respect for their right to free, prior, and informed consultation, much less the internationally respected standards of consent.

Earlier this week, Indigenous leaders and the government entered into dialogue and negotiations. They have since reached a signed agreement including an end to the National Strike and the “state of emergency” declared by the government. **There will be a repeal of Executive Decree 95 promoting oil and gas expansion** and a reform of Executive Decree 151 affecting the mining sector. Both decrees authorized the government to expand the extractive frontier into Indigenous territories and important conservation and forest areas. The reform of the mining decree is particularly notable because it states that activities cannot happen in protected areas or Indigenous territories, in designated “no-go” zones, archaeological zones, or water protection areas in accordance with the law, and it guarantees the right to free, prior, and informed consultation (not consent) as set forth in the standards dictated by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and Ecuador’s highest court. Fuel prices will also be reduced to a fixed rate, an economic justice victory acknowledging the cost of living crisis. They will use the next 90 days to address the remaining demands through a technical working committee.

The agreements and future discussions are rooted in the Indigenous movement’s ten points. Their

agenda aims to generate solutions to combat the sustained deterioration of living conditions, the crisis in the education and health system, the high costs of food and essential services, the expansion of the extractive frontier, and the violation of the collective rights of Indigenous peoples, among other demands.

Unfortunately, during the 18 days of the National Strike, the reaction of the Ecuadorian government was excessively violent and repressive, despite the constitutionally protected right to resist and protest. The Alliance of Human Rights Organizations of Ecuador, of which Amazon Watch is a member, documented 76 complaints of human rights violations; six deaths, 331 injured, and 152 protesters arrested.

The first attempt at dialogue between the government and the Indigenous movement was carried out on June 27. Negotiations were then stalled due to a confrontation that occurred between the armed forces and demonstrators on the night of June 28 in the Amazon community *Noviembre 18*, located in the Sucumbios province. There were several injuries and the death of a soldier. Even though [media outlets](#) later confirmed that the military initiated the armed confrontation against the protesters, the Lasso government used this event as justification to unilaterally break off the dialogue.

As the events of the strike unfolded, we've remained concerned that the national discourse focused on discrediting the mobilization and spreading hate speech against the protesters, who were called "Indians," "vandals," and "terrorists." In addition, both the viability and contradictions of their demands have been questioned numerous times. But their government and policy calls are not unlike demands from any working-class or marginalized group in the current context of global inflation and a skyrocketing cost of living. Just like many of us, Indigenous communities depend on oil and gas for transportation, which does not delegitimize their demands for an end to oil. We all live under the current energy system. This doesn't have to be in opposition to their demand for a better economy and government that does not depend on the whims of the oil industry. **We are united in our call for a just transition.**

Ecuador is also facing an acute crisis of widespread poverty and hunger, which was ignored by the current presidential administration. We must recognize that currently, 29% of the Ecuadorian population lives in conditions of poverty and extreme poverty, which means that one out of every three Ecuadorians is poor. This reality is this: 59.1% of the Indigenous population falls below the poverty line.

The serious economic situation has gotten more severe under the government of Guillermo Lasso. Previously, the Ecuadorian government, as part of its welfare and social equality policies, took on the differential value of fuel prices compared to the nominal cost of the international market. However, with the elimination of this subsidy, a price band system was established, resulting in a sudden 40% increase in gasoline. With this increase, the cost of living also rose, particularly in terms of food and household essentials. This decision became the final straw.

In many ways, this social mobilization succeeded in pausing "business-as-usual" and making Ecuadorian society acknowledge the pain and burden felt by Indigenous communities and the poor. Ecuador needs to continue the dialogue to resolve the demands of the Indigenous movement and civil society. We will continue our solidarity with those who cry out for a more just and democratic Ecuador because the Amazon rainforest depends on it. And we call on International human rights institutions to remain vigilant in case the national government continues to stigmatize social protest and fails to respect and protect human rights. **Many lives have been lost, and the wounds are open. It is time for the Ecuadorian government to follow through on its agreement to guarantee peace.**

P.S.

• Amazon Watch. June 30, 2022:

<https://amazonwatch.org/news/2022/0630-ecuadorian-indigenous-movement-secures-victories-ending-national-strike>