Ecuador: Indigenous leader released after mass protests

Leonidas Iza is free but a national strike continues in Ecuador, writes María Isabel Altamirano Solarte for ecosocialist.scot.

After 24 hours of illegal detention, Leonidas Iza was finally released.

Iza is president of CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), which is the largest organisation in Ecuador bringing together the majority of indigenous peoples and nationalities. His release has been a triumph of social mobilisation and international solidarity.

Leonidas Iza was arrested by elite forces of the national police and the Armed Forces in a violent and illegal manner, accused of "paralysing a public service" and incitment. His entire detention process was outside the framework of Ecuadorian law.

His release is a triumph of popular pressure and international solidarity. On the one hand, the affiliated organisations of CONAIE have come out more forcefully to express their discontent in their territories and in different cities of the country.

In Cotopaxi, the province where Leonidas Iza is from, the communities filled the streets of the main city, Latacunga. When they heard that their leader was being transferred to the Military Fort of Cotopaxi, they went there to demand his release.

In Quito, the capital of Ecuador, young people, university students, feminists, dissidents and ordinary people have also joined the mobilisation in the vicinity of the National State

Prosecutor’s Office to demand the release of the political detainees and to express their demands for education, health and non-violence by the state.

International Solidarity

International solidarity has been very important, with messages of support for Leonidas Iza and rejection of the persecution of political leaders, as well as other demonstrations such as the collection of signatures to demand his release.

The government of the banker Lasso, who seeks to impose neoliberal policies, has been totally inept in responding to the fair demands of the population and CONAIE. These demands include fair prices for agricultural products; freezing of fuel prices because this generates price increases; access to employment and no job insecurity; respect for the collective rights of peoples and nationalities, budget for health and education; stop the voracious extractivism in indigenous territories; stop speculation and rising prices of basic food basket items; stop the privatisation of strategic sectors; generation of policies to curb the wave of violence and hired killings; public policies to curb gender violence and femicide.

But this government has taken up again the National Security doctrines of the ‘internal enemy’, persecuting and criminalising social activists and indigenous leaders, women, students, workers, etc. Under this logic, eight young leaders of the Guevarist Movement were arrested a month ago. And now, in the context of the National Strike called by CONAIE, Leonidas Iza has been arrested. But they have also arrested other indigenous leaders of CONAIE’s affiliated organisations, young students and women who took to the streets to protest and demand their rights during these two days of the National Strike.

In addition, during these two days there have been very strong acts of repression, and there have been injuries with tear gas bombs and even pellets. Social communicators were attacked by members of the national police. But in these two days of the National Strike the mobilisation has also grown and strengthened.

Although his release is a victory for mass protests and international solidarity, Leonidas Iza still faces charges and a possible prison sentence for his role in the strike. Worldwide solidarity needs to be stepped up to call for all charges to be dropped and for the Ecuador government to grant the just demands of the strike movement.



Protests were taking place across Ecuador (Pic @CONAIE_Ecuador)



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