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Ecuador

Solidarity with Leonidas Iza, the Ecuadorean Indigenous leader – Against the far-right's plans to reform the constitution and destroy rights

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Since the re-election of Daniel Noboa as President of Ecuador on 13 April, his hard-right, Trump-like administration, and most of the Ecuadorean establishment, have launched a ferocious campaign against Leonidas Iza, the President of CONAIE (the Confederation of Ecuador's Indigenous Nations), and former presidential candidate of the Indigenous and plurinational movement, Pachakutik. They see him, and the communities, movements and struggles that he represents, as the main obstacle to their plans for a radical neoliberal reform to the constitution.

Ecuador's 2008 Constitution, produced during the early days of the 'Citizen Revolution' led by Rafael Correa, emerged from months of debate among all the country's social movements and civil society and was arguably the most progressive in the world. It was the first to enshrine the rights of nature, it strengthened labour rights and the rights of Indigenous communities, granted a right to "prior, free and informed consultation" (meaning 'consent') to communities facing mining and infrastructure projects on their territory, recognised women's domestic labour, promoted food sovereignty, protected the public sector against privatisation, and prohibited foreign military bases on Ecuadorean soil.. Many of these positive aspects were never fully implemented, or clearly abandoned, by successive governments, including by Correa himself. However, they have remained a fundamental point of reference for people's demands and struggles.

The Noboa government, in its first, curtailed term, from November 2023 to May 2025, already displayed contempt for these rights and the rule of law in general – using the alarming rise in drug-related violence as a pretext for imposing a state of 'internal war', deploying soldiers to attack communities like those of Palo Quemado resisting new mining projects, ignoring the result of a referendum vote to stop drilling for oil in the Yasuni National Park, and invading foreign embassies (that of Mexico) in pursuit of political opponents. Now, inspired by the example of Trump up north, it intends to sweep away any remaining institutional checks on its ability, to drill, mine, privatise and repress the movements that oppose it.

The campaign against Leonidas points in this direction. So far it has consisted mainly of a mob lynching in the mainstream media – a campaign that has been aided and abetted by right-wing sectors of the Indigenous movement, including some former leaders, who appear to have done deals with Noboa to promote their own interests. However, in a country where gang violence continues to surge, sometimes seemingly in cahoots with powerful political interests, and where numerous candidates and local politicians have been assassinated, calls to 'put an end' to Leonidas Iza's leadership and influence have taken on alarming overtones. Last week Leonidas Iza concluded his speech at a UN conference in New York by warning that the Noboa government should be held responsible should anything happen to him.

It is in this context that the National Antimining Front, allied to CONAIE, published this declaration of solidarity with Leonidas.

Leonidas, our friend, the Front is with you

Noboa's agenda is clear: to accelerate mining expansion and, to this end, reform the Constitution, which guarantees the rights of indigenous peoples and peasants, the rights of nature, and food sovereignty. This is essential to create the political and legal conditions for the mining empire to take over our territories, pollute them, and plunder them on the pretext of development and employment. This is the spearhead of Daniel Noboa's neoliberal government.

In a polarised context, where no programme for the country has been proposed that reflects the broad aspirations of the working class, in both rural and urban areas, several figures who in the past were social activists, even anti-mining activists, have been co-opted. They are now a doormat for the Noboa family corporation to parade freely through Carondelet Presidential Palace and crush the Ecuadorean people. This struggle of the peoples against mining capital has been betrayed by these pseudo-leaders who, with their triumphalist attitude, call for CONAIE to be 'de-leftised' (ie. purged of its left-wing positions). We denounce this once again as a betrayal of a historic political project that was built through the struggle of our two 'communist mothers' Dolores Cacuango and Transito Amaguaña, (women leaders who helped build the current Indigenous movement). Other more 'progressive' voices advocate the 'de-radicalisation' of the left; lukewarm voices representing the discourse of social democracy as it moves further to the right.

On the basis of our territorial struggles against mining capital, we identify with the consistent Abya Yala, marxist position of our Kichwa Panzaleo comrade Leonidas Iza, president of CONAIE, who, in this context of neoliberal advances, demands that we not lose our radicalism and sense of struggle. His important voice, which led the rebellions of October 2019 and June 2022, has stood firm, even in the election campaign, where marketing and lies become instruments of mass manipulation.

The media offensive, which brings together the traditional oligarchy, the puppets of power and the indigenous right wing, has turned its attack strategy towards Leonidas Iza. What really bothers them is the profound questioning that he represents, of economic power, of imperialism, of the colonial status of the Republic and of the limits of the current party system and its misnamed 'democracy'.

The anti-mining struggles have no other path: radicalisation for life or death. This position has been defended by our comrade Leonidas Iza, who has not abandoned our struggles and their victims. He has raised his voice for Mesias R, who was shot in the face by the armed forces; nor has he distanced himself from the criminalisation of more than 150 comrades in Las Pampas and Palo Quemado, 29 comrades in the province of Bolívar, 20 comrades in the canton of Nabón and a dozen more in other territories. From his position, he has been part of the Shuar struggle in Warintz, Nankints, Yaap and Kutuku Shaime, Transkutuku. The voice of Leonidas Iza is a threat to mining capital because he has denounced irregularities and rights violations in the Curipamba (Bolívar), La Plata (Cotopaxi), Loma Larga (Azuay), Cascabel (Imbabura), Cangrejos (El Oro), Warintza and Mirador Norte (Zamora Chinchipe) projects. He opposed the operation of the Chinese company ECSA in Mirador and the advance of mining in the Cordillera del Condor.

Comrade Leonidas Iza Salazar, the National Anti-Mining Front is with you and your territorial struggles

PS:

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