

# Ecuador's LGBT+ community seen suffering deadliest year in a decade

By Oscar Lopez

Thomson Reuters Foundation (21.01.2020) – <https://reut.rs/2RREWwC> – Last year was the deadliest in at least a decade for gay and transgender people in Ecuador, campaigners have said, citing a possible backlash against new laws enshrining LGBT+ rights.

There were 16 murders or violent deaths involving LGBT+ people in the South American country in 2019, according to a report released by the Ecuadorian LGBT+ rights group Silueta X Association.

The group said it was the highest number since it began keeping track in 2010 and most of the victims were transgender women. In 2018 it registered two LGBT+ murders.

“As the year went on, we were realizing that the statistics of murders were terrible,” said Diane Rodriguez, director of Silueta X and president of the Ecuadorian Federation of LGBTI Organizations.

“It’s tough seeing images of someone looking happy on social media, and then all of a sudden they’re gone,” she told the

Thomson Reuters Foundation on Monday.

Rodriguez, who was the first trans woman elected to Ecuador's National Assembly, said the legalization last year of same-sex marriage in the conservative, mainly Catholic country may have had "a negative impact".

That followed a move by Ecuador's top court in 2018 to legally acknowledge a lesbian couple as parents for the first time, while a law passed in 2016 allowed trans people to change their gender identity legally without having surgery.

Murders of LGBT+ people also rose in 1998 after homosexuality was decriminalized, Rodriguez said.

For the study, researchers monitored media reports of LGBT+ deaths, as well as complaints lodged with Silueta X directly.

LGBT+ rights expert Javier Corrales said the rise in killings may signal a backlash.

"When there is a major change in public policy toward LGBT communities ... homophobic and transphobic arguments increase in frequency and maybe even intensity," said Corrales, professor of political science at Amherst College in the United States.

"We have reason to think that an expansion of hate speech can

lead to increases in hate crimes,” he said via email.

Attacks against LGBT+ people are common across Latin America, where conservative religious values and widespread violence can be a deadly mix.

In 2019 almost 40% of trans killings worldwide took place in Brazil, according to the Trans Murder Monitoring research project, from advocacy group Transgender Europe.

Meanwhile, Mexico’s National Observatory for Hate Crimes Against LGBT People recorded 57 murders of gay or transgender people last year.

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## **Ecuador unrest: Amazonian women denounce ‘state violence’**

*Indigenous protesters accuse security forces of using excessive force as demonstrations continue for tenth day.*

By Kimberley Brown

Al Jazeera (13.10.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2oHUBE3> – Lineth

Calapucha distributed blankets and clothes to other protesters in a cultural centre in the Ecuadorian capital Quito on Friday as the sounds of bombs from tear gas and pepper spray echoed outside.

It was the ninth day of anti-government protests that began as calls for President Lenin Moreno to abandon fuel subsidy cuts and labour and tax reforms. But for indigenous protesters, it has since grown into a wider movement against the government's treatment of indigenous people and their land.

"What we're asking for is peace, tranquillity, and that the government understand that we, the people and [indigenous] nationalities act peacefully," Calapucha told Al Jazeera, as women and children streamed into the cultural centre to take shelter.

"Look, even now, we weren't even doing anything and they started launching tear gas," she said.

Calapucha is one of dozens of women from the Amazonian Women's collective who travelled to Quito to join the national protests and denounce the "inhumane repression" of protesters by police.

"We are women of peace, defenders of our territories and our families," the collective said in a statement on Saturday.

"We have come in peace but the state, as always, received us

again with violence,” the women added. “We want to build a society and a country where our rights are respected.”

Moreno declared a state of emergency and moved the government out of Quito earlier this week as tens of thousands of protesters converged on the capital, vowing to stay put until the government reverses its decision to cut the decades-old fuel subsidies and roll back the reforms.

The government, however, has also remained defiant, saying the reforms are necessary to comply with a \$4.2bn loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Calapucha said indigenous people reject the austerity measures, but their complaints go much further: They are demanding that the government stop all oil and mining in indigenous territory.

“We felt from the Amazon what was happening here in Quito and Guayaquil. That hurt us,” Calapucha said.

On Friday night, clashes began after police fired tear gas and pepper spray on a crowd of about 20,000 protesters in front of the National Assembly. The protesters had been rallying for hours, chanting anti-government slogans, with indigenous women singing and burning palo santo, a tree native to Ecuador, in front of the heavily guarded building.

By Saturday, the government and indigenous leaders announced

they would begin talks to negotiate the details of the austerity measures. But protests continued, prompting Moreno to impose a curfew in the capital.

## **Excessive force**

Protesters have accused security forces of using excessive force. At least five people have been killed, 800 severely wounded and more than 1,000 people arrested since the protests began, the state ombudsman said late on Friday.

Inocencio Tucumbi, an indigenous leader, was killed earlier this week when a tear gas canister fired by police hit his head, according to witnesses. The indigenous community honoured him by holding a mass procession and mass on Wednesday. They also detained eight police officers for several hours during the day, forcing them to witness the mass, before releasing them to the United Nations officials in the evening.

The vast majority of those wounded have been in Quito, where police have been accused of firing tear gas and pepper spray near hospital entrances, as well the cultural centre and universities, where the more than 10,000 indigenous people have been sleeping. This includes pregnant women and small children.

“There has been an excessive use of tear gas, of which weighs a lot on the protesters, but also on the girls and women who are around,” says Monica Vega Puebla, legal accessor with the

human rights organisation INREDH.

Government officials were not available for comment, but according to local media, Interior Minister Maria Paula Romo apologised for tear gas being fired at the universities, saying: "These are places where indigenous people are staying and have to remain safe places and they will be. These acts have no justification and will not be repeated."

Romo, however, denied that there has been an overuse of force, and instead continuously pointing out the violent acts by protesters.

Calapucha said there were clashes with police in the Amazon city of Puyo, where she has been protesting since the uprising began last week, but it never reached the same level of violence as Quito.

For the Amazonian women and many indigenous people in Ecuador, this month's protests only highlight what they call years of repression by the government.

"We want a country where we don't have to live in fear that our lands will be destroyed, our rivers will be polluted, our forests will be cut down. Where we are never afraid of our children being discriminated against and excluded in their own lands," the Amazonian women said in their statement.

"Yes, we are angry," Calapucha added, but "this is how we

chant: 'not one more bomb, not one more rock.'"