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## Protecting Ecuador's students from sexual violence

***Government should fully implement Inter-American Court ruling.***

By Elin Martínez

HRW (20.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3aTt1rg> - The Inter-American Court of Human Rights last week ruled against Ecuador in its first ever case on school-related sexual violence in the Americas.

In 2001, a public school vice principal in the city of Guayaquil began raping a 14-year-old pupil, Paola Guzmán Albarracín. The abuses continued for over a year, with the knowledge and complicity of school officials. Yet the school did nothing to protect her, and in December 2002, Paola took her life. After her death, Paola's mother, Pepita Albarracín, filed complaints with the school and the local prosecutor's office. The judicial proceedings suffered serious delays.

Paola's case is unfortunately not unique: since then, many children and teenagers have suffered sexual violence in Ecuador's schools, and few receive justice.

Eighteen years after Albarracín first sought justice locally, the Inter-American Court has found Ecuador responsible for violating Paola's rights to life, to study free from sexual violence, and to sexual and reproductive health and bodily autonomy, as well as her family's right to a fair trial and respect for their moral and psychological integrity. It ruled Ecuador did not comply with its obligations to protect children from sexual violence and prevent and respond to any acts of violence – especially those perpetrated by government officials in state institutions.

Human Rights Watch filed an amicus brief before the court, explaining the close relationship between sexual violence against girls and the lack of comprehensive sexuality education. The court recognized that Paola lacked necessary information about her sexual and reproductive health, concluding that the right to adequate sexuality education is an integral part of the right to education. It gave the government one year to guarantee that children are safe from sexual violence in its schools.

In a welcome departure from previous governments' longstanding failure even to recognize this problem, in 2017, President Lenín Moreno committed to zero tolerance for school-related sexual violence. This week, he reaffirmed his government's commitment and its plan to comply with the court's ruling.

The government should now publish a clear timeline for implementing measures ordered by the court, including by consulting young survivors of sexual violence. Ecuador should also back up this commitment by deploying resources to prevent sexual violence in schools and ensure that all child survivors have the access to justice that Paola's family was denied.

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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.'"