



By: TA | AP Brief

Ecuador deploys thousands of soldiers to crime-ridden provinces



Ecuadorian officials said that they have deployed 75,000 soldiers and police officers to four crime-ridden provinces where the government is implementing a **nightly curfew** banning people from leaving their homes from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m.

Officials said that 253 people were arrested for breaking the curfew, which started Sunday night in Guayas, El Oro, Los Rios and Santo Domingo de los Tsachilas.

The curfew is expected to last two weeks. While the orders cover Guayaquil, Ecuador's most populous city, they do not extend to Quito or the touristic **Galápagos Islands**.

Interior Minister John Reimberg said Monday that Ecuadorian troops used authorized artillery to destroy three identified targets, though he provided no specific details regarding the nature of the strikes.

"Let whatever must fall, fall — and whoever must fall, fall," he told journalists, noting that the operations resulted in no recorded casualties.

Ecuador is struggling to contain drug violence as rival cartels battle for control of coastal ports used to smuggle cocaine to the United States.

Last year, Ecuador recorded its highest homicide rate in decades of **50 murders** per every 100,000 residents, according to the Ministry of the Interior.

The homicide rate in Ecuador has quintupled since the COVID-19 pandemic, as cartels from Colombia and Mexico fight over the nation's drug trafficking routes and partner with local gangs.

Colombian drug traffickers

Ecuadorian President **Daniel Noboa** recently extended a state of exception that enables the military to conduct joint patrols with police officers and enter homes without a search warrant.

The conservative leader has blamed some of the violence on neighboring Colombia, accusing its government of not doing enough to stop cartels that operate along the border between both nations.

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In January, Noboa also **imposed tariffs** on Colombian imports and said they would not be lifted until the security situation along the border between both countries improves.

Earlier this month, Ecuador's military said it carried out a **joint operation** with the United States against a training camp used by Colombian drug traffickers, that included attacking the site with drones, helicopters and boats.

Officials said the camp was located on Ecuador's side of the border, and belonged to Comandos de la Frontera, a group that split off from the FARC, the guerrilla organization that signed a peace deal with Colombia's government in 2016.

Ecuador's president has come under criticism from civil society groups, who say his iron fisted methods have failed to reduce crime, while putting civilians in danger.

In a case last year that raised questions about Noboa's crime-fighting methods, eleven soldiers were sentenced to more than 30 years in prison over the **abduction of four children**, whose bodies were found outside a military base near Guayaquil.