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by **María Josefina Arce**

Ecuador continues to be the scene of criminal acts. Despite the declaration of internal armed conflict, three states of emergency and the militarization of the streets ordered by the government of President Daniel Noboa, the results are still not as expected and violence is still present in the country.

In recent days, the director of the Litoral Penitentiary, the largest and most populous in Ecuador, located in Guayaquil, which has become the epicenter of drug trafficking, was shot dead by a group of armed men.

This was the second assassination in ten days of the highest authority of a prison. Earlier this month, the director of the Lago Agrio prison in the Amazonian province of Sucumbios, on the border with Colombia, suffered the same fate.

The violence has also claimed the lives of other prison authorities, as well as municipal authorities such as mayors.

It should be recalled that between 2021 and 2023, the worst massacres were recorded in prisons, especially in the Litoral prison, due to clashes between criminal gangs for control of these facilities, which led to their militarization.

During this period, more than 500 inmates died in Ecuador's prisons, which are now under military control.

Although there have been no significant violent incidents in prisons in recent months, the situation on the streets is different. In Manta, in the coastal province of Manabí, alarming levels of violence have been reported this year, leading to the relocation of military and police headquarters to this port city.

According to reports, Manta accounts for 40% of the violent deaths in Manabí this year.

Although the government insists that it has managed to reduce the number of murders in the country from more than 5,000 in 2023 to 4,223 from January to September of this year, the figure is still alarming, and media outlets point out that official statistics are not clear and that officials themselves contradict themselves in their statements, nor do they take into account the increase in other crimes such as kidnapping and extortion on Ecuadorian territory.

Experts have stated that the results are inadequate because the authorities have neglected the implementation of social policies. The use of the military, they point out, is a stopgap measure that reveals the lack of a solid strategy to combat violence and insecurity.

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