

Ecuador purchases \$4 million worth of non-lethal weapons for armed forces



Quito, January 10 (RHC)-- Ecuador's Ministry of Defense has announced it will purchase \$3.6 million worth of non-lethal weapons and riot gear for the Armed Forces, ahead of new strikes called by various social and Indigenous groups for the first quarter of 2020.

"Following NATO's criteria, we have bought gear to Israel, France, and the United States," Minister of Defense Oswaldo Jarrin told the press, adding that the gear will be used for "public order" operations and "homeland security."

The transaction was authorized based on a report by the Logistics Command of the Army. Dated November 25, 2019, the document states the "acquisition of non-lethal material is to be used in operations against riots and counterinsurgency." The purchase is divided into three contracts signed on December 12th between the Ministry and U.S. companies, which establish the amounts, characteristics, and deadlines.

The first corresponds to the purchase of 179,070 pellet-type projectiles and tear gas canisters for \$2.9 million. It also includes "stunner" shotgun cartridges and rubber pellets, the use of the latter has been

criticized lately due to serious human rights violations in Chile. Militarized police have used it for crowd-control during Chile's protests causing over 300 people to lose their eyes, raising serious concern from human rights organizations and the United Nations. A study by the University of Chile stated that these pellets are composed of only 20 percent rubber, while the other 80 percent have different elements, such as lead.

The second contract includes 1,000 12-gauge shotguns for non-lethal projectiles; the third is for 1,200 gas masks of four filters for the amount of \$234,000 USD. The delivery date for this must be made until January 20, and February 5 for the first two deals.

The announcement has raised concerns from local human rights activists over the abuse of force and violence already witnessed during the October 3rd to 11th protests that rocked the Andean country. According to a United Nations Office for Human Rights report, released on November 29, repression by the security forces in Ecuador against protesters was unnecessary and disproportionate.

The document states that during the days of popular mobilizations there were new deaths, 1,507 injured, including 435 security officers, and 1,382 detainees. In addition, according to the allegations collected by the U.N. mission in that country, many of the arrests were carried out arbitrarily.

The High Commissioner for the agency Michelle Bachelet said that there was a "high human cost" in the 10 days of demonstration. Despite the warning and complaints by local organizations, the Armed Forces maintained that with the purchase, only 15 percent of the personnel used in riot military operations would be geared up, clarifying that with the new equipment the operational capacity will be increased "in case of new disturbances that alter public order."

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