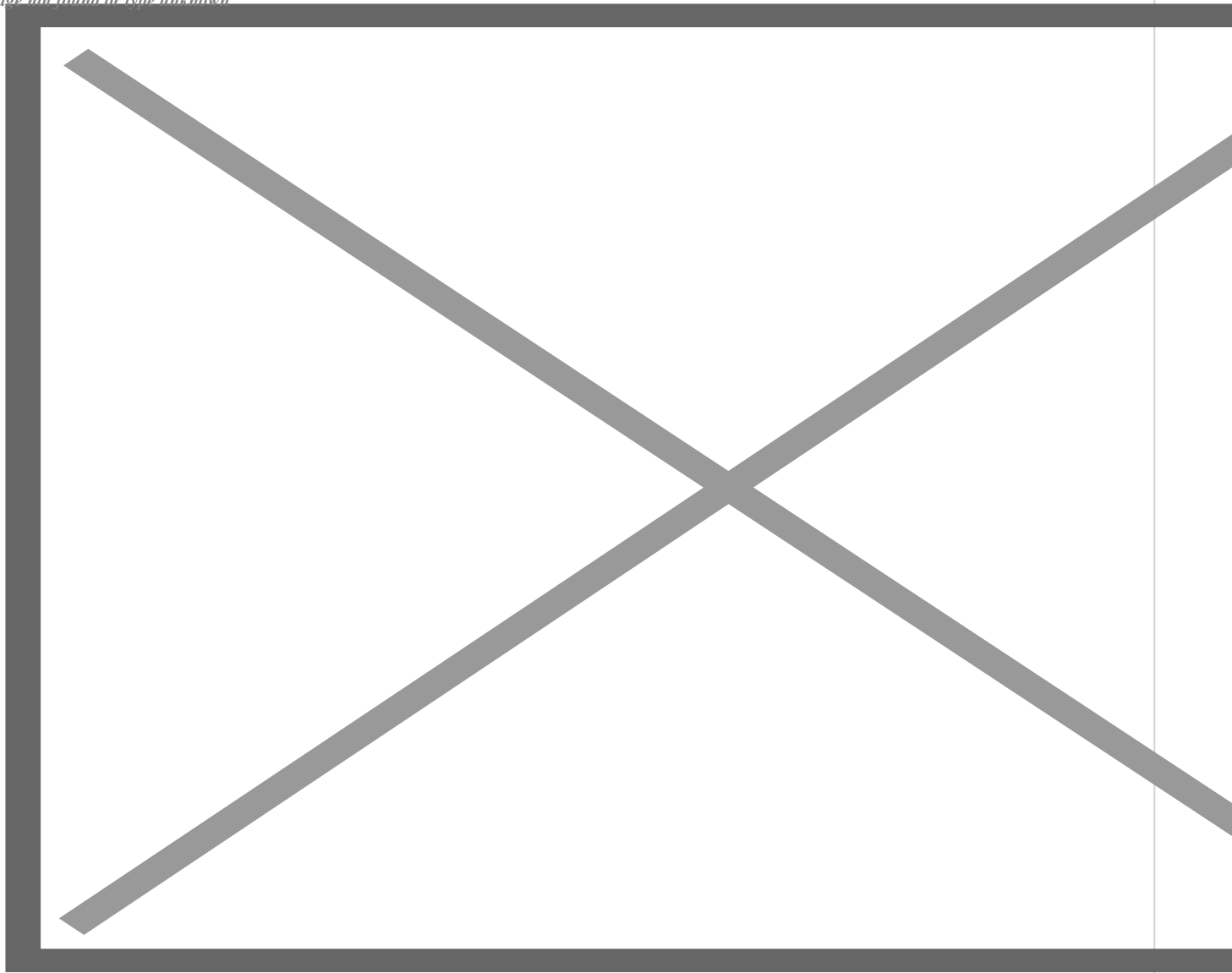


More than 60 dead and dozens injured in prison riots in Ecuador

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Members of the Ecuadorian Marine Force guard the Zone 8 Deprivation of Liberty Center in Guayaquil, Ecuador. (Photo: Marcos Pin Mendez/AFP)

Quito, February 23 (RHC)-- Prisons in Ecuador were on high alert after more than 60 people were killed and dozens of others injured in three prison riots, police said on Tuesday. According to authorities, riots erupted in prisons located in three cities Guayaquil, Cuenca and Latacunga. The violence was caused by disputes between rival gangs inside the prisons, officials said. Local media reported that prisoners were killed using guns and knives.

Police General Commander Patricio Carrillo said on Twitter on Tuesday that additional security forces were despatched to the prisons to regain control. Carrillo said the riots involved high-security prisoners. "All the prisons at the moment have restriction and controls in place," Carrillo wrote.

The riots reportedly erupted on Monday night, after prisoners took prison guards hostage. Local media reported that several ambulances were seen leaving the jails, and that as news of the riots was made public, dozens of prisoners' relatives gathered outside the prisons to get more information on what was happening.

Images and videos circulating on social media showed inmates gathered on a prison rooftop with police officers on motorcycles and in patrol cars surrounding the prison.

In a tweet, Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno said gangs had carried out "simultaneous acts of violence in several prisons in the country," and that in coordination with the Minister of Government, Patricio Pazmino Castillo, police were working to regain control of prisons.

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