

# *Ecuador Defense Chief Spotlights Latin American Military Integration*

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Caracas, June 20 (RHC-Xinhua) -- Latin America's armed forces are increasingly working together to ensure peace in the region and promote unity, Ecuadoran Defense Minister Maria Fernanda Espinosa said Thursday.

In an interview with Xinhua, Espinosa noted the region's various military corps are interconnected, and coordinate their work and constantly exchange information.

"It is essential to have a strategic partnership between our presidents and defense authorities to combat organized crime, and promote public peace and regional security," she said.

Espinosa, who was in the Venezuelan capital Caracas to attend the Second Meeting of Defense Ministers and Women Leaders, acknowledged that drug trafficking, arms smuggling and illegal mining grind down security in Latin America.

In this sense, the Ecuadorian minister said that there are several agreements and defense policies in Latin America to combat

these threats jointly. Asked about defense cooperation accords between Ecuador and Venezuela, Espinosa said there is a broad exchange for the training and preparation of officers.

Ecuador, Brazil and Argentina, for example, are working to build an aircraft for basic training in South America that will be called UNASUR I.

The minister said the Caracas meeting offered a space for reflection and exchange to analyze the role of women in the armed forces and generate a public policy of gender equality within the military.

Female authorities discussed the role of women in the military in building a culture of peace, a mandate of Latin America's heads of state following the last summit of CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, in Cuba.

She said that gender equality in the armed forces involves a change of institutional culture and that was the commitment reaffirmed at the meeting, she said.

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