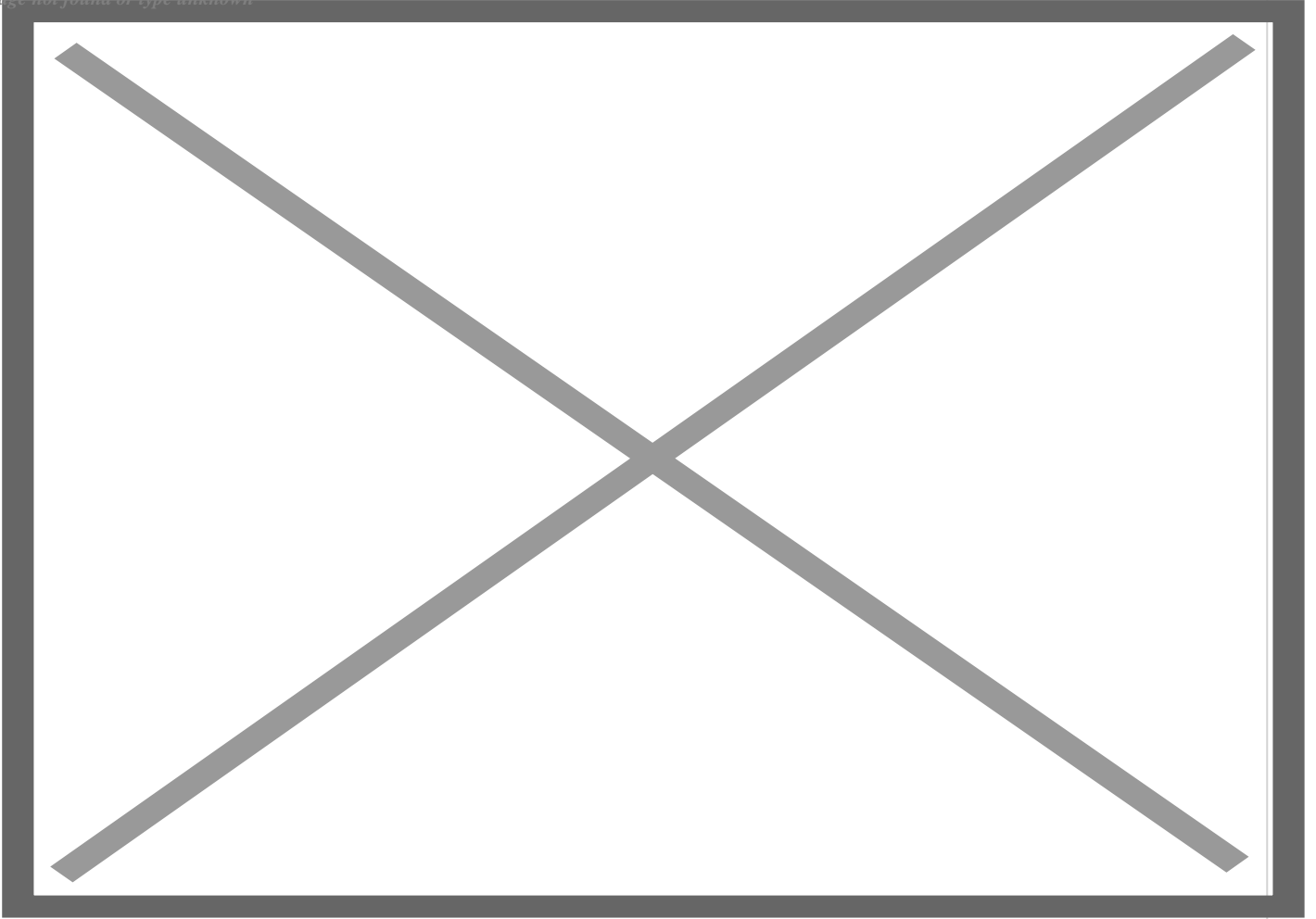


Colombia and Ecuador work to protect Indigenous people from attacks

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Illegal gold mining operations, like this one in Colombia, have helped fuel violence against Indigenous communities [File: Fernando Vergara/AP]

Bogota, March 8 (RHC)-- Colombia and Ecuador have launched a joint alert system meant to protect Indigenous Awa communities from attacks by armed groups in the border region between the two countries. At a news conference on Tuesday in the Colombian capital Bogota, human rights ombudsmen from the two countries announced the new system, which is designed to alert government and military officials in each country about potential attacks.

“The presence of illegal armed groups and organized crime in the cross-border area of ??Ecuador and Colombia has caused humanitarian consequences, especially against the nearly 29,000 members of the great Awa family who live in the area,” the office of the Colombian ombudsman, Carlos Camargo, said on Twitter.

As illegal business activities like mining encroach into areas that Indigenous communities call home, violence and intimidation by armed groups and criminal organisations have often followed.

Camargo said Awa communities have suffered killings, forced displacement and the threat of landmines. Children are also a target for recruitment by the armed groups. He emphasized that 14 Indigenous community members were killed last year and about 10,000 had been subject to displacement or confinement as the result of the violence.

Armed groups — including dissidents from the now-disbanded Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and rebels with the National Liberation Army (ELN) — operate near the border with Ecuador, as do drug-trafficking groups.

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