

Protests in Ecuador against the construction of a mega-prison

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By María Josefina Arce

The protests in the Amazonian town of Archidona, in the Ecuadorian province of Napo, against the plans of the government of President Daniel Noboa to build a maximum-security prison in this area, with a majority indigenous population, have not stopped.

For more than 10 days, the inhabitants have maintained their mobilizations, carrying out various actions such as road blockades and even the occupation of the governor's office of Napo.

The protests intensified when the indigenous movement and other social organizations of the Andean country joined them and threatened to spread to the entire Amazon region.

The citizens denounce, among other things, that the project was officially approved in an arbitrary manner and without prior consultation with the communities in the area, a right established in the 2008 Constitution approved under the government of then-President Rafael Correa.

The residents of Archidona also fear for the safety of children and adolescents, as there are four schools near the area where the plant will be built, which are attended by approximately 4,000 minors.

They also point out that economic activities essential to their livelihood, such as tourism and trade, will be affected.

Amanda Grefa, mayor of Archidona, has criticized the prioritization of such a project, at a cost of US\$52 million, and not the execution of works to improve education, health and the road system in Napo due to alleged government budget shortfalls.

Ecuador's National Assembly also approved a resolution calling on the president to desist from building a maximum-security prison in Napo and elsewhere in the Amazon.

The conflict led to the resignation of the governor of Napo, Marlene Cabrera, on the 7th, due to the lack of response from the government to the demands of the citizens of the area.

But Noboa persists in his plans and last week the construction of the second mega-prison was awarded to a company.

Last June, he already made official the construction of another maximum-security prison, which will be located in the coastal province of Santa Elena, which has also provoked the rejection of the inhabitants of the area, who requested the courts to stop the work.

These projects are part of the so-called Phoenix Plan, Noboa's strategy to confront violence and organized crime, which has been questioned by various sectors of society for not developing other actions that lead to the improvement of the living conditions of Ecuadorians and close the door to criminality.

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