

Ecuador allegedly holding Peruvian Pastors

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

QUITO, ECUADOR--A Peruvian human rights group has charged that four Evangelical pastors are among 45 Peruvians being detained by Ecuador. All of those held were taken into custody in connection with the border conflict earlier this year between the two countries, the group said.

The Association for Human Rights (Aprodeh) and the Council for Peace said the detainees are being held at various military facilities throughout Ecuador.

The two organizations said there are few details available concerning the detentions, however they have asked the Interamerican Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States to investigate.

A spokesperson for Aprodeh said the four pastors and three other people had been formally accused of espionage. He termed the accusations as "slander".

If found guilty on the charges the alleged spies could face prison sentences of between fifteen and eighteen years, he said.

Ecuadorian officials denied the charge of 45 detained, and said only seven Peruvians are in custody.

Ecuadorian Chancellor Galo Leoro Franco told the Quito newspaper "El Comercio" that the seven had been detained either during or after the recent conflict, and all had been charged with spying. Military officials refused to comment on the accusations.

The International Red Cross has been asked to investigate detainees in both countries.

The evangelical missionaries reported to be detained are Jose' Gonzales, Jorge Maza, Edgard Seminario and Jose' Timana', according to Ricardo Vasquez, legal representatives of Aprodeh.

Local church officials in Quito, who asked not to be identified, told NNI that Gonzales, a missionary with The Mission Society of the Christian Church In Ecuador, has admitted passing information to Peruvian authorities.

An Ecuadorian lawyer working with a North American mission in Ecuador who has worked on the Gonzales case could not confirm the detention of the other three missionaries, and told NNI he was not familiar with their names.

Vasquez told the Lima newspaper "Expreso" that the pastors were detained between the 29th and 30th of January and are being kept in jails in Quito and Guayaquil.

Peru has asked the OAS to send a mission to verify the state of its citizens detained in Ecuadorian facilities and to assure that their human rights are being respected.

Ecuador and Peru fought a five week conflict in late January and February over a portion of their undefined border. News agencies said at least 75 soldiers were killed and hundreds wounded. The two countries agreed to a cease fire in late February, and an international team is overseeing the disarmament and withdrawal of troops in the jungle area.

The dispute between the two countries goes back to a 1941 war in which Ecuador lost almost half of its territory. A formal agreement, the Rio Protocol, recognizing the occupation of the territory was signed by both countries in 1942, but Ecuador's congress declared it void in 1951.

Meanwhile, the Ecuadorian government has rejected accusations that it had violated the human rights of Peruvian citizens living in Ecuador.

Chancellor Leoro Franco said that Peru "has begun a campaign of accusations of alleged violations of human rights against Peruvian citizens. Ecuador respects and defends human rights," he said.

The official said that there is no hostility nor persecution directed toward Peruvians in Ecuador, and only seven Peruvian citizens had been arrested on charges of espionage.

He said that Ecuador had requested international human rights groups to investigate the human rights situation in both countries.

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