



“IT WAS THE MILITARY. I SAW THEM.”

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES IN ECUADOR AT THE HANDS OF THE ARMED FORCES

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this research briefing, Amnesty International analyses five cases of enforced disappearance that occurred in Ecuador in 2024, in the context of the militarized security strategy promoted by President Daniel Noboa.

In recent years, the Ecuadorian authorities decided to address public security challenges with a massive deployment of their armed forces. The strategy, currently known as the “Plan Fenix”, is sustained by successive states of emergency and the declaration of a supposed situation of “internal armed conflict”.

The Ecuadorian authorities have opted for the militarization of public security, in violation of international law and standards. This has resulted in allegations of serious human rights violations and crimes under international law, such as extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and torture and other ill-treatment.

Among the cases known to human rights organizations are a number of disappearances in the coastal provinces of Esmeraldas, Guayas and Los Ríos. Amnesty International has analysed the following:

- **Cirilo Leonardo Minota Nieves**, 35, disappeared on 4 April 2024 in Quinindé, in the province of Esmeraldas, following his arrest by the military.
- **Dave Robin Loor Roca**, 20, and **Juan Daniel Santillán Suárez**, 27, disappeared on 26 August 2024, in Ventanas (Los Ríos province) after being arrested on the street by the military and taken to a house raid.
- Cousins **Jostin Elian Álvarez Chávez**, 17, and **Jairo Damián Tapia Álvarez**, 16, were arrested by the military on 3 September during a raid on their family home. Jostin returned home on 17 September, recounting his arbitrary detention and torture and the possible killing of Jairo. He disappeared again on 28 November 2024.
- **Dalton Oswaldo Ruiz Tapia**, 34, disappeared on 20 October 2024 following his arrest by the military in Pimocha (Babahoyo canton) as he was leaving a popular festivity.
- On 8 December 2024, four children from the Las Malvinas community in the south of Guayaquil were violently detained by members of the Ecuadorian Air Force. Their charred remains, which showed signs of violence, were found on 24 December by the Taura River. They were 11-year-old **Steven Gerald Medina Lajones**, 15-year-old **Nehemías Saúl Arboleda Portocarrero**, and brothers **Josué Didier Arroyo Bustos** (14) and **Ismael Arroyo Bustos** (15).

Amnesty International considers that these five cases constitute enforced disappearance of persons, since the three constituent elements of such disappearances, as defined by international human rights law, are present, namely: 1. deprivation of a person’s liberty; 2. perpetrated by agents of the state or by persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the state; and 3. followed by an absence of information or the refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or to reveal the fate or whereabouts of the person, placing them outside the protection of the law and leaving them helpless in the face of human rights violations.

The cases studied for this report show that, rather than benefiting the population, the “Plan Fenix” enables serious human rights violations to be committed. They also show that, in the absence of clearly established public policies and protocols for the search and investigation of enforced disappearances and a lack of political will, cases go unpunished and investigations are slow and seriously flawed.

For these reasons, Amnesty International recommends that the authorities reverse their militarized approach to law enforcement and place human rights at the heart of all security policies.

Finally, Amnesty International makes a series of recommendations aimed at improving the immediate search for disappeared persons, ensuring proper investigation of cases, guaranteeing the rights of victims, and adopting a comprehensive policy to prevent and combat enforced disappearances.

2. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In December 2024, Ecuadorian society was shocked by the release of security footage showing members of the armed forces violently detaining four children on their way home from a football game in the Las Malvinas sector in the south of Guayaquil. Days later, the discovery of the children's incinerated bodies near a military base further fuelled public outrage and calls for justice, truth and reparation.

The case highlighted the risks of the government's militarized security strategy, but the images shown in the footage were not isolated incidents. Ecuadorian human rights organizations have recorded some thirty potential cases of enforced disappearance in 2024 alone, and there is an extensive list of reports of arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment.

Amnesty International has documented this and four other cases of disappeared persons in coastal region of Ecuador during 2024, with this report offering the results of such investigation. These emblematic cases are just a sample of the growing problem of disappearances at the hands of Ecuador's public security authorities, as well as of the state's inadequate response to investigating cases and searching for the victims.

These cases were analysed from an international human rights law and standards perspective. For all five cases, the organization had access to the files of the preliminary investigations conducted by the Public Prosecutor's Office; this information includes police reports, interviews with witnesses and expert analysis, among other evidence.¹

Amnesty International also had access to and analysed videos and photographs of the arrests in four of the five cases reported, with most of this material being analysed by the Evidence Lab, the organization's digital research team.² Amnesty International interviewed relatives of the disappeared persons by video in four of the cases, and their legal representatives in all of them. Finally, it carried out a review of reports and statements by international bodies and local human rights organizations, which helped to provide an understanding of the context in which the cases occurred.

Amnesty International would like to thank the individuals who provided information for this report, in particular the families of the disappeared persons, the Committee of Relatives of Disappeared Detainees in Ecuador, and the Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDH Guayaquil).

1. Amnesty International became aware of the files, such as they were, at the beginning of June 2025.

2. In the case of Las Malvinas, no technical analysis of the footage of the arrests was carried out, as such footage had already been analysed and deemed authentic by relevant actors, including the Ecuadorian authorities.

3. HUMAN RIGHTS AND MILITARIZATION OF PUBLIC SECURITY

“We never knew why they took him. We never heard from him. We knew nothing until now. They won’t even say why.”

Sister of Cirilo Minota.

Ecuador faces a delicate public security situation. The actions of organized criminal groups have affected both everyday life and the ability of institutions to carry out their functions properly. The situation has reached all regions of the country, increasing homicide rates and violence in prisons and on the streets.³

In recent years, the Ecuadorian authorities decided to address public security challenges through a massive deployment of their armed forces.⁴ The strategy is sustained through repeated states of emergency, which have had a serious impact on the observance and enjoyment of human rights.⁵

In January 2024, the government redoubled its commitment to a militarized strategy by declaring a state of emergency (Executive Decree 110) and an alleged “internal armed conflict” (Executive Decree 111).⁶ Since then, the President’s Office has issued at least 13 other executive decrees suspending human rights in different parts of the country, including the coastal region.⁷

In fact, the suspension of guarantees and the deployment of the military to carry out law enforcement duties are a practically permanent situation that is consistent with the security policy known as the “Plan Fenix”, announced by the president of the Republic in January 2024. This plan is the mainstay of the government’s security strategy and is regularly cited as justification for its actions, although the plan itself is not publicly available.⁸

The use of the armed forces to carry out law enforcement duties is contrary to international human rights standards. Under the inter-American human rights system, of which Ecuador is a party, states must, to the greatest extent possible, limit the use of the armed forces to control ordinary crime or internal violence, and

3. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), *Ecuador: IACHR and RFOE Condemn Serious Acts of Violence Committed by Organized Criminal Groups*, Press Release Nbr. 017/24, 17 January 2024.

4. The armed forces are made up by the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, as provided in article 6 of the Organic Law for National Defence and article 16 of its Regulations.

5. IACHR, *2024 Annual Report: Chapter IV.A, “Ecuador”*, OAS/Ser.LV/II, 26 March 2025, para. 371.

6. Ecuador, Presidency of the Republic, Executive Decree 110 of 8 January 2024 and Executive Decree 111 of 9 January 2024.

7. These are executive decrees (ED) 135 of 23 January 2024; ED 193 of 8 March 2024; ED 218 of 7 April 2024; ED 229 of 19 April 2024; ED 230 of 20 April 2024; ED 250 of 30 April 2024; ED 275 of 22 May 2024; ED 318 of 2 July 2024; ED 351 of 8 August 2024; ED 377 of 30 August 2024; ED 410 of 3 October 2024; ED 493 of 2 January 2025; and ED 599 of 12 April 2025. As notified to the OAS General Secretariat. See Department of International Law of the Secretariat for Legal Affairs of the OAS, *Recent Suspensions of Guarantees regarding Multilateral Treaties*, accessed in July 2025.

8. Amnesty International, *Ecuador: Submission to the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances, 29th Period of Sessions, 22 September - 3 October 2025*, June 2025, AMR 28/9493/2025, p. 4.



↑  President Daniel Noboa surrounded by members of the Armed Forces during a campaign event in Santa Elena. His administration has been characterized by the use of the Army for public security duties. Photo: Agencia Press South

adhere to strict exceptional criteria and due diligence in the safeguarding of human rights.⁹

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights has established that when a state does decide to use the armed forces for duties that typically correspond to the police, such intervention must be:¹⁰

 EXCEPTIONAL The intervention must be exceptional, temporary and limited to what is strictly necessary in the circumstances of each case.	 SUBORDINATED AND SUPPLEMENTARY The armed forces must only support the work of civil agencies and may not perform functions such as investigation of crimes or criminal prosecution.
 REGULATED There must be mechanisms, protocols and training on the use of force, under the principles of exceptionality, proportionality and absolute necessity.	 SUPERVISED The work carried out by the armed forces must be overseen by competent, independent and technically capable civilian bodies.

One of the reasons for limiting the actions of the armed forces in security duties is that the training they receive is focused on dealing with armed conflict and defeating the enemy, rather than the protection of civilians.¹¹ Their deployment therefore carries the inherent risk of human rights violations.¹²

9. Inter-American Court of Human Rights. *Case of Cabrera García and Montiel Flores v. Mexico*. Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of November 26, 2010. Series C No. 220, paras 88 and 89
10. Inter-American Court of Human Rights. *Case of Alvarado Espinoza et al. v. Mexico*. Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of November 28, 2018. Series C No. 370, para. 182.
11. Inter-American Court of Human Rights. *Case of Montero-Aranguren et al. (Detention Center of Catia) v. Venezuela*. Preliminary Objection, Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of July 5, 2006. Series C No. 150, para. 78.
12. IACHR, *Report on Citizen Security and Human Rights*, OAS/Ser.L/V/II, Doc. 57, December 31, 2009, para. 100.

In particular, any state agency that carries out public security work must be trained and equipped with various types of weapons and ammunition to allow for a differentiated use of force, including firearms and less lethal weapons, in accordance with the principles of necessity and proportionality, with a view to preserving, among others, the right to life and personal integrity.¹³ However, the armed forces do not usually receive this training.¹⁴

In Ecuador, the increasing militarization of public security has led to numerous reports of serious human rights violations and crimes under international law, such as extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and torture.¹⁵

The situation has generated alarm among international human rights bodies. The Committee against Torture expressed concern in connection with information it had received regarding serious human rights violations in the actions of the armed forces, including “acts of torture, unlawful detention and alleged extrajudicial executions”.¹⁶

The Human Rights Committee also expressed concern regarding the frequency with which Ecuador has made use of states of emergency, and called on the state party to limit their use and ensure strict respect for human rights.¹⁷

Despite reports of human rights violations and crimes under international law, President Noboa and other high-ranking Ecuadorian officials have continued the mandate that the armed forces participate directly in public security actions, a role that normally falls to the police. In this regard, it should be remembered that hierarchical superiors have the duty to take necessary and reasonable measures to prevent or punish the commission of crimes under international law by their subordinates, as well as to report such acts to the competent authorities.¹⁸

Against this national backdrop, local human rights organizations are continuing to document cases of serious human rights violations, coordinate assistance for victims and call for changes in the government’s security strategy. Similarly, in the absence of an immediate search and rigorous investigations by the Public Prosecutor’s Office, many families with disappeared loved ones have set up the Committee of Relatives of Disappeared Detainees.¹⁹



↑  Members of the Armed Forces conduct security operation in the streets of Guayaquil in February 2024. Photo: John Moore

13. UN, Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, adopted September 1990.

14. Amnesty International, Use of Force: Guidelines for the Implementation of the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, Amsterdam and Madrid, 2015, p. 167.

15. Amnistía Internacional, *Ecuador: Información para el Comité de derechos humanos de la ONU, 142 periodo de sesiones, del 14 de octubre al 8 de noviembre de 2024*, AMR 28/8531/2024, octubre de 2024, p. 3.

16. ONU. Comité contra la Tortura, *Observaciones finales sobre el octavo informe periódico del Ecuador*, 16 de agosto de 2024, CAT/C/ECU/CO/8, párr. 11.

17. ONU. Comité de Derechos Humanos, *Observaciones finales sobre el séptimo informe periódico del Ecuador*, 4 de diciembre de 2024, CCP22/C/ECU/CO/7, párrs. 9 y 10.

18. ONU. Tribunal Penal Internacional para la ex Yugoslavia (ICTY), *Caso Blagojević y Jokić*, Caso No. IT-02-60-T, Sentencia, 17 de enero de 2025, párr. 793.

19. See, among others: Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDH Guayaquil), *Desapariciones forzadas en el contexto de la militarización en la costa en Ecuador* [Enforced Disappearances in the Context of Militarization in the Coastal Region of Ecuador], 31 January 2025; and Regional Human Rights Advisory Foundation (INREDH), *Informe sobre los hechos de violencia policial y militar durante la declaratoria del Decreto 111* [Report on the incidents of police and military violence during the state of emergency as per Decree 111], Ecuador 2024.

4. CASES OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE IN 2024

Human rights organizations have detected an increasing number of disappearances of people at the hands of Ecuador’s armed forces. Most of the cases reported occurred in the coastal region, in the provinces of Esmeraldas, Guayas and Los Rios.²⁰ In this section, Amnesty International provides an analysis of five of these cases.



20. Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDH Guayaquil), *Reporte de desapariciones forzadas en Ecuador: patrones identificados en intervenciones militares en casos de desaparición forzada en 2024* [Report on Enforced Disappearances in Ecuador: Patterns Identified in Military Interventions in Cases of Enforced Disappearance in 2024], 31 January 2025, updated 10 April 2025.

4.1 THE DISAPPEARANCE OF CIRILO MINOTA

“As a mother, I want the military to give me an answer. Where did they leave my son? Where is my son?”

Mother of Cirilo Minota.

Cirilo Leonardo Minota Nieves, 35, lived with his family in Quinindé, in the province of Esmeraldas, where he looked after a small farm. He is the father of two daughters, aged 17 and three, and an eight-year-old son.

On 4 April 2024, Cirilo and two friends were in a mechanical workshop, fixing the air conditioning in Cirilo’s car, when a group of at least seven soldiers arrived and forced the three men into a van. Residents of Quinindé recorded the arrest from a few metres away and shared the video ²¹of which Amnesty International has a copy ²²on social media and local instant messaging groups. It soon reached Cirilo’s family, who were able to fully identify him.

One of the detainees was released that night in a wooded area, naked and battered, far from the place where they had been detained. With the help of local residents, he was able to return to Quinindé the next morning and seek medical attention. He later gave a statement to the authorities, stating that while in the van their heads were covered and that the military had taken them to an unknown location, where they were beaten and interrogated.²¹

From the moment Cirilo’s sister received the call announcing his arrest, the family began a search that has not yet ended. They enquired with the police and the military. They went to the prison and searched neighbourhoods where locals claimed that the military tortured people. But they found no answers. The military sent them to the police, who sent them back to the military. Everyone denied the allegations. At a military detachment, a soldier allegedly tried to take Cirilo’s sister’s mobile phone, on which she had shown him the video of the arrest.²²



↑ Family member of Cirilo Minota gives an interview with a t-shirt that shows a picture of his relative. Photo: Billy Navarrete

The family not only searched of their own accord, but the day after the disappearance they filed a complaint with the Public Prosecutor’s Office and delivered the video of the arrest. However, the investigation has not yielded results on what happened to Cirilo or on who might be responsible.

One of the main obstacles in the investigation is the refusal of the Ecuadorian armed forces to provide information on the case. Since at least 12 April 2024, the prosecutor has been requesting details regarding military activities carried out on the day and in the place of

21. Witness statement before the Public Prosecutor’s Office, 23 May 2024, included in the file of the preliminary investigation.
22. Amnesty International interview with relatives of Cirilo Minota, July 2025. The information is consistent with the statements contained in the file of the preliminary investigation carried out by the Public Prosecutor’s Office.

the arrests.²³ However, the response from the armed forces on one occasion was that the request should be made to the Ministry of National Defence and, on another, that the information was confidential and should be requested directly from the Minister of Defence.²⁴

Lack of information from the military is not the only factor hindering the investigation. The Prosecutor's Office itself has inexplicably omitted key procedures. For example, they did not collect potential evidence from Cirilo's car, though witness statements and the video indicate that those perpetrating the arrest interacted with him and could have left fingerprints or other evidence. Security camera footage that might have recorded the events or the route taken by the military van after the arrest was also not collected or reviewed.

The family believes that Cirilo's social media accounts and bank account were active after the day of the arrest, but the Public Prosecutor's Office has done little to investigate this. According to the file, for example, they requested generic information regarding several banking transactions but ignored the request from Cirilo's bank to clarify the period for which the information was being requested.

In the days following the arrest, members of the National Police visited the site of the detentions and other places such as hospitals, health centres and the forensic medicine service. However, there is no indication that they collected any evidence in the form of photographs, videos or other records that could help throw light on the case.²⁵

Despite the family's efforts and the striking inaction of the authorities, Cirilo's fate and whereabouts remain unknown at the time of writing.

4.2 THE DISAPPEARANCE OF DAVE LOOR AND JUAN DANIEL SANTILLÁN

“Why would you ignore existing procedures? Because in Ecuador, if the military apprehends someone in flagrante delicto, what they must do is hand that person over to the authorities for the police to open an investigation.”

Aunt of Dave Loor.

On the afternoon of 26 August 2024, friends Dave Robin Loor Roca, 20, and Juan Daniel Santillán Suárez, 27, were riding a motorcycle through the streets of town of Ventanas, in the Los Ríos province, on the way to buy *empanadas*. As they crossed the village, military personnel signalled for them to stop. They were searched and forced into a white van, with the detention being captured on video by several security cameras. Dave's family obtained the footage hours after the events; Amnesty International has also been able to review the footage.²⁶

At 4:30 in the afternoon, Lorena Roca was about to finish work when she received a phone call from a relative informing her that the military were holding her son Dave in a house close to her home. She immediately travelled to the site, where soldiers were



23. The prosecutor first requested information through official document No. FPE-FED3-5656-2024-000015-O, dated 12 April 2024, addressed to the Head of Army Command of Esmeraldas.

24. These responses are contained in official document CCFFAA-FTC-AJ-FGE-2024-009-O, dated 25 October 2024, issued by the Commander of the “Esmeraldas” Joint Task Force and official document ARE-COOPNO-AJU-2025-0009-O, dated 31 January 2025, issued by the Commander of Northern Operations of the Ecuadorian Navy; both addressed to the prosecutor then in charge of the case.

25. Information from Investigation Report PN-SZ-E-QUIN-JINV-PDESP-2024-024-INF, dated 8 April 2024, contained in the file of the preliminary investigation.

26. The videos are also included in the preliminary investigation by the Public Prosecutor's Office and have been analyzed in the technical expert report on audio, video and other media No. PN-SZ LOS RIOS-JCRIM-AVA-2024-URB22400112, sent by the Ecuadorian National Police to the Public Prosecutor's Office on 5 October 2024.

conducting a raid.

Neighbours who had gathered outside the house said that her son was in one of the two vans ~~one~~ one grey, one white – that the soldiers had parked in front of the house. She could see that there were people in the vehicles, but could not identify them, as the soldiers were pointing their weapons at her and did not allow her to get any closer. However, at one point one of the detainees raised his head: it was Dave. It was the last time she saw him.²⁷

When the raid was over, the military left taking Dave, Juan Daniel and other detainees with them. Lorena and other relatives began a frantic search, using motorcycles to comb the area, and asking anyone they found if they had seen the van with the soldiers.

Hours later, they found one of the detainees on a dirt road, running and naked. He told them that they had all been beaten. They continued searching until, around seven in the evening, they saw a van in the distance from which the military was releasing two young men. When the soldiers left the family went up to them, but the men who had been freed, both half-naked and beaten, were neither Dave nor Juan Daniel.

One of the people released that day later stated that he had been detained by soldiers traveling in a grey van, who then beat him and took him to the house where the raid took place. The white van carrying Dave and Juan Daniel had then arrived. After the raid, they were taken to a cobblestone road leading to Via Pijío, outside the town of Ventanas, where they were tortured and had their mobile phones screened. There, he was stripped of his clothes and released, but the others were taken away.²⁸

The family continued searching nearby roads and villages all night. They went to the prison, they enquired with the police and a number of soldiers, but all the public officials they spoke to denied having them or knowing what had happened. Lorena returned home at some point in the night, only to find that the house had been raided. Neighbours told her it had been the military. The house was in a mess, some objects were missing, and others had been burned outside.²⁹

Relatives of Dave Robin and of Juan told Amnesty International that staff from the Prosecutor's Office refused to accept the complaint on the day after the detention. It was not until two days after the events, and thanks to the intervention of a lawyer, that the Prosecutor's Office accepted the complaint.³⁰

As in other cases, and despite irrefutable evidence, the armed forces have denied any involvement.³¹ But this time a report from the military was received by the Public Prosecutor's Office. In it, a commander states that during a patrol two men on a motorcycle – one of them being identified as Robin Loor – were detained,



↑ Family member of Dave Loor shows a banner with a picture of his relative. Photo: Billy Navarrete

27. Amnesty International interview with relatives of Dave Loor and Juan Daniel Santillán, July 2025. The information is consistent with the statements contained in the file of the preliminary investigation carried out by the Public Prosecutor's Office.

28. Witness statement given to the police on 7 September 2024, contained in the preliminary investigation by the Public Prosecutor's Office.

29. Testimony by Dave Loor's mother, recorded in the initial complaint, in the writ of 3 September 2024 filed before the prosecutor's office, and in her statement given to the investigative police on 4 September 2024. Consistent with the Amnesty International interview with relatives of Dave Loor and Juan Daniel Santillán, July 2025.

30. The complaint was received on 28 August 2024 for involuntary disappearance. On 12 September 2024, the prosecutor determined that it should be investigated as an enforced rather than an involuntary disappearance.

31. For example, at the habeas corpus hearing, a representative from the armed forces denied any arrests having been made on that day or location and stated that they had not violated the rights of any citizen. Multi-competent Criminal Judicial Unit, based in the canton of Ventanas. Judgment in trial number 12281-2024-00401, 16 September 2024.

interrogated and allegedly released.³² The prosecutor in charge of the case summoned the commander on several occasions, but when he finally did appear, he exercised his right to remain silent.³³ When the Prosecutor's Office requested information directly from the armed forces, they replied that this was "classified" information.³⁴

In the absence of results from the investigation carried out by the Public Prosecutor's Office, the families of Dave and Juan Daniel have continued to search for their loved ones themselves. They have travelled to other cities to put up posters, share information on the case and tell their story, as well as to offer support to other families of disappeared persons.



↑ Family member of Juan Santillan shows a picture of his relative. Photo: Billy Navarrete

4.3 THE DISAPPEARANCE OF COUSINS JOSTIN ÁLVAREZ AND JAIRO TAPIA

“What we’re really asking for is justice, for our children. Because it’s heartbreaking, not knowing if he’s alive, if he’s dead. If he’s eating or not.”

Father of Jairo Tapia.

On the night of 3 to 4 September 2024, the military forcibly entered the home of the Álvarez family, in the Babahoyo canton, Los Ríos province, to carry out a search.

They did not explain what they were looking for, but the family told Amnesty International that they went through all the furniture and objects that they could and even took several things of value. During this chaotic episode, the younger children were crying, one soldier threatened a family member and others ordered Jostin Elián Álvarez Chávez, 17, and his cousin Jairo Damián Tapia Álvarez, 16, to sit separately from the rest of the family.³⁵

A neighbour woke up because of the disturbance and went out to see what was going on. He saw the house surrounded by military personnel who had arrived in two vans, one grey and one white. Other soldiers came out of the house, taking Jostin and Jairo in their custody, and left with them.³⁶ The soldiers told the family that

32. Ecuador, Special Forces Group Report No. 25 Southern Base, “Informe de las novedades suscitadas durante los patrullajes del lunes 26AGO24 en el cantón Ventanas” [Report of events occurring during patrols carried out on Monday, 26 August, 24 in the Ventanas canton], dated 28 August 2024.

33. Statement provided to the Specialized unit for investigating the illegitimate use of force No. 1, on 3 April 2025.

34. This response is contained in official writ number MDN-JUR-2025-0153-OF, dated 28 January 2025, addressed to the prosecutor in charge of the case by the General Coordinator for Legal Advice at the Ministry of National Defence.

35. Amnesty International interview with relatives of Jostin Álvarez and Jairo Tapia, July 2025.

36. Witness statement given to the police on 14 September 2024, contained in the file of the preliminary investigation by the Prosecutor's Office.

they were taking the young men because of an ongoing investigation, and that in an hour they would be able to pick them up from the National Police headquarters.³⁷

The family therefore left at dawn to look for them, but they were neither at the police facilities nor in the prison: they were nowhere to be found. They searched throughout the province of Los Ríos and filed a complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office.³⁸

Two weeks after the arrest, on 17 September, Jostin returned home.³⁹ He said that the military had kept them locked up, tied hand and foot, in the facilities of the Montalvo Fire Department. There were more people detained there, with the military interrogating them about weapons and drugs in the area. Since the Alvarez cousins could not give them any information, they were constantly beaten. He also said that about a week after the arrest, they were put in a van, along with another detainee, and taken to what Jostin believes was a site near San Pablo, in the province of Bolívar. There, they ordered Jairo and the other detainee to get out of the van, and Jostin heard two gunshots. When the soldiers returned, they threw some shovels into the van and told him they had been killed for not providing information. They spared Jostin and took him back to the clandestine cell in the Fire Department. Days later he managed to escape.

Following Jostin's return, on multiple occasions military personnel reportedly turned up at the family home and at other locations where Jostin was staying, something that the family considered was clearly harassment. Jostin's mother told Amnesty International that he was with a friend in Babahoyo on 28 November 2024 when the military arrested him again. They have not heard from him since.

The investigation is progressing slowly and has yielded no results. Although investigative police officers collected testimonies and carried out searches, many of the actions were late or ineffective. For example, when the police went to the family home – three weeks after the events – they simply took photographs of the outside and did not collect clues, fingerprints or other evidence.⁴⁰ Months later, in January 2025, the prosecutor ordered an inspection of the site, this time with evidence collection, but again only photographs of the outside were taken.⁴¹



Relatives of Jostin Alvarez and Jairo Tapia show photos of their missing family members. Photo: Billy Navarrete

37. Interview with the relatives of Jostin Álvarez and Jairo Tapia, and statements given by relatives to the Public Prosecutor's Office, 5 September 2025, contained in the file of the preliminary investigation.

38. The complaint was filed by Jairo Tapia's mother on 5 September 2024, in the canton of Babahoyo, province of Los Ríos.

39. Jostin's statement as presented here is known through what he told both his family and the police. Statement provided by Jostin Elian Álvarez Chávez in an interview with the police on 24 September 2024, which appears in Location Report number 202409110302236-D, of the Disappeared Persons Investigation Unit of the Ecuadorian National Police. Amnesty International interview with relatives of Jostin Álvarez and Jairo Tapia, July 2025.

40. Ecuador, Ministerio del Interior, Parte policial número 2024093009442313600, del 30 de abril de 2024, que consta en el expediente de la investigación previa.

41. Ecuador, Ministry of the Interior, Police report number 2024093009442313600, of 30 April 2024, contained in the file of the preliminary investigation.

Other essential information has not been integrated into the file. The Public Prosecutor's Office took so long to request the recordings of some of the cameras that videos no longer existed, since they were kept for only 30 days.⁴² When a judge denied the request to access Jostin's social media accounts, on grounds that the request lacked motivation and due justification, the prosecutor did not prepare and file an amended request and therefore did not access the information.⁴³

The Public Prosecutor's Office requested information regarding military activities in Babahoyo on the day of the events, but the armed forces responded by claiming that such information was secret.⁴⁴

It should be noted that neither the Public Prosecutor's Office nor the police have carried out an inspection of the Fire Department facilities that Jostin claimed were a clandestine detention site, despite the requests of the Álvarez family, who are still looking for Jostin and Jairo on their own.

4.4 THE DISAPPEARANCE OF DALTON RUIZ

“Because months and months have gone by with no response, months in which the children ask for their father.”

Dalton's partner.

The Rodeo Montuvio is an important popular festivity in Ecuador, featuring equestrian and livestock shows and music, held at various locations on the Ecuadorian coast in October. In the town of Pimocha, in the Babahoyo canton, one of such festivity was held on 20 October 2024. That day, 34-year-old Dalton Oswaldo Ruiz Tapia attended the celebrations with friends but never returned home.

At approximately 9:30 in the evening, Dalton and two of his friends left the Rodeo. Dalton was on his way home to his partner, daughter and son who were waiting for him, so he took a taxi. After a few metres, the car was stopped by some of the police officers working in the extensive security operation set up for the event. The police officers searched Dalton and, finding nothing illegal, allowed him to continue on his way. However, the taxi was stopped again almost immediately, this time by a dozen military personnel.⁴⁵

The military ordered Dalton to get out of the car and held him by the side of the road, upon which the taxi left. At that time, local residents took photographs that were later shared on social media, allowing his family to identify him easily.⁴⁶ The images show five armed persons dressed in military uniform standing around Dalton. Witnesses told the authorities that there were more military personnel than those shown in the photographs, that they were travelling in a white van, and that they handcuffed Dalton before ordering onlookers to disperse.⁴⁷ That was the last they heard of him.

The family learned of the arrest that very night and began looking for him in the area. They enquired with the police, who denied having any information. After three days without news, relatives filed a complaint before the Public Prosecutor's Office.⁴⁸



42. Response by the ECU 911 Babahoyo to the Public Prosecutor's Office, response number: BAB-2024-S-000224, dated 13 November 2024, to a request made on 29 October 2024.

43. Ecuador, Criminal Judicial Unit based in the Babahoyo canton. Judgement No. 12282202500408G, decision of the judge, of March 12, 2025, denying the request of the Attorney General's Office.

44. The response from the Ecuadorian armed forces is contained in official writs numbers CCFFAA-JCC-DAJ-P-2024-15934-O, of 7 November 2024 and CCFFAA-JCC-DAJ-P-2024-17737-O, of 12 December 2024, sent by the Head of the Joint Command of the Armed Forces to the General Coordinator of Legal Advice.

45. Statements were provided to the Prosecutor's Office by two witnesses on 24 October 2024. These are contained in the file of the preliminary investigation.

46. Amnesty International has a copy of three photographs of the events, showing military and police personnel in Pimocha town. Dalton's family has identified him as the arrested man.

47. Two witness statements, 24 October 2024, contained in the file of the preliminary investigation.

48. Amnesty International interview with relatives of Dalton Ruiz, July 2025.

The investigation carried out by the Public Prosecutor’s Office has been inadequate and has yielded no results. The prosecutor opened an investigation for “involuntary disappearance”, as if those suspected of committing the crime were not public officials. This situation was not corrected until February 2025, when the Prosecutor’s Office decided to change the investigation to one for the crime of “enforced disappearance”.⁴⁹

As in other cases, the armed forces have failed to cooperate with the investigation. Despite the presence of military personnel in the vicinity of the Rodeo Montuvio being confirmed,⁵⁰ the military authorities have refused to provide the duty sheet and list of personnel working that day. In response to a request from the prosecutor, the Head of the Joint Command of the Armed Forces claimed that the information was “classified” and could not be provided without first being declassified.⁵¹

This refusal to provide information also runs counter to the ruling issued by the [female] criminal judge in the Babahoyo canton, province of Los Ríos, who resolved a *habeas corpus* proceeding filed on behalf of Dalton, determining, among other measures, that: “It is hereby ordered that the armed forces must provide all information relating to operations carried out on 20 October 2024.”⁵²

Furthermore, the Public Prosecutor’s Office failed to collect other relevant information for the case. For example, neither the taxi nor its driver was identified, despite the fact that the driver would have been able to provide a significant witness statement on Dalton’s detention. Moreover, it was not until 6 January 2025 – 78 days after the events occurred – that a search was carried out at the scene, when evidence could no longer be found. The investigating police therefore simply confirmed that the street where the arrest occurred existed and took a few photographs.⁵³

Shortcomings at other institutions have also affected the investigation. For example, although there is a public security camera just metres away from where the detention took place, the ECU-911 (the Ecuadorian emergency services) reported that it was not working properly and therefore did not record the incident.⁵⁴

Given the ineffectiveness of the authorities, Dalton’s family has joined others in similar situations to share experiences and develop strategies for locating their loved ones.



↑ Relatives of Dalton Ruiz show a banner with a photo of his missing family member. Photo: Billy Navarrete

49. The change in the type of crime investigated was entered on 6 February 2025, following a decision by the Provincial Prosecutor’s Office of Los Ríos, in Babahoyo.

50. This is mentioned in the statements provided by two witnesses on 24 October 2024, and two police officers on 5 December 2024, as contained in the file on the preliminary investigation carried out by the Prosecutor’s Office. It can also be seen in the photographs of the incident, as mentioned.

51. This is official writ CCFFAA-JCC-DAJ-P-2024-17709-O, dated 12 December 2024, signed by Admiral Jaime Patricio Vela Erazo, Head of the Joint Command of the Armed Forces and addressed to the General Coordinator of Legal Advice [of the Armed Forces], sent in response to the prosecutor’s request in the preliminary investigation into the case.

52. Ecuador, Criminal Judicial Unit based in the Babahoyo canton. Ruling in proceeding No. 12282-2024-31597, 4 April 2025.

53. Ecuadorian National Police. Expert technical report on inspection of the scene of events.16 January 2025, expert technical report number: PN-SZ- LOS RÍOS-JCRIM-IOT-2025-URBIT2500062-PER which concludes that “the place subject to the expert report does exist”.

54. ECU 911 Babahoyo. Technical report PVV BAB-046-DOMO of 13 November 2025, which states that “due to the equipment’s useful life, it is faulty, and videos have not been recorded continuously over this time period”.

4.5 THE FOUR CHILDREN OF LAS MALVINAS

“We cannot sleep, we cannot eat, we are barely alive knowing that we get up but will not see them.”

Father of Steven Gerald Medina Lajones.

On the night of 8 December 2024, a group of children and adolescents were heading back to their homes in the Las Malvinas community in the south of Guayaquil after a football game when they were stopped by a group of soldiers from the Ecuadorian Air Force;⁵⁵ and violently pursued. Some managed to flee, but four were apprehended and forced into the vehicles in which the soldiers were traveling. They were 11-year-old Steven Gerald Medina Lajones, 15-year-old Nehemías Saúl Arboleda Portocarrero, and brothers Josué Didier Arroyo Bustos, 14 and Ismael Arroyo Bustos, 15.

That same night, one of the children called home from a borrowed phone, claiming that the military had beaten them and then abandoned them naked in the Taura region, a largely rural area near Guayaquil. The authorities went to the indicated location but were unable to find them.⁵⁶

On the following day, the father of the Arroyo Bustos brothers filed a complaint with the Prosecutor's Office. This triggered an investigation for the crime of “kidnapping” rather than “enforced disappearance”, a situation that was corrected on 22 December 2024.⁵⁷

On 24 December, Christmas eve, the police reported the discovery of four charred bodies bearing signs of violence. The bodies were found near the banks of the Taura River, in a mangrove swamp. Despite having been badly burned, some of the ropes used to tie their hands still remained.⁵⁸ Forensic experts determined that at least three of the bodies bore signs of gunshot wounds. They were unable to confirm whether the fourth body had sustained any gunshot wounds.⁵⁹

That same day, a *habeas corpus* hearing was held in the city of Guayaquil following the complaint filed by the children's families so that they could be found and returned immediately. At the hearing, the representative from the Ministry of National Defence acknowledged that military personnel had apprehended the four children but alleged that they had been released near the Air Force base in Taura. The [female] judge ruled that such acts constituted a crime of enforced disappearance under the responsibility of the Ecuadorian state and decreed a series of measures for the search.⁶⁰

On 31 December 2024, the Prosecutor's Office filed charges of enforced disappearance against 16 soldiers, and the judge ordered that they be held in custody pending trial.⁶¹ That same day, the Prosecutor's Office confirmed that the bodies were those of the four missing children.⁶²



55. Ecuadorian National Police, Police report No. 9121-2024, of 11 December 2024, which for the first time in the investigation mentions the participation of members of the Air Force – a part of the armed forces – and the existence of footage of the incident.

56. Witness interview, 9 December 2024, recorded in police report 9101-2024 of the Ecuadorian National Police.

57. Complaint of 8 December 2024 and Proceeding No. 7 of the Provincial Prosecutor's Office of Guayas, 22 December 2024.

58. Ecuadorian National Police, Technical visual inspection report, examination of the scene of the events, of related objects and of the evidence No. PN-Z8 DMG-JCRIM-IOT-2024-03788-PER. The report is dated 21 January 2025, but the inspection was carried out on 24 December 2024.

59. Public Prosecutor's Office, Specialized Comprehensive System of Investigation, Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences, Autopsies 4204-2024, 4205-2024, 4206-2024 and 4207-2024.

60. Ecuador. Family, Women, Children and Adolescents Judicial Unit North based in the Guayaquil canton, province of Guayas. Special proceedings No. 09209202408930, court decision of 31 December 2024.

61. Attorney General's Office, *Caso Malvinas: Fiscalía formula cargos contra los 16 militares involucrados [Malvinas Case: Prosecutor's Office files charges against the 16 soldiers involved]*. FGE Press Release No. 1003-DC-2024.

62. They were identified using forensic anthropology and genetics tests, carried out by experts from the Specialized Comprehensive System of Investigation, Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences.

The armed forces have been reluctant to acknowledge responsibility and initially denied any involvement.⁶³ They later claimed that the children had been apprehended for alleged robbery, though this was never proven, and that they had been released shortly afterwards.⁶⁴ When the court ordered the Minister of Defence to offer a public apology in relation to the case, he used the occasion to deny the involvement of the armed forces – despite the fact that the investigation had not yet concluded – and intimidate the judge, stating that they would “use the full extent of the law to punish [the judge’s] actions... and would not allow the ruling to be used to bring the Armed Forces to its knees”.⁶⁵

The armed forces have also taken on the legal defence of the accused soldiers, appointing lawyers and requesting that the judge in the case lift pretrial detention.⁶⁶

At the date of closing of this report, the case is still before the judiciary and progress in the proceedings is slow.⁶⁷

The families of the four murdered children demand justice, backed by a growing social movement calling for changes in Ecuador’s public security policy.



↑  Banners show photos of the four children of Guayaquil during a vigil. Photo: Andres Loor

63. The denial was issued via a videotaped message from the “Security Block” of the government of Ecuador, released on 21 December 2024. EFE “El gobierno de Ecuador atribuye a «grupos delincuenciales» la desaparición de 4 menores” [The government of Ecuador links the disappearance of 4 minors to “criminal groups”]. 22 December 2024.

64. Ecuador. Family, Women, Children and Adolescents Judicial Unit North based in the Guayaquil canton, province of Guayas, Special proceedings No. 09209202408930, court decision of 31 December 2024.

65. National radio channel, Ministry of Defence, 6 January 2025. See also the declaration by 34 human rights organizations in Ecuador: *Rechazamos las amenazas del Bloque de Seguridad del gobierno nacional contra jueza constitucional y contra organizaciones de derechos humanos* [We reject the threats issued by the government’s Security Block against a constitutional judge and against human rights organizations], 7 January 2025.

66. Ecuador, Air Force, writ signed, among others, by General Celiano Cevallos Calderón, General Commander of the Ecuadorian Air Force, submitted to the judge in proceedings 09284-2024-07121, dated 9 July 2025.

67. By mid-August 2025, the preliminary hearing and trial evaluation had already been postponed three times. El Universo, “Caso Las Malvinas: se difiere por tercera vez la audiencia preparatoria de juicio contra 17 militares” [Las Malvinas Case: the preliminary trial hearing against 17 military personnel is deferred for the third time], 13 August 2025.

5. ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

An enforced disappearance is both a serious violation of human rights and a crime under international law. The prohibition of enforced disappearances is a peremptory norm of general international law that all states are obliged to comply with.⁶⁸

Enforced disappearances are defined by two international treaties of which Ecuador is a party: the 1994 Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons and the 2006 International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.⁶⁹

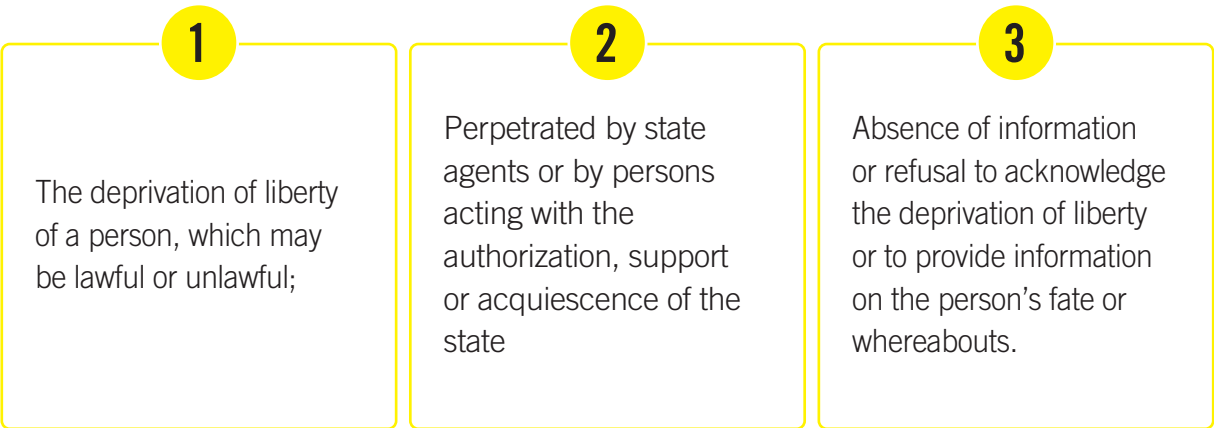
The Inter-American Convention defines enforced disappearance as:

[T]he act of depriving a person or persons of his or their freedom, in whatever way, perpetrated by agents of the state or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the state, followed by an absence of information or a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of freedom or to give information on the whereabouts of that person, thereby impeding his or her recourse to the applicable legal remedies and procedural guarantees.⁷⁰

In turn, the International Convention defines it as:

[T]he arrest, detention, abducting or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law.⁷¹

These definitions provide three elements that must be present for an enforced disappearance to exist:



68. I/A Court H.R. *Case of Goiburú et al. v. Paraguay*. Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of September 22, 2006. Series C No. 153, para. 84 and I/A Court H.R. *Case of Flores Bedregal et al. v. Bolivia*. Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of October 17, 2022. Series C No. 467, para. 78.

69. Ratified by Ecuador in 2006 and 2009, respectively.

70. Article II.

71. Article 2.

Amnesty International considers that the five cases analysed in this report constitute enforced disappearance of persons, since these three constituent elements are present:

- **Deprivation of liberty.** In the cases analysed, deprivations of liberty occurred within the context of law enforcement operations. According to the available evidence, these persons were detained by members of the armed forces and subsequently transferred in military vehicles.⁷²
- **Involvement of state agents.** In all cases, witness statements and video or documentary evidence indicate that the deprivations of liberty were perpetrated by Ecuadorian military personnel.⁷³
- **Absence of information or refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty.** In the cases analysed, the military authorities claim that they do not provide information on grounds that it is classified information. In some cases, they have stated that there were no deprivations of liberty or that, if there were, the persons detained had been released and their whereabouts were therefore unknown.

The state of emergency decreed in the country is not an obstacle to ending the commission of enforced disappearances. International law establishes that perpetrators cannot be exempted from criminal responsibility on the grounds of orders or instructions received from their superiors; nor can circumstances such as a state of war or the threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency be invoked to justify an enforced disappearance.⁷⁴

Finally, in view of the repeated reports of possible cases of enforced disappearance and other crimes under international law in the Ecuadorian coastal region, Amnesty International will continue to monitor and analyse the situation to determine whether the constituent elements of a crime against humanity are verified for the purposes of article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, an international treaty to which Ecuador is a state party.

72. The contexts of the detentions and the fact that the victims have not been taken before the criminal investigation authorities is indicative of the arbitrary nature of such detentions.

73. As detailed earlier in this report, the investigations include clear, forceful and consistent testimonies pointing to the involvement of military personnel in the deprivation of liberty. In four of the five cases there is additionally media evidence (video recordings or photographs) confirming the involvement of the armed forces. In two cases there is information from the armed forces themselves acknowledging their involvement, albeit alleging that the incident was only a deprivation of liberty and that the individuals were subsequently released.

74. Articles VIII and X of the Inter-American Convention and 6 and 23 of the International Convention, respectively.

6. OBLIGATION TO SEARCH AND INVESTIGATE

“We believe that no one should ever have to go through this situation in their lifetime. It’s just too much. It’s very hard not to know where your family member is, not to know the reason why these soldiers took it out on them.”

Aunt of Dave Loor.

When a person disappears, state authorities have an obligation to search for them and promptly investigate the case. This obligation derives from the obligation to guarantee human rights as enshrined in article 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and article 1 of the American Convention on Human Rights, international treaties to which Ecuador is a party.

Investigating and searching are related actions. However, they are separate and independent actions that can be carried out by different state authorities and are not subordinate or conditional on each other.⁷⁵

The obligation to investigate cases of disappearance is contained in the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which establishes that the authorities will undertake without delay a thorough and impartial investigation of the cases.⁷⁶

Additionally, the Inter-American Court has ruled that, in cases of serious human rights violations, including enforced disappearance, there is an obligation to carry out without delay an *ex officio* investigation that is genuine, impartial and effective, with the aim of determining the truth and prosecuting those suspected of criminal responsibility.⁷⁷

The duty to search for disappeared persons derives from article X of the Inter-American Convention and article 24 of the International Convention on the matter of enforced disappearances. The search must be systematic and rigorous and use all necessary human, technical and scientific resources.⁷⁸

To comply with its international obligations, the state must follow the necessary technical guidelines and adhere to international standards on criminal investigations, evidence preservation and forensic analysis, among others. With regard to the search, the state must take into account the Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons.⁷⁹

Additionally, if the commission of another serious human rights violation is verified, the authorities must apply the standards relevant to the case, such as, for example, the Istanbul Protocol in cases of torture or the Minnesota Protocol in cases of extrajudicial executions.

75. I/A Court H.R. *Case of Flores Bedregal et al. v. Bolivia*. Preliminary Exceptions, Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of October 17, 2022. Series C No. 467, para. 78.

76. Article 12.1. The obligation is also implicit in Article I, b, of the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons, which establishes the obligation to punish enforced disappearances.

77. I/A Court H.R. *Case of the Pueblo Bello Massacre vs. Colombia*. Judgment of January 31, 2006. Series C No. 140, para. 143.

78. I/A Court H.R. *Case of Perez Lucas et al. v. Guatemala*. Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of September 4, 2024. Series C No. 536, para. 128.

79. Committee on Enforced Disappearances. *Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons*, adopted at its 16th Session, April 2019.

International human rights standards provide that cases of enforced disappearance must be investigated and prosecuted in the ordinary civilian jurisdiction, to the exclusion of military jurisdictions.⁸⁰

The authorities must also ensure that persons suspected of involvement in an enforced disappearance are not in a position to influence an investigation or to intimidate or pressure complainants, witnesses or any other persons connected to the case.⁸¹ To this end, the authorities may temporarily remove public officials who are under investigation from their post.

Despite the provisions of international law, the reality is that the authorities responsible for investigating and searching for disappeared persons in Ecuador are overwhelmed by the number of cases they have to deal with and by the lack of adequate resources with which to do so. As an example, the specialized unit for investigating the illegitimate use of force, which is the section of the Public Prosecutor's Office responsible for investigating cases of enforced disappearance, only has seven prosecutors for dealing with cases throughout the country and only one dedicated to cases occurring in the provinces of the Ecuadorian coastal region.⁸²

The analysis of the five cases documented in this report, which illustrate the general situation in Ecuador, reveals shortcomings in the investigations and in the search for victims that are incompatible with the state's international obligations.



Photo taken from a video verified by Amnesty International shows the detention of the children of Guayaquil



Photo taken from a video verified by Amnesty International shows detention of Juan Santillan and Dave Loor

One issue to note is that the immediate search for victims is carried out ineffectively. Although prosecutors order the immediate start of the search, they do not provide guidelines for carrying it out. Police reports show that initial proceedings are limited to interviewing relatives and neighbours and taking photographs of the alleged location where the deprivation of liberty took place.

80. Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons, Article IX.

81. International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Article 12.4.

82. Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDH Guayaquil), interview with Amnesty International, July 2025. The Guayaquil headquarters of the specialized unit for investigating the illegitimate use of force hears cases from the provinces of Esmeraldas, Manabí, Guayas, Santa Elena, Los Ríos and El Oro, as provided in Article 2 of Resolution 063-FGE-2023, of the Public Prosecutor's Office.

As previously explained, in most of the cases analysed no evidence was collected at the alleged location in the first days of the disappearance. On several occasions, the order to collect evidence was issued months after the disappearance occurred, by which time it was too late to recover any evidence. This means that potential evidence such as fingerprints, evidence from the scene and security camera footage is lost.

Amnesty International found a worrying lack of proper attention to cases, as evidenced by, for example, omissions and errors when requesting information from the authorities and individuals, and a lack of care when processing evidence, for example with video footage of the detentions lying for months in the files of the Prosecutor's Office without being analysed by an expert.

Finally, the organization was able to confirm that the armed forces did not cooperate in the investigation of these cases. The military authorities typically claimed that the information required for the investigation was "secret", "classified" or "confidential" and could therefore not be provided to the Prosecutor's Office. This practice is contrary to the obligation to provide access to all the information necessary for conducting the investigation effectively.⁸³

As with any state authority, the armed forces must fulfil their duty to cooperate with investigations without hindrance, including by searching for and delivering information requested from them.⁸⁴ Compliance with this obligation must be guaranteed by their hierarchical superiors, including the Minister of Defence and the President of the Republic, in the discharge of their duty to bring the facts to the attention of the competent authorities for investigation and prosecution.⁸⁵



↑  Relatives of the four children of Guayaquil show photos of their family members during a protest at the Guayas Prosecutor's Office. Foto: Agencia Press South

83. International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Article 12.3.a.

84. I/A Court H.R. *Case of Perez Lucas et al. v. Guatemala*. Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of September 4, 2024. Series C No. 536, paras 123 and 124.

85. International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Article 6.b.iii. See also, ICTY, *Kordić and Čerkez* Case, Case No. IT-95-14/2, Judgment, 26 February 2001, para. 446.

7. OTHER REPORTS OF DISAPPEARANCES

The five cases analysed by Amnesty International for this report are but a small sample of the extensive list of disappearance reports recently registered in Ecuador. In this regard, the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances registered 22 urgent actions related to events that occurred in Ecuador between only 20 January and 6 December 2024;⁸⁶ while the Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDH Guayaquil) registered 33 disappearances in 2024.⁸⁷

The relatives of the disappeared persons in the cases described in this report are members of the Committee of Relatives of Disappeared Detainees of Ecuador (*Comité de Familiares de Personas Detenidas Desaparecidas del Ecuador* in Spanish). It is a collective established in 2024 by family members of persons who have disappeared in the Ecuadorian coastal region, in response to the recurrence of disappearance in Ecuador and the lack of an adequate response from the state. The Committee carries out a number of different actions, including coordination, reflection and advocacy to demand that the authorities search for the disappeared persons and conduct investigations for each case.



↑ ⓘ Committee of Relatives of Disappeared Detainees of Ecuador. Photo: CDH Guayaquil

86. Committee on Enforced Disappearances. *Report on requests for urgent action submitted under Article 30 of the Convention*, CED/C/28/3, 13 May 2025, para. 60.

87. Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDH Guayaquil), *Reporte de desapariciones forzadas en Ecuador: patrones identificados en intervenciones militares en casos de desaparición forzada en 2024* [Report on Enforced Disappearances in Ecuador: Patterns identified in military interventions in cases of enforced disappearance in 2024], 31 January 2025, updated 10 April 2025.

At the date of closing of this report, the Committee of Relatives of Disappeared Detainees was working to seek justice for the following disappearances:

- 
- 09/01/24 – Edwin Eduardo Pata Cheme
 - 30/01/24 – Bruno Stiwar Rodriguez Castillo
 - 30/01/24 – Fardi Ricaurte Muñoz Quiñonez
 - 23/03/24 – Romario Ricardo Caicedo Mina
 - 04/04/24 – Cirilo Leonardo Minota Nieves
 - 11/04/24 – Luis Fernando Delgado Mora
 - 18/04/24 – Jefferson Daniel Bolaño Corozo
 - 25/04/24 – Cristhian Dalwin Cabrera Marcillo
 - 25/04/24 – Oswaldo Mauricio Morales Santana
 - 17/07/24 – Ariel Jair Cheme Franco (found dead)
 - 17/07/24 – Nevil Lenin Mina Quiñonez (found dead)
 - 23/08/24 – Jordy Jair Morales Martinez
 - 26/08/24 – Dave Robin Loor Roca
 - 26/08/24 – Juan Daniel Santillán Suarez
 - 03/09/24 – Jairo Damian Tapia Alvarez
 - 03/09/24 – Jostin Elian Alvarez Chavez
 - 20/10/24 – Dalton Oswaldo Ruiz Tapia
 - 24/11/24 – Cristian Damian Sandoya Valle
 - 24/11/24 – Jonathan Gabriel Adrihan Bravo
 - 24/11/24 – Oscar Arturo Adrihan Bravo
 - 25/11/24 – Jahayra Geovanka Marquinez Cortez
 - 25/11/24 – Jeampier Maicol Castañeda Solis
 - 25/11/24 – Justin Santiago Valverde Alava
 - 27/11/24 – Dario Manuel Vasquez Chalela
 - 28/11/24 – Luis Miguel Salas Alvarado
 - 30/11/24 – Francisco Javier Alvario Montoya
 - 04/12/24 – Jorge Luis Izquierdo Solis
 - 06/12/24 – Bryan Yair Torres Carranza
 - 06/12/24 – Carlos Pisco Arteaga
 - 06/12/24 – Kleiner Pisco Arteaga
 - 06/12/24 – Miguel Moran Escobar
 - 08/12/24 – Ismael Eduardo Arroyo Bustos (found dead)
 - 08/12/24 – Josue Didier Arroyo Bustos (found dead)
 - 08/12/24 – Nehemias Saul Arboleda Portocarrero (found dead)
 - 08/12/24 – Steven Gerald Medina Lajones (found dead)
 - 09/12/24 – Jonathan Daniel Villon Velasco
 - 12/12/24 – Kevin Danilo Mazzini Mejia
 - 20/12/24 – Fabricio Alejandro Alvarado Zambrano
 - 20/12/24 – Jason Ariel Franco Gil
 - 20/12/24 – Víctor Alfonso García Mera

Amnesty International would like to remind the authorities that they must conduct diligent investigations into any reports of disappearance and take all necessary measures to determine the whereabouts of the victim.⁸⁸

Moreover, when there are indications that a state agent may be involved in the disappearance, the cases must be investigated as potential enforced disappearance. At the time of publication, the Public Prosecutor's Office reported that since 2023, it had received reports of the possible enforced disappearance of 43 people.⁸⁹

88. I/A Court H.R. *Case of Perez Lucas et al. v. Guatemala*. Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of September 4, 2024. Series C No. 536, para. 104.

89. Information shared to Amnesty International by the Public Prosecutor's Office via email on 13 September 2025.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Enforced disappearances are multiplying in Ecuador, while the authorities persist in their failed strategy of militarizing public security and law enforcement.

The cases documented for this report show that, rather than benefiting the population, the strategy known as the “Plan Fenix” enables serious human rights violations to be committed. Enforced disappearances go unpunished and investigations are slow; what limited progress is achieved is due to the constant pressure applied by the families of the disappeared persons.

A review of the investigation files reveals serious shortcomings in the investigations themselves and a lack of resources within the Public Prosecutor’s Office, the National Police and other public institutions. There is also an absence of clearly defined public policies and protocols for searching and investigating these crimes.

IN LIGHT OF THIS, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL MAKES THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ECUADORIAN AUTHORITIES:

- Completely reverse the militarized approach to law enforcement, placing human rights at the centre of all security policies. To this end, the presidency of the Republic must repeal the decrees that make up the “Plan Fenix” and the National Assembly must prohibit, by law, the taking on of law enforcement duties by the armed forces.
- Carry out *ex officio* and without delay the search for disappeared persons in accordance with international human rights standards, in particular the Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons, through the Public Prosecutor’s Office, the National Police and other authorities with search powers.
- Immediately, independently, impartially and effectively investigate, in the ordinary criminal jurisdiction, through the Public Prosecutor’s Office, all cases of disappeared persons in Ecuador and bring before the courts those suspected of criminal responsibility, in fair trials.
- Provide the Specialized unit for investigating the illegitimate use of force of the Public Prosecutor’s Office, particularly that of Guayaquil, with the material and human resources necessary to carry out prompt and effective investigations.
- Ensure that the criminal responsibility of superiors in cases of disappearance of persons is enshrined by law and in accordance with international law and ensure also that they are brought to justice.
- Establish by law that public officials suspected of involvement in an enforced disappearance must be removed from any position in which they could influence the investigations or exert pressure, intimidation or retaliation against those conducting such investigations.
- Take all necessary measures, including through legislative provisions and executive orders, to ensure that the armed forces cooperate fully with investigations and do not impede them by classifying state information or in any other way.
- Ensure that prosecutors and judges can carry out their duties independently and professionally and free from pressure or reprisals for doing so.
- Guarantee the rights of victims and their families, allowing their participation in searches and investigations, and providing protection and comprehensive reparation measures, including access to psychosocial care.

- Adopt, within the framework of the National System to Search for Disappeared and Missing Persons and Respond to Indirect Victims, a comprehensive policy to prevent, investigate and punish enforced disappearances, with a differentiated approach to take into account the particular vulnerability faced by certain groups, such as children and adolescents.
- Give consent for international human rights mechanisms to provide technical assistance to the Public Prosecutor's Office for the investigation of enforced disappearances.
- Take all necessary measures to comply with the recommendations provided to Ecuador in the urgent actions of the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances.
- Adhere promptly and without reservations to the Ljubljana-The Hague Convention on International cooperation in the investigation and prosecution of the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other international crimes.



**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT
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**WHEN INJUSTICE HAPPENS
TO ONE PERSON, IT
MATTERS TO US ALL.**

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“IT WAS THE MILITARY. I SAW THEM.”

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES IN ECUADOR AT THE HANDS OF THE ARMED FORCES

This report presents an analysis of five cases of enforced disappearance that occurred in Ecuador in 2024, in the context of the militarized security strategy promoted by President Daniel Noboa. The cases show that, rather than benefiting the population, the “Plan Fénix” facilitates the commission of serious human rights violations. They also show that, in the absence of clearly established public policies and protocols for the search and investigation of enforced disappearances and a lack of political will, cases remain unpunished and are investigated slowly and with serious flaws. In view of this, Amnesty International recommends that the authorities reverse the militarized approach to public security, urgently search for missing persons, and promptly investigate the allegations of human rights violations.

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