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Ecuador, Peru Finalize Border Demarcation

by LADB Staff

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A decades-old dispute ended May 12 when Presidents Alberto Fujimori of Peru and Jamil Mahuad of Ecuador put the final border marker in place in the Cordillera del Condor where the rivers Yaupi and Santiago meet. The two presidents signed the Final Demarcation Act of the Common Border, which included the provision that Peru give Ecuador the use of the controversial spot called Tiwinza. In addition to a geographic marker, this is "a historic marker because it finishes defining our border," said Mahuad. "Peace is not a ceremony, it is a process; it is not a signature, it is an essential characteristic of the soul of human beings, and we hope it will endure."

In addition to representatives from Rio de Janeiro Protocol guarantor countries Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and the US representatives from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Corporacion Andina de Fomento (CAF), the World Bank, and the Parlamento Andino attended. Ecuador's Foreign Minister Jose Ayala Lasso said the agreement signed by Fujimori and Mahuad signifies the "beginning of a new stage in the relations" between the two countries, which is now marked by "a desire to build a better world for our peoples."

The Global and Definitive Peace Treaty signed by the two presidents in October 1998 in Brasilia ratified the terms of the 1942 Rio de Janeiro Protocol, which ended the 1941 war and which Ecuador later disputed (see NotiSur, 1995-02-10, 1995-08-11, 1998-10-30). Beginning in February, border markers were placed along the disputed 78-km stretch of territory 350 km south of Quito and 1,100 km north of Lima. Before the markers could be placed, the area where each was to go had to be cleared of land mines.

Now the painstaking process of clearing mines from the rest of the border area will begin, with financial help and expertise from the Canada, Japan, Spain, the Ukraine, and the US.

Financing to flow to border

Now that the border is defined, other provisions of the October treaty become effective, including agreements on commerce and navigation on the Amazon, measures to ensure mutual confidence and security, and plans for border development and integration. To achieve the goals for the region, a US\$3 billion "peace fund," with support from multilateral lending organizations and from several developed countries, will finance various projects.

Last February, Mahuad and Fujimori spoke with lenders in Washington to obtain the funds, which will be dispersed during the next 10 years. The projects are supposed to raise the standard of living for the people living in northeastern Peru and southern Ecuador. Two Ecuadoran-controlled trade centers will be constructed in eastern Peru, one on the Marañon and one on the Amazon rivers. Each center will cover 150 hectares and be governed by Peruvian laws. The navigation treaty opens a new trade route for Ecuador with its trading partners in the Amazon Basin, especially in the Peruvian Amazon.

Ecuador and Peru also plan on building highways to unite the two countries, new airports, health centers in the border towns, joint irrigation systems for agricultural projects, electrification projects, and a connection between their oil pipelines. Bilateral trade has already picked up and sustained growth is expected in the medium term that could exceed US\$1 billion. Trade, which had dropped to US\$108 million in 1995, climbed to US\$300 million in 1998. Tiwinza comes under Ecuadoran control In Lima on May 10, the Peruvian government deeded to Ecuador as "private but not sovereign" property a sq km of Peruvian land called Tiwinza, one kilometer inside the Peruvian border. Tiwinza became a symbol of Ecuador's advances during the undeclared war in 1995.

To get around the constitutional prohibition against any foreigners directly or indirectly, individually or collectively possessing land within 50 km of Peru's borders, Fujimori signed a decree saying that turning over Tiwinza was a public necessity. "Peace with Ecuador constitutes a public necessity to ensure the development of the country and ensure that the agreements be the foundation for strengthening bilateral relations for mutual benefit," said the decree.

Not all support the treaty

When he arrived at the border, Fujimori was confronted by angry citizens from the department of Loreto who oppose many provisions in the peace treaty. About 3,000 citizens from Iquitos staged protests, which were organized by the Frente Patriotico de Loreto (FPL).

The FPL said it was considering filing a motion to charge Fujimori with treason for giving up Tiwinza and the sites for the two commerce and navigation centers. And, Ecuadoran Deputy Victor Hugo Sicouret of the Partido Roldosista Ecuatoriano (PRE) said provisions of the treaty are unfavorable to Ecuador and will only keep open the existing wounds.

"President Mahuad and the foreign minister signed a peace treaty abandoning our principles," said Sicouret. "With the signing, we have ceased to be a Amazon country." "No patriotic Ecuadoran thinks that the kilometer of land they are giving us is sufficient to wash away the blood of the soldiers who fell at Tiwinza," he said. "Tomorrow will be a black page in Ecuadoran history. The only thing they are doing is accepting all the agreements that recognize the Rio de Janeiro Protocol, which we have been saying is null for more than 50 years." [Sources: Notimex, 05/10-12/99; El Nuevo Herald (Miami),05/12/99; CNN, 05/12/99, 05/13/99; Inter Press Service, 05/13/99; Reuters, Spanish news service EFE, 05/13/99, 05/14/99]

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