

Five Peruvians sentenced for espionage in Ecuador, four alleged to be pastors

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Quito, Ecuador--Five Peruvian citizens have been sentenced to 16 years in prison each for alleged spying activities during a border conflict earlier this year between Ecuador and Peru.

Ecuador had originally detained seven people on espionage charges, but later released two of them saying they were innocent.

Peruvian human rights groups charged that four of those detained were evangelical pastors/missionaries working in Ecuador. However, Ecuadorian authorities later said three of the men were Roman Catholic missionaries working in Ecuador.

The names of the four clergy are: Edgar Jonny Seminario Covenas, Jose Manuel Timana Sandoval, Jorge Antonio Maza Salinas and Jose Rojano Gonzalez Alarcon.

Local church officials in Quito reported that Gonzalez was a missionary with The Mission Society of the Christian Church in Ecuador and had admitted passing information to Peruvian authorities. Ecuadorian authorities said he belongs to the Congregation of Peruvian Primitive Christians.

Ecuadorian authorities said Seminario had admitted to passing geographic intelligence to Peruvian authorities, including information on ports and bus terminals.

Timana was accused of passing information concerning military operations and bases. Officials said he was a member of the Peruvian army.

Maza also was accused of passing information on troop movements and housing areas for Ecuadorian military. Officials said he also was soldier in the Army.

Meanwhile, the two countries have not reached an agreement on a proposed exchange of prisoners which would include the five alleged Peruvian spies, and a number of Ecuadorians being held in Peru.

The two countries fought a conflict over their undisputed border in February of this year which left dozens dead and hundreds wounded. The fragile peace agreement is still being negotiated, and several skirmishes have been reported in recent weeks.

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