

Introduction

There's a saying in Ecuador that when God created the world he left his finger just a little longer in Ecuador. Ecuador is home to the highest active volcano in the world, extraordinary Amazonian rainforests and stunning tropical beaches. It's a country of great beauty, diversity and vibrant indigenous cultures.



History

The Inca invaded Ecuador in 1460 establishing their language, Quechua, amongst the indigenous tribes and bringing with them a powerful and advanced society.

Lured by the promise of gold and great riches, the Spanish landed in Ecuador in 1532, defeated the Inca, to establish a rule that lasted for nearly 300 years. The Spanish legacy can be seen in the colonial architecture, the official language – Spanish – and the prevalence of Roman Catholicism.

In 1822, Ecuador won its independence from Spain and joined Colombia and Venezuela to form the state of Gran Colombia. Originally intended to form part of a united South American constitutional republic, Ecuador seceded from the union eight years later, bringing an end to the union.

Modern times have been marked by internal struggles and turbulent political disputes. Much of the disputes have been between the conservative city of Quito and the liberal city of Guayaquil. Assassinations of leaders on both sides have occurred. Military dictators ruled Ecuador until 1979 when, although still politically unstable, Ecuador returned to democracy. Since 1996, ten presidents have governed Ecuador.

Current challenges

- ▶ It is estimated that nearly 80 per cent of the population in Ecuador live on less than £1 a day. Sixty five per cent of Ecuadorians are underemployed. Poverty and unemployment are widespread.
- ▶ Access to healthcare remains very limited, especially in the poor rural areas. Around 32 per cent of women give birth without medical attention.
- ▶ Ecuador's economy is unstable which has had a ripple effect on the whole country. For poor pre-school-aged children, this has meant missing out on the crucial foundation laid by a pre-school education. Children unable to attend pre-school are more likely to drop out of school, and, without education, it is nearly impossible for them to improve their quality of life.

BMS involvement in Ecuador

BMS World Mission involvement in Ecuador is in its early stages. The Baptist Convention of Ecuador has recently engaged in partnerships with BMS to strengthen the mission work of the churches through the development of programmes that help local churches to bring together the social and evangelistic dimensions of the gospel. The first projects that BMS will support in Ecuador include:

Mission leader's training programme in Guayaquil

John and Norma Clark, BMS workers in Brazil for 37 years, and are due to retire in 2008 have been responsible for the development of a country-wide mission leaders' training programme.

Establishing PEPEs in local churches

BMS are helping establish pre-school education programmes (PEPEs) in Ecuador by training teachers. The PEPE programme is a proven way of addressing the root causes of poverty and violence in poor communities. Mid-termer Lizzie Hamlin is working alongside Ecuadorian colleagues in this ministry.

Church work amongst the urban poor

Church work among the urban poor Peter and Vicki Butchers are involved in church work amongst people living in urban poverty in Ecuador.

Social-evangelistic projects with the indigenous riverside communities in the Amazonian Basin

BMS is developing channels for a variety of BMS teams to work with Ecuadorian Home Mission projects amongst these needy groups.

Background Information

The land

Sometimes referred to as the 'Republic of the Equator', Ecuador is situated on the north west coast of South America, at the equator. At 283,560 sq km Ecuador is only slightly larger than the UK (244,820 sq km). The country is divided north to south by the Andes mountains into three geographically distinct regions, each with its own natural beauty. To the west of the Andes lies the tropical climate of the coastal plain where the city of Guayaquil is situated, an important financial and industrial centre. To the east of the Andes is the Amazon basin of Ecuador's interior. In the middle, the Andes are home to the capital city of Quito.

Ecuador has rich oil resources and agricultural areas and exports mostly primary resources such as oil and bananas. However, the export of primary resources has meant that Ecuador is particularly sensitive to fluctuations in world market prices, which have a huge domestic impact.

Religion

Following the Spanish conquest in 1532, Catholicism was introduced to the indigenous people of Ecuador. As in other Latin American countries the Catholicism of the Conquistadores, itself strongly rooted in the superstitious folk religion of medieval Europe, quickly absorbed elements of the animistic nature worship of the Inca peoples. Most Ecuadorians have been brought up in this mixed religious tradition which continues to have a very significant influence within the nation's culture. However, despite the conservatism of more rural indigenous groups, there is a growing openness amongst Ecuadorians to discover the lively message and relevance of the Christian gospel for today.

The Baptist Convention of Ecuador has approximately 150 churches and 40 mission congregations scattered throughout the country.

Prayer points

- ▶ Pray that the Baptist Convention of Ecuador will continue to grow and develop.
- ▶ Pray for BMS World Mission's pioneering work in Ecuador, especially for creative vision, and resources to carry out BMS' strategy, including establishing PEPEs (church-based pre-school initiatives). Pray that PEPEs would reach the large number of slum communities.
- ▶ Pray for the government of Ecuador to stabilise and to govern the country with integrity and wisdom.
- ▶ Pray that the many Ecuadorians caught in the cycle of poverty will be given the opportunity to improve their quality of life.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Keep up-to-date with BMS World Mission's work across the globe by visiting www.bmsworldmission.org

- ▶ sign up for our weekly e-mail updates and mission personnel prayer letters
- ▶ find out more about the resources we have to offer
- ▶ discover how you can get involved in BMS World Mission

BMS World Mission
PO Box 49 Didcot OX11 8XA
T: 01235 517700
E-mail: mail@bmsworldmission.org

Registered as a charity in England & Wales (number 233782)
and in Scotland (number SC037767)

