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Ecuador says USAID must leave by end of September

5/10/2014

Ecuador has called for the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to leave the country by the end of September.

In a letter obtained by the Associated Press on Thursday, Ecuador's government told the USAID that it "must not execute any new activity," nor widen any existing projects in the country.

The letter, dated November 26, 2013, was signed by Gabriela Rosero of Ecuador's international cooperation agency and was sent to the US Embassy in the Ecuadorean capital of Quito.

The letter was reportedly addressed to USAID program officer, Christopher M. Cushing.

Rosero said that the USAID must pull out by September 30, and that "the decision has been made."

Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa suggested in December that the USAID's programs were no longer welcome in Ecuador, saying on one of his regular Saturday programs on television and radio that "we don't need charity."

In April, Ecuador ordered 20 US military staff working at the US Embassy in Quito to leave the country by the end of the month.

In January, President Rafael Correa publicly complained that the United States had too many military officers in the country. He said Ecuador planned to order some to leave. Many observers say that the action was taken over concerns about Washington's espionage activities.

Relations between the United States and Ecuador have strained in recent years. There were even tense relations before President Correa granted political asylum to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in June 2012 in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London.

Assange gained international prominence in 2010, when WikiLeaks began publishing thousands of confidential US diplomatic cables, which embarrassed the US government. The website has also published hundreds of thousands of classified US documents relating to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Ecuador has forced out several US diplomats including former ambassador, Heather Hodges, in 2011.