

Trade Deal With China Doesn't Need to Mean Friction With U.S.: Ecuador's Lasso

By Gene Kuleta

WASHINGTON—Ecuadorean President Guillermo Lasso, whose government is finalizing a free trade agreement with China, said Tuesday that he wants to maintain good relations with both China and the United States but that he must first consider the benefits of such a deal for Ecuador.

"In matters of foreign relations, I have always thought that a government has to think of the interests of its citizens," Lasso told the Advisor in an interview. "I think maintaining a good relationship with China doesn't imply having a bad relationship with the United States, or vice versa."



Lasso // Photo: Gastón Ocampo, Inter-American Dialogue.

Lasso, who spoke to the Advisor following remarks at the Inter-American Dialogue, said he has expressed a desire for good relations both to U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping, whose countries are trade rivals. Lasso said a main benefit Ecuador will see from a free trade pact with China is tariff-free access to China for Ecuadorean shrimp. Half of Ecuador's exports of shrimp go to China, he said. The Ecuadorean president said last week that his government was on the verge of completing negotiations on a trade accord with China following 10 months of talks.

The new trade deal is expected to increase Ecuadorean exports to China by \$1 billion and also increase employment in the South American nation. China this year surpassed

the United States as Ecuador's largest trading partner for goods other than petroleum.

During his visit to Washington, Lasso met with Biden Monday at the White House. Biden and Lasso discussed strengthening economic ties, and the White House said that the U.S. International Development

Finance Cooperation would disburse \$13.5 million for microfinance loans in Ecuador, including for businesses that are owned and led by women. "Generating employment, especially for women, will help us in fighting violence against women" and will help more

women become economically independent, Lasso said Tuesday.

Biden and Lasso also agreed to deepen security cooperation, the White House said. Ecuador has faced gang violence and a series of prison riots that have left more than 300 people dead since last year. The presidents also discussed regional cooperation on migration. More than seven million Venezuelans have fled their country since 2015, with more than 502,000 of them setting in Ecuador, according to the United Nations. In September, Ecuador began a program to regularize Venezuelan migrants in the country. "The world has been generous to Ecuador, and Ecuador cannot be so selfish as to today say no and reject Venezuelans," Lasso said at the Inter-American Dialogue, adding that he is the youngest in a family of 11 siblings. "My mother would always say that if a guest arrives, there is also food for them."