

CORREA: ECUADOR MUST PRESERVE GALAPAGOS

The Miami Herald
Apr. 11, 2007

QUITO, Ecuador --

President Rafael Correa called on his Cabinet and local authorities to meet urgently to better preserve Ecuador's famed Galapagos Islands, the country's top tourist destination. His suggestions include restricting tourist and residency permits as well as flights to the islands.

Correa's announcement Tuesday coincided with a visit by a UNESCO delegation, which is meeting with Ecuadorean authorities to determine ways to preserve the archipelago.

UNESCO's World Heritage Center director warned last month of threats to the flora and fauna of the "fragile and delicate" island chain.

Correa, in his signed emergency decree, did not specify whether government agencies would be given more money to combat the effects of tourism, human settlement, the introduction of nonnative species and other threats.

The decree said the meeting should take place within 15 days.

Last year, the government announced plans to deport to the mainland some 5,000 Ecuadoreans illegally residing in the Galapagos. About 15,000 Ecuadoreans legally live there, working in fishing or tourism.

The Galapagos Islands, located 625 miles off Ecuador's Pacific coast, were declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979 for their unique plant and animal life including giant tortoises, marine iguanas and blue-footed boobies.

Charles Darwin's observations of the islands' finches inspired his theory of evolution.