

## Freedom of Press Violated in US, Brazil and Across Americas

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The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has released a note expressing its concern on the vulnerability which affects journalists throughout the Americas.

During the period between October 1st and December 31st of 2006, six journalists were murdered in Mexico for reasons that could be related to the practice of journalism, and another journalist has gone missing in that same country.

In addition, over 50 incidents of physical assault or threats against journalists were reported in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.

All these events have taken place within a situation of impunity which is common to the majority of the reported cases of murders, physical assaults and threats, and such a situation encourages these acts to continue happening regularly.

Concerning Brazil, the Special Rapporteur mentioned the alleged tapping by the Federal Police of telephones of journalists of the newspaper Folha de S. Paulo.

It also showed concern for the questioning that the Federal Police conducted on the journalists of the magazine Veja in order to get them to reveal their information sources.

Brazil has also had several cases of prior censorship imposed by the courts plus the prison and conviction of journalist Fausto Brites, editor of the newspaper Correio do Estado, who accused of criminal defamation filed by a public servant in relation to a report on money laundering.

As for the United States the Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression regretted that the US Supreme Court of Justice has rejected the request of The New York Times to impede the Federal Attorney from reviewing the telephone files of journalists from the newspaper in relation to their investigations regarding the alleged participation of companies in the financing of terrorist activities.

Principle 8 of the Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression approved by the IACHR establishes that: "Every social communicator has the right to keep his/her source of information, notes, personal and professional archives confidential."

Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Ignacio J. Álvarez, expressed that "within the alarming increase in violence against journalists in the region during 2006, the fourth trimester of the year was especially tragic for freedom of expression".

He added that "it is imperative that the States address the situation of violence against journalists in the region and the impunity of the respective cases. Political statements regarding this matter are important, but not enough.

"More effective measures must be taken; these must consist in imposing sanctions to the material or intellectual perpetrators of such crimes. When a journalist is murdered or attacked, not only is the victim affected, but indeed, all of society is as well".

The Special Rapporteur also stresses the harmful consequences for freedom of expression generated by the pressures on the media imposed by some national and local governments in relation to their editorial position in general or with the specific position of certain programs, through the use of mechanisms such as threats and discriminatory allocation of official advertising.

In addition to affecting the freedom of the media itself and of the public in general, journalists are also affected by having their programs cancelled or by being dismissed or forced to resign. During the period analyzed, programs were taken off the air and journalists were the object of dismissals or forced to resign due to the pressure imposed on the media.

The Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression also points out positive events which have taken place during this period, including the investigation and the sanctions applied to the intellectual perpetrator of the death threats received by journalist Daniel Coronell and the call for a public bid to assign frequencies to community radios in the 24 capitals of the departments of Colombia.

In addition, the Office of the Special Rapporteur considers as positive that the National Congress of Honduras has approved the Law of Transparency and Access to Public Information.

This quarterly report, based on the daily monitoring that the Office of the Special Rapporteur carries out on the situation of the right to the freedom of expression in the region, seeks to emphasize the concerns and advances that have taken place in matters relating to freedom of expression, and to try to contribute to the adoption of corrective measures which could be pertinent for a greater exercises to the right to freedom of thought and expression.

## Argentina

Given the complains about discriminatory allocation of official advertising in the country, the Office of the Special Rapporteur considers important to be able to advance in the discussion of pending law projects in the National Congress that seek to regulate the allocation of official advertising.

On the other hand, the Office of the Special Rapporteur is concerned that during the analyzed quarter several radio programs were taken off the air due to alleged pressures from public officials.

## Colombia

The Office of the Special Rapporteur expresses its concern over the high number of threats and assaults carried out against journalists in this quarter. The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression is closely monitoring

the detention of journalist Fredy Muñoz Altamiranda, correspondent for Telesur, who has been linked to an investigation on crimes of terrorism and rebellion. The journalist was freed on January 9, 2007, but the investigation is still underway.

On the other hand, the Office of the Special Rapporteur considers positive that the intellectual perpetrator of the death threats received by journalist Daniel Coronell has been investigated and sanctioned, and that a public notice has been issued to assign frequencies to community radios in the 24 capitals of the departments of Colombia.

## Cuba

The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression reiterates its great concern over the systematic and continuous situation of utter and complete disrespect for freedom of thought and expression in Cuba.

During the period analyzed, journalist Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta received a beating while in jail; journalists Pedro Enrique Martínez Machada, Carlos Serpa Maceira, Juan Carlos Linares Balmaceda and Ahmed Rodríguez Almacía were deprived of their freedom; journalists Raimundo Perdigón Brito and Guillermo Espinosa Rodríguez were sentenced to incarceration and journalist Luis Felipe Rojas Rosabal had his books and personal items confiscated.

## Honduras

The Office of the Special Rapporteur regrets the murder of lawyer Dionisio García, who acted as advisor for the journalistic team of the Association for a More Just Society (Asociación por una Sociedad Más Justa) in their investigations about the work conditions in security companies. On the other hand, the Office of the Special Rapporteur considers positive that the National Congress of Honduras has approved the Law of Transparency and Access to Public Information.

## Mexico

The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression is alarmed by the extreme vulnerability of journalists in Mexico. During the especially tragic fourth quarter of 2006, the following journalists were murdered: Brad Will, Misael Tamayo Hernández, José Manuel Nava Sánchez, Roberto Marcos García, Adolfo Sánchez Guzmán, Raúl Marcial Pérez, and journalist José Antonio García Apac disappeared.

The Office of the Special Rapporteur urges the new government to give maximum priority to prevent that these and previously committed murders go unpunished, given that impunity encourages new murders to be perpetrated as well as self-censorship situations as a result of the absence of guarantees for the rights to life and to freedom of expression.

## Paraguay

The Office of the Special Rapporteur expresses its concern over the conviction to journalist Luis Verón for the crimes of criminal defamation after publishing an article where he criticized the restoration of an architectural piece.

## Peru

The Office of the Special Rapporteur manifests its concern over another quarter with a high number of assaults and threats against journalists in the country. On the other hand, the Office of the Special Rapporteur expresses its worry over the approval of Law No. 27962 which modified the existing norm that regulated international technical cooperation. It also considers that the new legislation contains dispositions that could limit the right to freedom of thought and expression of nongovernmental organizations in Peru and that of its members.

## Venezuela

The Office of the Special Rapporteur says it has been closely monitoring the situation regarding RCTV.