

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/colombia-colombian-candidates-urged-to-22-05-2014,46328.html>

Americas - Colombia

Presidential election

Colombian candidates urged to respect journalists' work

22 May 2014

To the 25 May presidential election candidates

Clara López
Enrique Peñalosa
Marta Lucía Ramírez
Juan Manuel Santos Calderón
Óscar Iván Zuluaga

Dear Presidential Candidates,

Reporters Without Borders, an international organization that defends freedom of information, would like to remind you before the 25 May presidential election of the crucial importance for the public interest of what journalists do and the need to guarantee their security at all times in order to ensure a peaceful democratic climate.

The successful presidential candidate must treat media freedom and the fight against impunity for crimes of violence against journalists as priorities for Colombia, which is ranked 126th out of 180 countries in [our organization's press freedom index](#).

Reporters Without Borders asks you to make it a point of honour to ensure that the safety of journalists is respected during these sensitive elections. Colombia's voters are going to the polls just weeks after riot police attacked four journalists who were covering May Day demonstrations in Medellín. One of these journalists, [Esteban Vanegas](#), was improperly accused of attacking the police.

Twelve days later, riot police fired teargas at photographer José Luis Torres, *RCN Noticias* reporter **Eider Marines** and *Telenoticias* reporter **Jhon Fredy Ocoró** as they were covering a protest against the lack of drinking water in the western city of Buenaventura. In the absence of any reaction from the city's police chief, many of its journalists went on strike.

It is essential that the presidential candidates should undertake to end the impunity enjoyed by those responsible for threats, physical attacks and murders targeting journalists in Colombia. Reporters Without Borders has registered 19 murders of media personnel in connection with their work during the past 12 years and three presidential terms. They all remain unsolved except that of **Efraín Alberto Varela Noriega** in the western department of Arauca in 2002, whose murderer was sentenced to 13 years in prison in 2007.

The fact that murders committed before 2000 are subject to a 20-year statute of limitations make this level of impunity all the more disturbing. [Colombia should treat murders of journalists as crimes against humanity](#) – which are not subject to any statute of limitations under Colombian and international law – as it has done in the case of the murders of **José Eustorgio Colmenares Baptista** and **Guillermo Cano**.

The statute of limitations took effect in January of this year for the 28 January 1994 murder of **Jesús Medina Parra**. If nothing is done, impunity will also be eternal for the 27 May 1994 murder of **Abelardo Martín Pinzón** and the 3 September 1994 murder of **Martín Eduardo Múnera**.

Reporters Without Borders reiterates its request to the authorities to set up a proper protection mechanism for professional and non-professional journalists by reinforcing the interior ministry's National Protection Unit programmes. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights stressed this need in its latest report on freedom of expression on 23 April.

[Yonni Stevens Caicedo](#), a journalist working for local TV stations *TV Noticias* and *Más Noticias*, was murdered on 19 February, seven months after receiving death threats. Reporters Without Borders had criticized the ineffectiveness of the measures taken by local police after the initial threats.

In outlying regions, the danger to journalists may also come from agricultural or industrial quarters, as was the case with **Exequiel Henao Guzmán** of *Radio Super de Popoyán*, who was threatened by three people, presumably mine employees, while researching a story about the San Antonio mine collapse, near the southwestern town of Santander de Quilichao, on 4 May. The day before, *Radio Tulúa* journalist **Eugenio Lucas** was the target of a grenade attack at his home. Reporters Without Borders urges the authorities to investigate these threats thoroughly in order to identify those responsible and ensure that the threats are not carried out.

I take this opportunity to draw your attention to the fact that, as in 25 other Latin American countries, media offences are still punishable by imprisonment in Colombia. Only Uruguay and Argentina have abolished prison sentences for libel, slander and insults. Reform hopes were raised in Colombia by a supreme court decision in July 2013 quashing a jail sentence for newspaper editor [Luis Agustín González](#) in a libel case. Unfortunately, there has been no progress since then.

I thank you in advance for the attention you give to this letter.

Sincerely,

Christophe Deloire
Reporters Without Borders secretary-general



**Carta a
candidatos 2014**

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