

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/costa-rica-government-accused-of-spying-on-21-01-2014,45759.html>

Americas - Costa Rica

Phone surveillance

Government accused of spying on newspaper's reporters

21 January 2014

Reporters Without Borders calls for a parliamentary committee investigation into spying on the San José-based *Diario Extra* newspaper, which reported at new conference yesterday that the Judicial Investigation Agency (OIJ) and the office of the public prosecutor have been monitoring the private and professional phone calls of its journalists for the past ten months.

"This is very similar to the scandalous [seizure of the Associated Press' phone records](#) in the United States," Reporters Without Borders said.

"Such activities violate the confidentiality of the news media's sources, which is the bedrock of journalism. They jeopardize the safety and work of the journalists concerned and, beyond that, the ability of the press to perform its watchdog role.

"Following the adoption of a [computer crimes law](#) that is still very controversial even after being amended, freedom of information has now suffered another serious setback in a country that has traditionally demonstrated a high degree of respect for this freedom."

Reporters Without Borders added: "Inasmuch as the highest government levels seem implicated in this scandal, parliament should unite the entire political spectrum in a concerted effort to establish the facts and identify those responsible. And the results of its investigation should be made public."

Accusing the government of practices "worthy of authoritarian regimes," *Diario Extra* deputy editor **Patricia Hernández** said the aim of the spying was to identify government employees who have been acting as [whistleblowers](#).

Diario Extra also reported that it had received threatening calls from OIJ officials and that journalists had been followed when they went to meet with sources. The newspaper intends to refer the case to Inter-American bodies.

OIJ deputy director Gerald Campos said the agency obtained a judge's permission to investigate an OIJ employee who was suspected of revealing sensitive information about a case of abduction. Divulging confidential information is penalized by article 322-b of Costa Rica's criminal code.

The US Department of Justice acknowledged in May 2013 that it had obtained the records of calls made a year earlier from 20 of the *Associated Press'* phone lines and the phones of some of its reporters. Coming amid a generalized witch hunt against leaks and whistleblowers, the admission revived calls for [federal-level protection](#) of journalists' sources.



**RWB:
Whistleblowers
need protection**

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