

Reporters Without Borders

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Americas - Honduras

Fatal attack

Journalist killed, paper attacked as violence against media grows

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The murder yesterday of **Luz Marina Paz Villalobos**, a journalist with the radio station *Cadena Hondureña de Noticias* (CHN), in Comayagüela on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa, brings to 17 the number of journalists killed in Honduras since 2010.

Paz was test-driving a car when two men on a motorcycle opened fire, instantly killing her and a mechanic who was accompanying her.

Was this an attempt to steal the car, a settling of scores, or punishment for refusing to pay a "war tax" demanded by drug dealers on the business that she ran in parallel with her radio career? The motives for the crime are still difficult to determine precisely.

Paz was known to have views that were hostile to the present government. She had worked for almost 10 years at Radio Globo, an opposition station sympathetic to former President Manuel Zelaya, who was overthrown in a coup in 2009. Investigators believe the attack may be related to her work.

Noting that no murders of journalists have been solved since 2010, Reporters Without Borders said: "We deplore the disgraceful impunity enjoyed by those who order and carry out these crimes.

"The lack of conclusive investigations leaves the profession vulnerable to attacks by drug traffickers and some local authorities whose criminal activities have been exposed in the press.

"In this connection, we recall that the killers of the journalist **Medardo Flores**, a member of the deposed president's party, the Broad Front for Popular Resistance (FARP), who was murdered in September, have not yet been identified."

The press freedom organization noted there had been an unprecedented increase in attacks on the press. The day before Paz's murder, the newspaper *La Tribuna* was the target of an armed attack by gunmen who fired several shots at its office in Tegucigalpa. A security guard was taken to hospital suffering from serious stomach wounds.

The newspaper's editorial team believes the attack could have been in reprisal for the publication of an article on 22 November accusing members of the police of killing the son of Julieta Castellanos, the director of the National Autonomous University of Honduras, and one of his friends.

The attack on *La Tribuna* followed many death threats and assaults against its journalists, who have been prepared to expose the criminal excesses of the police force.

"What is the future of journalists who show courage and concern for the right of citizens to be informed? Judicial indifference, a product of the highly polarised media climate since the coup, gives the military and police a free hand to take it out on news organizations that dare to draw attention to the abuses and misdemeanours of public authorities," Reporters Without Borders concluded.
