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Americas - Colombia

Criminal violence

Journalist investigating child prostitution attacked in Colombia

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The journalist Oscar Castaño Valencia was assaulted and threatened by armed men four days ago as he was investigating the involvement of criminal gangs in child sexual exploitation in Antioquia department in North-West Colombia.

For the past three months **Castaño**, director of the program "Oriéntese" on the TV station *Cosmovisión*, has been carrying out an investigation into child sexual exploitation activities by the criminal groups known as "combos" in the town of Bello in Antioquia. He was on his way to meet a source when he was attacked by three armed and masked men. He was tied up, threatened and beaten, then forced to sign a "confession" that he had gone there with the intention of raping an under-age girl. The attackers made a recording of the forced confession then let him go, telling him his life was at stake.

After the attack, Castaño lodged a complaint with the state prosecutor's office in Medellín, the capital of Antioquia department, and asked the government for protection. The journalist had previously been threatened when he was head of the trade union of the Colombian National University and was forced into exile for nine years in 1987.

In 2011, he was threatened again after he made a documentary about disputes over mining activities. He says is now worried for his family.

"Reporters Without Borders urges the National Protection Unit to ensure Oscar Castaño Valencia and his family are given effective protection as soon as possible," said Claire San Filippo, head of the organization's Americas desk. "The government must ensure that attacks on journalists do not go unpunished."

The combos are extremely violent and well known to the elite GAULA police units that specialize in cases of abduction and extortion. A GAULA unit carried out a raid in the area where Castaño was attacked a few days later. There has been an increase in threats against journalists in Colombia since the beginning of the year.

The Office of the Defender of the Colombian People, a national body created to promote human rights, says it has recorded twice as many reports of threats against journalists this year compared with 2013. Colombia remains the [second deadliest country for journalists](#) in Latin America.

It is ranked 126th of 180 countries in the [World Press Freedom Index](#) published by Reporters Without Borders
