

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/colombie-spying-on-journalists-compromises-19-02-2014,45904.html>

Americas - Colombia

Illegal surveillance

Spying on journalists compromises coverage of peace talks

19 February 2014

Reporters Without Borders calls for full respect for the work of journalists by President Juan Manuel Santos' government and members of the armed forces, both acting and retired, following the latest allegations of Colombia government spying on the media.

The Miami-based Spanish-language TV station *Univision* reported on 8 February that at least 2,600 emails between foreign reporters and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) were intercepted after peace talks resumed between FARC and Colombian government representatives in Havana in January.

These emails, to which *Univision* gained access, were intercepted by a digital surveillance unit that is almost certainly under Colombian government control.

The unit allegedly spied on email exchanges between journalists and the two FARC spokesmen responsible for the negotiations since their resumption in January – Hermes Aguilar and Fernando Salcedo.

The news media affected included international news organizations such as *Agence France-Presse*, the *Associated Press*, *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, the Spanish News Agency *EFE* and *Reuters*, and Colombia media such as *Radio Caracol*, *El Tiempo*, the TV programme *Noticias Uno* and the online newspaper *El Turbi3n*.

Such surveillance constitutes a clear violation of the confidentiality of journalists' sources, comparable to last May's revelation of the [US government's seizure of the Associated Press's phone records](#), and directly undermines the ability of reporters to investigate sensitive subjects of public interest.

The confidentiality of journalists' sources is protected in Colombia by the Constitution and Constitutional Court case law.

"Have the Colombian authorities learned nothing from the 'Dasgate' spying scandal?" said Camille Soulier, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Americas desk. "We urge them to take concrete steps to end such practices. And we call for a parliamentary commission of enquiry to establish the government's role and to ensure that journalists are protected against any future government spying.

"Despite continuing judicial proceedings, the intensive surveillance apparatus put in place under former President Alvaro Uribe does not seem to have been dismantled. This shows that the authorities do not respect the work that journalists do, providing the public with information."

This is unfortunately not the first time that the Colombian authorities have spied on journalists. The [chuzadas](#) (phone-tapping) scandal that broke in 2010 has not been forgotten.

Dozens of journalists, news agencies and NGOs, including the International Federation for Human Rights and OXFAM Solidarity, [filed complaints accusing Uribe](#) of responsibility for the surveillance, threats and illegal phone tapping to which they were subjected during his two-term presidency (2002-2010).

None of these proceedings has so far made any kind of progress and all of the abuses by Colombia's leading intelligence agency, the Administrative Department of Security (DAS), are

still unpunished.

The sole exception is the investigation that was initiated in response to the many complaints filed since 2003 by the journalist [Claudia Julieta Duque](#) of the human rights radio station *Nizkor*, who was the victim of psychological torture. However, not even Duque's case has so far come to trial.

Reporters Without Borders is also concerned about the fact that journalists and media that cover judicial proceedings and investigations of a political nature are subject to constant harassment by a group of former military officers.

In an *RCN* radio interview yesterday with Brig. Gen. Jaime Ruiz Barrera, who heads the association of former Colombian military officers, journalist **Vicky Dávila** expressed concern about his comments.

He referred to investigative reporting as "media smear campaigns" and condemned "insidious, capricious and malicious journalists who help dark forces and the FARC to work against the government."

Photo: Le Figaro

Slideshow: El Espectador

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