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<http://www.rsf.org/guatemala-whistle-blowing-journalist-accused-31-10-2011,41319.html>

Americas - Guatemala

Criminal militias

Whistle-blowing journalist accused of using drugs by local security committee

31 October 2011

Lucía Escobar, the head of the radio station *Radio Ati* in the town of Panajachel, in the Sololá department of south-western Guatemala, accused the town's security committee on 27 October of being behind threats she has received since she published an [opinion piece](#) in the newspaper *elPeriódico*. Her article drew attention to the involvement of several members of the committee in the disappearance of a young man two weeks ago as well as in "social cleansing" carried out by the urban militia, in place since 2009. Escobar left home two days ago to seek shelter in a secret location.

Reporters Without Borders urges the authorities to ensure her protection and to conduct a serious and effective investigation into those behind the threats.

The Guatemalan state is unable to maintain order in the corrupt social and political climate since the end of the civil war in 1996, and juntas and committees have sprung up which devote themselves to "social cleansing" of delinquents.

In her article, Escobar accused several influential members of the committee, as well the town's mayor, Gerardo Higuero, of "representing and defending the 'hooded men' ("los encapuchados") of Panajachel, who go around at night with their faces hidden and armed with all sort of weapons, such as baseball bats and tasers, to enforce security in the town. "Up to now, more than 30 complaints have been made against these hooded men for various crimes, such as abuse of authority, torture and illegal detention," the article said. "One could also point to assassinations, social cleansing and extra-judicial killings."

The committee responded through the Panajachel television station *Canal 10*, owned by the mayor, on 27 October during a televised meeting, with members accusing Escobar of being implicated in the trafficking and consumption of drugs. The Latin American journalists' organization IPYS reports that she has received [threatening messages](#), telling her she will be found at the bottom of Lake Atitlán, a reference to the last sentence of her article: "If I am the next (victim) to lie at the bottom of the most beautiful lake in the world with my body weighed down with stones, you will know who is responsible."

According to a report published on 27 October by the secretariat of the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, Central America is the most violent region of the world, because of armed groups linked to organised crime, which makes it a dangerous region for journalistic investigation. In Honduras, **Edy Andino**, a journalist with the television station *Canal 6*, was shot and seriously wounded in the northern city of San Pedro Sula by four men firing from a tourist bus while he was driving home. The gunmen stopped firing when he told them he worked for *Canal 6*, a sign that the attack was not linked to his work. The journalist is out of danger.
