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Americas - Bolivia

Disturbing impunity

Charges dropped against main suspects in double murder

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The Bolivian justice system has yet to try anyone for the double murder of brother-and-sister journalists Verónica and Víctor Hugo Peñasco two years ago in El Alto, a city adjoining La Paz, although ten suspects were originally arrested.

The two journalists worked for the Aymara radio stations *San Gabriel* and *Pachaqamasa* and *Canal 7 Televisión Boliviana*.

On 11 February, Judge Dina Larrea was supposed to decide whether the two main suspects, Juan Monroy Dueñas and Félix Fernando Yupanqui Condori, should be tried for the double murder, but the hearing was suspended for an unknown reason.

Dueñas and Yupanqui, said to be members of the Cogoterros, a criminal gang operating in El Alto, were bizarrely released on the prosecutor-general's orders on 30 January, although the judicial investigation is still under way.

A second hearing was due to be held on 12 February to decide whether Noemí Nina Paty and a fourth suspect should stand trial, but it was also postponed, and was rescheduled for today.

"We deplore the slow pace with which this case is proceeding, especially as the investigation got off to a good start because of the public's concern and the determination of the police involved," said Camille Soulier, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Americas desk.

"We think it is unacceptable that suspects have been released before the investigation has been completed and before the motive has been established, and we call for justice to be served in the murders of these two journalists at today's hearing."

Soulier added: "We also urge the prosecutor-general to reach a quick and sensible evaluation of the implication of the various suspects to and to reconsider the implication of the persons against whom charges have been dismissed without good reason."

Dueñas and Yupanqui were arrested on 7 March, a week after the double murder. Evidence of their involvement was provided by the defence, which revealed that Verónica Peñasco had received phone calls from a number assigned to Dueñas.

Bolivia is ranked 94th out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).
