

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/bolivia-political-motive-suspected-in-31-10-2012,43623.html>

Americas - Bolivia

Slow investigation

Two suspects in Radio Popular arson attack still on the run

9 November 2012

The investigation into the 29 October arson attack on *Radio Popular* in Yacuiba (in the southern department of Tarija) has made little progress since the arrest of four suspects shortly after the attack, in which station manager **Fernando Vidal** and a technician were badly injured.

Vidal's son-in-law, fellow journalist **Esteban Farfán**, told Reporters Without Borders there has been "no significant progress." Two individuals suspected of involvement – one identified only by the nickname of "Chaqueño Cuenca" and the other identified as José Alberto Villena aka "El Cuñao" – are being sought in nearby Argentine border towns, Farfán said.

"Chaqueño Cuenca" has been named as the mastermind by Jairo Félix Sejas Chavarría, 21, aka "El Jairo," one of the four suspected perpetrators who were arrested shortly after the attack. The other three are Edward Vargas Arias, 26, a taxi driver known as "El Sapo," Juan José Antonio Camacho, 25, a mechanic known as "El Negro," and José Omar Portal Paredes, aka "Chino."

"Chaqueño Cuenca" allegedly hired a total of five people to "burn down" the radio station – but not kill its manager – offering each of them 2,000 bolivianos (230 euros). The arson attack was reportedly planned at his home in the presence of leaders of the Tarija-based National Autonomous Party (PAN).

"We are aware that a police and judicial investigation takes time and that the prosecutor's office has six months to reach its conclusions, but we hope there will be more progress before then, given the evidence already available," Reporters Without Borders said. "There should be no rush to rule out the possibility of a political motive either."

Reporters Without Borders, which is concerned about the situation of journalists in Tarija, is also waiting for the police to solve the shooting attack on freelance reporter and columnist **Humberto Vacaflor's** home in the city of Tarija on 11 October.

In Yacuiba, relations are extremely tense between mayor Carlos Eduardo Bru Cavero and some of the local media. The mayor recently brought two criminal prosecutions against **José Manuel Ramos Peláez**, a correspondent of the magazine *Larga Vista* and head of the *Agencia Chaqueña de Información (ACHI)*, for alleging that he was involved in corruption.

31.10.12 - Political motive suspected in arson attack on border town radio station

Reporters Without Borders takes note of the progress apparently being made in the investigation into a shocking arson attack two days ago on a local radio station near Bolivia's southern border with Argentina, in which station manager, **Fernando Vidal**, 70, and one of his technicians, **Karen Arce**, 25, were almost killed.

Yesterday the police said they have arrested three men on suspicion of carrying out the attack on *Radio Popular FM* in the border city of Yacuiba (in Tarija department). The three – Eduardo Vargas, Juan José Camacho and Jairo Sejas Chavarría – all have police records.

"The police must use these three arrests to identify who was behind this particularly barbaric attack, which has traumatized journalists in Bolivia and neighbouring countries," Reporters

Without Borders said, offering Vidal and Arce its wishes for a speedy recovery.

“When criminals no longer hesitate to attack a radio station and its personnel while they are on the air, it is time the authorities dealt a blow to impunity. And the investigators must not hold back if it is confirmed that the attack was politically motivated. We like to think the case will be solved quickly.”

The attack took place on the morning of 29 October as Vidal was presenting a programme and Arce was acting as studio technician. Four intruders burst in with gasoline cans, poured gasoline not only over desks and equipment but also on Vidal Arce, and then set it alight.

Vidal has been hospitalized in Santa Cruz with second and third-degree burns to the head, chest, back and arms while Arce – who was also badly burned but less seriously than Vidal – is in an intensive care unit in La Paz. The radio station managed to resume broadcasting yesterday.

Radio Popular journalist **Esteban Farfán Romero**, who is Vidal’s son-in-law, told Reporters Without Borders that Vidal believes that two Tarija department government officials were behind the attack. Interior minister Carlos Romero supports the theory. The attack was clearly designed to halt Vidal’s programme, which he was dedicating that day to discussing local contraband cases.

A former Yacuiba mayor and municipal councillor, Vidal has never hesitated to speak out about corruption in Tarija department and has always criticized the way public funds are managed at both national and regional level, where they have increased significantly now that the Chaco region is earning more than 100 million dollars a year from the sale of its natural gas.

This was [far from being the first attack](#) on radio station this year. The many cases of violence against journalists and news media that have gone unpunished in recent years include radio journalist **Carlos Quispe Quispe**’s murder in Pucarani in 2008.

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