

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/bolivia-court-orders-reporter-to-reveal-12-05-2014,46268.html>

Americas - Bolivia

Absurd charges

Court orders Bolivian reporter to reveal his sources

12 May 2014

Reporters Without Borders calls on the judicial authorities to drop all proceedings against *La Razón* editor **Claudia Benavente** and **Ricardo Aguilar**, one of her reporters, in connection with an article that allegedly revealed state secrets.

Published on 13 April, the article was about the complaint that land-locked Bolivia brought against Chile before the International Court of Justice in The Hague as part of its historic campaign to recover territory that would give it access to the Pacific Ocean.

The prosecutor-general filed a complaint on 22 April accusing Aguilar of "espionage" and Benaventura of "complicity." Then, on 7 May, a court ordered Aguilar to reveal his sources for the report within five days.

On 9 May, *La Razón's* lawyer brought a counter-motion against the judge in charge of the case, Jhonny Machicado, and the prosecutor Facundo Coronel, accusing them of incompetence. As a result, the appearance of Aguilar and Benavente in court has been delayed but Aguilar remains subject to the order to reveal his sources.

"Ordering Aguilar to reveal his sources constitutes a violation of the 1925 press law, which guarantees the confidentiality of journalists' sources," said Camille Soulier, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Americas desk.

"We call on the prosecutor to withdraw this request at once, and to abandon all the charges against these journalists. The report in *La Razón* contained information of general interest. Although the territorial dispute between Bolivia and Chile is sensitive, accusing journalists of 'spying' in a case based on the vague concept of 'state secret' could set a dangerous precedent for investigative journalists and have a deterrent effect on their sources."

The court is due to rule on the incompetence motion today. The journalists have meanwhile said that, if summoned to appear in court again, they will exercise their right to silence.

Prosecutor-general Héctor Arce has told the media that all he did was initiate an investigation and that the order to reveal the sources was the responsibility of the relevant judicial bodies.

In an address for Day of the Journalist (celebrated on 10 May in Bolivia), Vice-President Álvaro García Linera said the aim of the case against *La Razón* was to identify the officials who leaked the information and to thereby ensure that this kind of violation of national interests did not recur.

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