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Americas - Venezuela

Rendering justice

Investigation into security forces should take account of attacks on journalists

14 April 2014

Reporters Without Borders hails yesterday's announcement by the prosecutor-general's office that 97 members of the armed forces and police are to be investigated on suspicion of torture and mistreatment.

The move comes after two months of impassioned street protests accompanied by constant clashes between protesters and security forces that have often been violent.

Reporters Without Borders calls on the authorities to ensure that attacks on journalists are fully taken into account in this investigation, which must be independent and impartial if it is to be credible.

The Venezuelan National Union of Press Workers (SNTP) has registered 181 attacks on journalists of various kinds of media and editorial positions since the start of the violence on 12 February.

"We point out that the role of the army and police is to protect the population from the excesses likely to occur during mass protests, and not to prevent journalists from doing their work," said Camille Soulier, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Americas desk.

"In March, the [UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on the safety of journalists during peaceful protests](#) that stressed the crucial role that journalists play in covering demonstrations."

Reporters Without Borders has repeatedly drawn attention to [abuses by both sides in Venezuela](#). In [a letter to President Nicolás Maduro](#) on 26 February, RWB condemned the many violations of freedom of information taking place in Venezuela, and urged the authorities to punish those responsible.

Mildred Manrique, a reporter for the privately-owned daily *2001*, has been targeted twice by the police. The first time, she was attacked while covering a major protest on 18 February. The second time, the police searched her apartment on 22 March and, because they found bullet-proof vests and gas masks, they held her for several hours on suspicion of terrorism and confiscated equipment.

The security forces have also harassed foreign reporters. While covering a demonstration in Aragua province for the newspaper *Abruzzo* on 24 February, Italian journalist **Giafranco di Giacomantonio** was arrested, stripped of his equipment and held for 12 hours, until Italian diplomats helped to obtain his release.

While yesterday's decision by the prosecutor-general's office constitutes progress in the fight against impunity, the role of both demonstrators and criminals who take advantage of the unrest to target journalists should not be forgotten.

For example, the authorities have yet to identify those responsible for throwing a Molotov cocktail at *Zyvke Mundial*, a pro-government radio station managed by **Oscar Pérez** in Zulia state, on 10 April.

Venezuela is ranked 116th out of 180 countries in the 2014 [Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

Photos: [Mariana Vincenti](#)

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