

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/colombia-statute-of-limitations-to-apply-to-20-04-2011,40066.html>

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Americas - Colombia

Danger of impunity

## Statute of limitations to apply to six murders of journalists

20 April 2011

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A 20-year statute of limitations will apply from this weekend to any criminal prosecution for the 1991 murders of *El Espectador* reporters **Julio Daniel Chaparro** and **Jorge Enrique Torres**, yet again highlighting the problem of impunity in Colombia. Chaparro and Torres were murdered on 24 April 1991 while investigating the impact of a 1988 paramilitary massacre in Segovia, in the northwestern department of Antioquia.

Although 20 years have gone by, the investigation being conducted by the Human Rights Unit of the prosecutor-general's office was, until last week, still at a preliminary stage, without any suspect ever being charged. This week, a prosecutor announced that the case had finally been closed because the suspects were all believed dead. These two murders will therefore remain completely unpunished.

The 20-year statute of limitations is also likely to be applied to four other murders of journalists between now and the end of the year – those of **Carlos Julio Rodríguez** (20 May 1991), **José Libardo Méndez** (20 May 1991), **Arsenio Hoyos Lozano** (13 September 1991) and **Rafael Solano Rochero** (30 October 1991). These murders must not be allowed to go unpunished. They must not be forgotten.

The Press Freedom Foundation (FLIP), the Reporters Without Borders partner organization in Colombia, wrote to prosecutor-general Viviane Morales on 24 March condemning this situation and calling for urgent action to prevent these cases being closed for good.

The FLIP wants these murders to be declared crimes against humanity, to which no statute of limitations applies. In July 2010, the Human Rights Unit of the prosecutor-general's office declared *El Espectador* editor *Guillermo Cano's* 1986 murder to have been a crime against humanity on the grounds that it was part of a plan orchestrated by Colombia's drug traffickers.

The Colombian judicial system has a duty to investigate all murders to journalists, and to identify and prosecute those responsible. In the absence of serious efforts to prevent such murders or prevent them going unpunished, Colombia will be exposed to the possibility legal action before international bodies.

The special rapporteur for freedom of expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights already drew attention on 15 April to the fact that [most of these murders go unpunished](#).

Ensuring respect for free expression and combating impunity must be priorities for Colombia. It must also ensure that the statute of limitations does not apply to any murder carried out with the aim restricting free expression and media freedom, in accordance with the 2007 [Medellin Declaration](#) on the safety of journalists.

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