

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/colombia-i-won-t-stop-doing-my-job-says-03-09-2014,46889.html>

Americas - Colombia

Open letter

"I won't stop doing my job," says Colombian journalist in open letter

3 September 2014

Intruders broke into journalist Javier Osuna's Bogotá home on 22 August and set fire to his computers, destroying the results of 18 months of research into the victims of the many paramilitary groups still operating in the northeastern department of Norte de Santander.

Osuna, who was still pursuing his research at the time of the break-in, has clearly become a target of these predators of freedom of information, like the many other journalists working in Norte de Santander that are the victims of constant intimidation.

The victims have included *La Opinión de Cúcuta* reporter **Renson Said Sepúlveda**, who was threatened last year, and **Jairo Jacomé**, the target of intimidation by former paramilitaries. They reported the threats to the authorities but the protection they have received has been limited and they are still in danger.

In an open letter, which Reporters Without Borders is publishing, Osuna talks of the difficulties of being a reporter in Colombia and the need to assign more importance to journalism.

We urge the Colombian authorities to reinforce their investigations into threats against journalists and to punish those responsible. There is an urgent need for protection. At the same time, the judicial authorities must play their part in order to guarantee freedom of information.

Bogotá, 3 September 2014

OPEN LETTER TO PUBLIC OPINION

My name is Javier Osuna Sarmiento. I am a journalist and I love this job. I will only stop doing it when I get old, not out of fear of reprisals.

Someone broke into my Bogotá home on 22 August and set fire to my computers, which contained my master's thesis, "You will speak to me of the fire," a tribute to those who were the victims of the killing machine operated by the paramilitary groups in Norte de Santander department.

My computers were destroyed just three days after my return from San José de Cúcuta [Norte de Santander's capital], where I met victims of the armed conflict who not only lost loved ones but also continue to be threatened despite the pacification process being implemented under the Justice and Peace Law.

For the time being, my safety continues to be uncertain. The authorities have come to my home to analyze the crime scene ten days after the break-in. Today, the Criminal Investigation and Interpol Bureau (DIJIN) cybernetics center called for a quicker risk evaluation. The UNP [National Protection Unit] has assigned me temporary protection. I hope it will soon be implemented. However, permanent protection might not be implemented for at least three months.

I urge the authorities to consider the safety of all the people linked to my research, including my sources. The danger posed by those responsible for the break-in must be properly evaluated. They were familiar with all of my movements and were able to enter my home in a city far from the one where I was conducting my interviews. The same thing happened to other journalists working with the Colombian Association of the Relatives of the Disappeared (ASSFADES) in 2010.

I urge society as a whole to assign more importance to journalism because, like me, hundreds of provincial journalists expose themselves to violence and risk their lives to practice it.

I will not stop doing this job. I will resist like the thousands of people who are subjected every day

to the scourge of violence in our country. I am very proud of the path I have created with my own hands, together with the courage of the hundreds of victims who continue to fight for their rights.

"Neither sorrow nor fear," the poet Raul Zurita wrote during General Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile. His words were dug into the Atacama Desert so that only those overflying the region in helicopter can read them, like the Nasca lines in the Peru. I have "neither sorrow nor fear" of demanding a better country for the victims of the cowardly crime of enforced disappearance. I have "neither sorrow nor fear" of demanding that the authorities do their duty.

I thank the national and international bodies that are helping me, including Colombia's Press Freedom Foundation (FLIP), Reporters Without Borders and ASFADDES, all of which have voiced their solidarity since the outset. And I send a fraternal embrace to the victims of enforced disappearance in our country, along with my promise to continue my commitment to their loved-ones.

Sincerely,

Javier Osuna
