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Americas - Colombia

Assaults on the rise

Call for punishment of those responsible as police violence towards journalists grows

25 October 2012

Ana Maria Garcia, a photographer with the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo*, was assaulted by a police officer two days ago while she was covering the crash of a bus of the TransMilenio transit system north of Bogota. For no clear reason, the policeman threw her to the ground and overpowered her, injuring her right arm.

The Bogota police chief, General Luis Eduardo Martinez, issued [a public apology](#) on behalf of the force, describing the incident as "deplorable and despicable" and said an investigation had been launched. He promised to make the results available by the 30 November at the latest.

"We welcome the response of police chief Martinez and await the results of the investigation," Reporters Without Borders said.

"However, this unprovoked assault is just the latest in a series of abuses committed by the police in various parts of the country in the past few weeks, against the background of peace talks with FARC guerrillas and large-scale public protests. In each instance, the victim has made a complaint. As in the case of Ana Maria, the police need to carry out disciplinary investigations and punish those responsible as soon as possible.

"The government has an obligation to guarantee freedom of information and the protection of journalists. The law on public safety should not be used as an excuse to prevent demonstrations, carry out arbitrary arrests or, even worse, assault journalists."

On 12 October, as a series of large-scale and peaceful protests known as the "Week of Indignation" was coming to an end, many journalists and human rights campaigners were the victims of police brutality.

The Italian blogger **Giorgio Sabaud** was filming several young activist groups marching from the capital's Kennedy district to Bolivar Square when he and 37 other people were forced into a police vehicle. He was released about 4 p.m. after the intervention of the ombudsman.

Ernesto Mercado, a journalist with the newspaper *El Turbion*, was reporting on a police crackdown on protesters in the Bosa district of the city when officers who were not displaying their obligatory identification numbers smashed his video camera and equipment with their batons.

Guillermo Castro, a journalist with the website *Macarenazoo*, had his press card confiscated by law enforcement officers after he refused to hand over his recordings.

The journalist **Camilo Aguilera**, a member of the Popular Media Center, was filming clashes in Bolivar Square, when he was hit in the face by a tear gas canister thrown by the police. He was taken to the Kennedy Hospital for treatment.

Two days later, on 14 October, **Jefferson Murillo**, a 24-year-old photographer with the local station *Cali TV*, was hit by a shot fired by the police in the city of Cordoba. He was taken to hospital where he underwent surgery on a lung and his spleen. The journalist, who was on his day off, happened to witness an argument in the street between residents and police officers. Seeing that it was becoming heated, he started filming the scene on his cell phone.

Ignoring warnings from one of the officers, he continued recording when three shots were fired and he fell to the ground, seriously wounded by one of the bullets.

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