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<http://www.rsf.org/colombia-colombian-radio-journalist-gunned-13-08-2014,46804.html>

Americas - Colombia

Negligence

Colombian radio journalist gunned down two weeks after protection withdrawn

13 August 2014

Radio station director Luis Carlos Cervantes was gunned down yesterday in Tarazá, a town in the northwestern department of Antioquia, two weeks after the authorities withdrew the police protection he had been getting since 2012.

The director of Tarazá-based Radio *Morena*, **Cervantes** is said to have been one of the journalists who had received most threats in Antioquia. Three gunmen shot him as he was riding his motorcycle.

Colleagues said his murder may have been carried out by the "los Urabeños," a criminal gang that was an offshoot from the paramilitary alliance known as the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC). He had covered many corruption cases in Antioquia municipalities involving links between local officials and organized crime.

Amid growing threats, he was granted a police bodyguard in June 2012 by the National Protection Unit (UNP), a government body that protects journalists, human rights defenders and lawyers who are threatened in connection with their work.

Two weeks ago, the UNP decided he was no longer in danger and withdrew his protection. Cervantes had nonetheless told the UNP on 21 July that he had been the target of a new death threat.

The UNP has withdrawn protection from a total of 14 journalists so far this year on the grounds that they are no longer at risk. These journalists are now extremely concerned for their safety.

"The tragic withdrawal of Cervantes' police bodyguard shows that the National Protection Unit needs to be more effective in its risk studies and its implementation of protection mechanism that are appropriate for journalists," said Camille Soulier, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Americas desk.

"We call on the Colombian authorities to conduct an exhaustive investigation into Cervantes' murder so that it does not join the long list of crimes against journalists that remain unpunished in Colombia."

According to the Press Freedom Foundation (FLIP), a Colombian NGO, a total of 140 journalists were murdered from 1977 to 2012. Of these cases, 62 are destined to remain unpunished forever because of Colombia's 20-year statute of limitations.

One of Colombia's most emblematic murders of a journalist is that of **Jaime Garzón**, a humourist who was gunned down exactly 15 years ago, on 13 August 1999. He was much loved in Colombia not only because of his TV work but also because of the role he played in peace talks between the guerrillas and the government.

Some progress has been made in the investigation into Garzón's murder, but not enough. Recent advances have been seen in the trial of José Miguel Narváez, the former head of the intelligence agency known the Administrative Security Department (DAS), and in retired colonel Jorge Eliécer Plazas Acevedo's arrest.

These developments suggest that the judicial authorities have stepped up their efforts. And the prosecutor-general's office announced today that 11 more military officers would be summoned to testify.

Despairing of the Colombian state's ability to try and punish those responsible for Garzón's murder within a reasonable period, the Garzón family filed a complaint against Colombia with

the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in July 2011.

While awaiting a response from the IACHR, which has yet to materialize, the family also filed a request with the Colombian prosecutor-general's office for Garzón's murder to be recognized as a crime against humanity, to which no statute of limitations applies under Colombian and international law. This was already done in the case of another famous journalist, **Guillermo Cano**.

However, the ministry of human rights responded on 22 July that the Garzón murder does not meet the necessary criteria. Reporters Without Borders does not agree.

"We support the request by Garzón's family's for his murder to be recognized as a crime against humanity," Soulier added. "His murder does meet the required criteria because it was part of the systematic persecution of journalists by paramilitaries in the course of an armed conflict. It would set a precedent for all journalists killed in connection with their work during an armed conflict."

As the paramilitary demobilization process was clearly a failure, paramilitaries continue to be the main source of danger to journalists in Colombia. Los Urabeños is one of the Reporters Without Borders [press freedom predators](#), accused of instigating terror campaigns against journalists and human rights activists in 337 municipalities in central Colombia and on the Caribbean coast, and in the Cali and Medellín metropolitan areas in particular. Colombia is ranked 126th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).
