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Americas - Colombia

Death threat

Two journalists named by paramilitary organization

26 September 2014

Colombian journalists Leiderman Ortiz Berrio and Edgar Astudillo are among threatened by the paramilitary organization "Los Rastrojos" in a hit list circulated on leaflets in the city of Montería, in the northern department of Córdoba. "If you continue with your political, pro-union, pacifist, leftist proselytizing against our organization, you will pay the price," the leaflet says. "Our patience has its limits."

"Los Rastrojos" has threatened Ortiz Berrio and Astudillo as "agitators." The two journalists are among 24 people named on the list, which also includes political leaders and activists. This form of threat is a terror tactic long employed by Colombian paramilitaries and drug traffickers. Many journalists have been treated as "military targets" by these criminal gangs.

Ortiz Berrio is the editor of *La Verdad del Pueblo*, a weekly newspaper that reports on corruption and violence in the Bajo Cauca region of northern Colombia. He has been the target of repeated threats. In 2010, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights requested that the Colombian government provide him with protection. He has kept on living in Caucasia, in Antioquia department, but travels in an armoured car, protected by three bodyguards.

Astudillo, the other threatened journalist, also receives government protection. In 2009, he reported extensively on "Los Paisas," a criminal gang. He left Montería, the capital of Córdoba, under threat. Having returned in 2011, he now runs a program on a local broadcaster, *Radio Panzenú*.

"Reporters Without Borders urges the government to thoroughly investigate the publication of the hit list and to take action against those responsible for this new terror campaign in northern Colombia," said Camille Soulier, head of the organization's Americas desk. *"The government must go beyond providing protection – undeniably necessary though that is – and take systematic action against impunity in order to guarantee the safety of journalists who risk their lives daily to inform the public on sensitive issues."*

Ortiz Berrio demanded that the National Protective Unit re-evaluate measures taken to safeguard his family as well as dozens of other threatened journalists. He recently attended the funeral of a colleague, journalist Luis Carlos Cervantes, who was murdered in Antioquia on 12 August. A paramilitary group, Los Urabeños, was the alleged perpetrator.

Colombia ranks 126th of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders world [press freedom index](#).

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