

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/honduras-judicial-harassment-of-journalists-22-07-2014,46683.html>

Americas - Honduras

Sedition charges

## Judicial harassment of journalists and social communicators

22 July 2014

**Reporters Without Borders condemns the judicial harassment of 36 members of the Honduran Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations (COPINH), who are being tried on sedition charges in the southwestern department of Intibucá.**

The defendants include *Radio Progreso* reporter **Albertina Manueles Pérez** and the reporters of several community radio stations that are COPINH members. [These "social communicators" are being persecuted](#) for reporting the claims of the mainly indigenous population of the town of San Francisco de Opalaca that its current mayor, José Socorro Sánchez, was elected fraudulently.

At a hearing on 24 June, the Intibucá departmental court placed all the defendants under judicial control after the prosecutor accused them of "sedition against the internal security of the state of Honduras and usurping functions." The next hearing is set for today.

*"This judicial harassment of 'social communicators' and civil society organizations is indicative of a desire on the part of the authorities to restrict free speech,"* said Camille Soulier, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Americas desk.

*"We call for the withdrawal of all the charges in this case and we point out that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has asked the Honduran authorities to guarantee the protection of some of the defendants."*

The trial is taking place at an extremely [fraught time for freedom of information](#) in Honduras. **Herlyn Espinal**, a TV journalist based in the northwestern city of San Pedro Sula, was found dead in the neighbouring department of Yoro yesterday, some 48 hours after going missing.

Espinal coordinated *Corporación Televicentro's* "Hoy Mismo" programme. As the authorities usually do, interior minister Arturo Corrales rushed to rule out any possible link between Espinal's murder and his journalistic work. According to the Committee for Free Expression (C-Libre), most of the 37 murders of journalists since a coup d'état in 2009 have gone unpunished.

"Reporters Without Borders urges the authorities to do everything possible to shed light on Espinal's murder," Soulier added. "A thorough, independent investigation must be carried out as quickly as possible, as it should with all the other media workers murdered in Honduras. The dangerous tendency to rule any link with the victim's work makes it easier to silence critics with complete impunity."

As well as risking their lives for the sake of the right to information, journalists and social communicators fear judicial sanctions for reporting certain stories, especially those involving land disputes or indigenous rights, and they often end up censoring themselves.

Community media – which are often linked to grass-roots movements and therefore particularly inclined to draw attention to abuses – are constantly being persecuted. The proportion of broadcast frequencies assigned to them falls far short of the 33 per cent that RWB, the IACHR and other organizations are calling for.

As a result, some community radio stations broadcast illegally and even those that have been officially allocated a frequency risk reprisals.

The National Telecommunications Commission, which regulates broadcasting, filed a complaint against *Radio Voz de Puca* last month on the grounds that a news programme hosted by journalist **Juan Martínez** violated its rules.

The government's systematic interference in the choice and treatment of news even affects

human rights defenders such as Annie Bird, a US citizen who is currently the target of a government smear campaign for reporting human rights abuses.

Honduras is ranked 129th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).

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