

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/ecuador-colombian-journalist-threatened-22-08-2012,43257.html>

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Americas - Ecuador

"Watch out"

## Colombian journalist threatened, attacked with steel bar

22 August 2012

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**Orlando Gómez León**, a Colombian journalist based in the Ecuadorean capital of Quito, was attacked and threatened last week after *Semana*, a Colombian weekly for which he is a correspondent, ran a story contrasting free speech problems in Ecuador with its decision to offer asylum to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Gómez, who also works as international editor of the Quito-based newspaper *La Hora*, was attacked at around 10 a.m. on 16 August after leaving his office in his car to go to a meeting.

A motorcycle that had been following him drew alongside and one of the two people aboard called him by name. Realizing that he did not know the man who had addressed him and that the man was carrying a steel bar, Gómez drove away at speed, but his assailant succeeded in smashing a wing mirror and the back of his car.

Previously, at around 4 a.m. the same day, *La Hora's* security guard had called Gómez to warn him that calls has been received from an unidentified person in Mexico saying he needed information about Assange and asking when Gómez would arrive at the newspaper.

Then, at around 6 a.m., Gómez received a call at his home from an unidentified person who said: "Watch out, you son of a bitch, stop saying bad things about Ecuador."

Gómez has said he does not know the precise origin of the threats but assumes they could be linked to the *Semana* story, headlined "[Ecuador and obstacles to the media](#)", even if he did not participate in writing it.

As well as examining the implications of the decision to give Assange asylum, the article criticized the restrictions on freedom of expression in Ecuador and the influence of the drug cartels. It prompted a protest letter by Ecuador's ambassador to Colombia, Raúl Vallejo (photo), who claimed that information he had given to *Semana* had been used out of context.

*Semana* editor **Mauricio Sáenz** told Reporters Without Borders he had not received this letter. He added that the reactions to the article confirmed that, whenever the Ecuadorean government was criticized in a press report, it did everything possible to suppress it.

"While we welcome Ecuador's decision to give asylum to [Assange](#), we must not lose sight of the high degree of internal tension between the Ecuadorean authorities and part of the country's press," Reporters Without Borders said.

"The Ecuadorean government wants to portray itself to the international community as a defender of free speech, but attacks on press freedom and the media in general continue to be frequent in Ecuador. [Raids](#), [closures](#), exorbitant [damages awards](#) and [prosecutions of opposition](#) journalists are all part of the very difficult day-to-day reality for the media in Ecuador."

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