

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/guatemala-officials-reject-all-criticism-28-01-2014,45791.html>

Americas - Guatemala

Open letter

Officials reject all criticism, harass newspaper

28 January 2014

The authorities have been gunning for **José Rubén Zamora**, the editor of the Guatemala City-based daily *elPeriódico*, for the past year. Although President Otto Pérez Molina withdrew his lawsuit, Zamora is still accused of "crimes against women" by Vice-president Roxana Baldetti.

elPeriódico also suffers the consequences of Zamora's critical editorial line: the authorities suddenly stopped giving it any of the state's lucrative advertising in 2013. The authorities targeted the newspaper again this month. It has been the subject of a tax audit since 21 January.

The newspaper is not new to harassment. It has been the target of anonymous cyber-attacks when it ran stories about alleged abuse of authority and corruption involving President Otto Pérez Molina's administration. On 25 January, people close to Zamora received threatening text messages from unknown sources.

The president and vice-president announced on 10 January that they were withdrawing their complaints against Zamora, but the vice-president has not kept her promise. As a result, Reporters Without Borders has written this open letter to her.

Paris, 27 January 2014

President Otto Pérez Molina
Government of Guatemala

Vice-President Roxana Baldetti
Government of Guatemala

Dear President Pérez Molina, Dear Vice-President Baldetti,

Reporters Without Borders, an international organization that defends freedom of information, condemns the judicial and economic harassment of the newspaper *elPeriódico* and its editor, **José Rubén Zamora**.

President Pérez Molina brought criminal charges of coercion, extortion, blackmail, violating the constitution and "insulting the heads of state entities" against Zamora on 21 November, as a result of which he was banned from leaving the country and his bank accounts were frozen on 7 January. President Pérez Molina has since withdrawn, and Reporters Without Borders hopes he will not follow up on his threat to press charges again through a Court of Honor.

Vice-President Roxana Baldetti filed a strange complaint accusing Zamora of a "crime against women" in connection with a story about alleged corruption dating back to 2008. As a result, Zamora, who is due to appear in court in March, was immediately banned from contacting her or going near her home.

The criminal charges you brought against Mr. Zamora seem to have little in common with the actual complaints that might have been made against him. How can allegations, that at worst might have given rise to a libel suit, be used as the basis for a charge of gender violence?

Mr. Zamora is just doing his job as a journalist by questioning the alleged practices of a public figure who holds a leading political office, whether or not they prove to be true. The allegations against you that he reported did not concern your identity as a woman but your position as vice-president.

Your announcement on 10 January that the criminal proceedings against Mr. Zamora were

being dropped led us to assume you had realized their devastating impact on freedom of information and we therefore fail to understand why you have not yet kept your promise.

All the different forms of censorship of Mr. Zamora and *elPéridico* that have been deployed by government officials violate fundamental freedoms that are guaranteed by Guatemala's constitution and by the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights, which Guatemala has signed.

The judicial proceedings against Mr. Zamora should therefore be declared null and void.

We thank you in advance for the attention you give to this request,

Sincerely,

Christophe Deloire
Reporters Without Borders secretary-general

Slideshow: El Nuevo Diario

You can download those documents on our website :

- , (JPEG - 50.6 kb)
-