

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/dominican-republic-impunity-wins-out-as-suspect-in-05-12-2013,45560.html>

Americas - Dominican Republic

Shameful release

Impunity wins out as suspect in journalist's murder is freed on bail

5 December 2013

Reporters Without Borders is dismayed at the release on bail of Fermín Marcelino Calderon (photo), one of those charged over the 2011 abduction and murder of the journalist [Jose Agustin Silvestre](#), also known as "Gajo". He was bailed on the orders of Judge Haydeliza Henriquez in the eastern city of San Pedro de Macoris on 29 November. The prosecution has said it will appeal against the decision.

"In view of the seriousness of the charges against Fermin Marcelino Calderon in the Silvestre case, his release on bail appears a strange act of clemency," the press freedom organization said. "What guarantees have been given to ensure the accused will appear at his trial? What reasons prompted Judge Henriquez to take such action? It is the second time that a suspect in the murder of a journalist [has been freed](#) while an investigation is in progress. The decision casts doubt over a legal system where freedom can be bought, even in the most serious cases.

Besides his alleged involvement in Silvestre's murder, Marcelino Calderon is also accused of money laundering on behalf of Matias Avelino Castro, suspected to be the man who ordered Silvestre's murder.

"This episode occurs at a time when Dominican journalists are increasingly the target of defamation suits, often accompanied by large-scale demands for reparations. Reporters Without Borders believes that the reform of the criminal code currently under way is very limited, merely reducing the penalties for press offences without decriminalizing them."

There are several worrying examples, such as the defamation suits brought by Senator Felix Bautista against the journalist **Juan Taveras Hernandez** of the radio station *Z-101*, the station's owner **Bienvenido Rodriguez** and its manager, **Willy Rodriguez**. The senator is claiming 1.16 million dollars in compensation. A verdict is expected on 15 January 2014.

Similarly, the editor of the news site *Ciudadoriental.org*, **Robert Vargas**, and one of its journalists, **Julio Benzant**, are also the subjects of defamation cases brought by the member of Parliament Alfredo Martínez.

For their part, the journalists **Luis Eduardo "Huchi" Lora** of *Teleantillas*, and **Juan Bolivar Diaz** of *Telesistema* have been accused of being traitors to their country by the nationalist group National Sovereignty Defense Network for criticizing the Constitutional Court's decision to withdraw Dominican citizenship from people of Haitian descent. The journalists have been the targets of a hate campaign.

Other images



JPEG - 34.8 kb
633 x 222 pixels
