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Americas - Salvador

Protection pending

Online newspaper awaits protection after being threatened

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The staff of the San Salvador-based online newspaper *El Faro* are very worried about the threats they have been receiving in connection with a series of stories about El Salvador's feared criminal gangs, known as Maras.

Speaking to Reporters Without Borders, *El Faro* editor **Carlos Dada** (photo) flatly denied reports that the newspaper had been offered protection by the internal security minister, Gen. David Munguía Payés. "I was given no such undertaking," he told us. The need for protection is nonetheless extremely urgent.

Members of *El Faro*'s staff had reported being under surveillance and followed in a way they found disturbing ever since the online newspaper posted an article in May 2011 about the so-called Taxis Cartel, an alleged network of connections between gang leaders and leading local businessmen and politicians in the Chalatenango and Santa Ana regions.

El Faro's security concerns increased on 14 March, when it began reporting [secret negotiations between the government and Maras](#), known as Maras. In exchange for a temporary halt in murders by Mara 18 and Mara Salvatrucha (MS13), the prison authorities allegedly allowed relaxed conditions for detained members of these two gangs and approved transfers to other prisons.

Before publishing the report, which was strenuously denied by the government, Dada had tried to reach Gen. Munguía to confirm the prison transfers, but the minister did not respond.

During a meeting on 16 March with journalists from various media (but not *El Faro*, our sources say), Gen. Munguía expressed concern about Dada and his staff because of what he called the dangers involved in this kind of report. He subsequently warned Dada of possible gang reprisals against him and his staff without elaborating on the kind of reprisals or referring to the possibility of protection, Dada said.

There were additional grounds for concern for Dada when *Canal 33* TV broadcast a joint communiqué by the two gangs on 22 March during its "8 Punto" programme, in which Dada was participating. "It is incredible that people like Carlos Dada exist," the statement said. At the end of the programme, Dada publicly appealed to President Mauricio Funes, a former journalist, to intercede.

A few days later, *Canal 12* TV quoted one of the M18 gang leaders, Carlos Mojica, as saying: "Tell [Dada] not to worry, we have forgiven him." On 28 March, President Funes personally denied the existence of any "pact" with the Maras.

"We have not forgotten French journalist [Christian Poveda](#)'s murder, which highlighted how dangerous it is for journalists to cover the Maras and which is clearly relevant to this case" Reporters Without Borders said. "We ask the same question that Dada asked: why didn't the

government immediately give him protection if it thought the danger was obvious from the outset? We urge the authorities to provide *El Faro's* staff with the protection that Dada is seeking."
