

# LOCAL LEVEL JOURNALISM AND DEMOCRACY INDICATORS IN LATIN AMERICA

**Fernando J. Ruiz**

## SUMMARY

The worst areas to practice journalism in Latin America in the last semester

- BLACK AREAS
- RED AREAS
- BROWN AREAS

Impunity retreats

Police and Journalism

Government advertising and "subtle censorship"

Words to be remembered

Neopopulism in the communication media



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-*Las palabras son acciones: historia política y profesional del diario La Opinión de Jacobo Timerman*, (Words are action: Political & professional history of the La Opinión newspaper belonging to Jacobo Timerman ), 1971-77, Perfil Libros, Buenos Aires, 2001.

-*El señor de los mercados. Ambito Financiero, la City y el poder del periodismo económico*,(The master of the markets: Ambito Financiero, the City & the power of the financial press), El Ateneo, Buenos Aires, 2005.

# Local Level Journalism and Democracy Indicators in Latin America

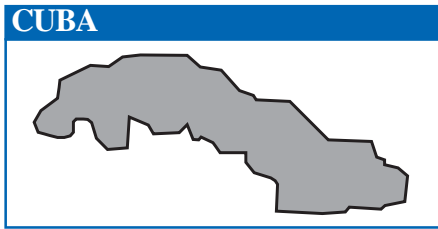
By **Fernando J. Ruiz**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Cuban dictatorship continues to harass journalists: a female journalist was imprisoned.
- Mexico and Colombia continue to be the two most dangerous countries for journalists.
- The chronic instability in Haiti maintains insecurity at a high level.
- In Brazil, death can occur at any moment in any State.
- Venezuela can become a Black Area if the Government implements the press controls that have been decreed.
- At the Inter American Press Association's (SIP) request, Mexican and Peruvian editors arrived at a historic agreement to fight impunity.
- In most Latin American countries, the police force is one of the main sources of aggression to the free press.
- Populism in the different countries has a similar communicational policy of not valuing the role of journalism.

# THE WORST AREAS TO PRACTICE JOURNALISM IN LATIN AMERICA IN THE LAST SEMESTER

## BLACK AREAS: The law prohibits freedom of press and the law is enforced.



The dictatorship does not allow for criticism in the media or for freedom of expression and therefore, for journalism. In spite of this, the Cuban Government continues to award Latin American journalists with the Jose Marti prize for Journalism. It's a known fact that none of the three categories that they give awards for (opinion journalism, interpretive journalism, participative journalism) can be practiced on the island. In spite of this, journalists from all Latin America take part as judges and to receive these awards.

Journalism continues to be an activity which in Cuba is carried out by people without specific training but who wish to exercise their freedom of speech. Most of them become journalists because of civic vocation and from personal necessity to exert their freedom of conscience. Those who are jailed in most cases occur after they have suffered personalized harassment by the Political Police to make them give up their activity.

The various decades of State Security experience was used in the last semester, among other cases, against Osmel Sánchez López, a journalist who was summoned on June 18 to the Political Police's offices in the town of Venezuela (Ciego de Avila Province, Center). The journalist reported to Reporters without Borders that: "An officer, who gave his name as Jesus, interrogated me for three hours. Above all, he ordered me to desist in my activities and prohibited me from meeting Carlos González

Leyva, Director of the Cuban Human Rights Foundation. If not, I would be convicted to a four year unconditional prison term for being a socially dangerous pre-delinquent."

He continued saying that he was not physically ill-treated but that throughout the interrogation he was constantly shouted at, insulted and threatened. Once this had finished, he was taken in a jeep and left out in the countryside late at night.

On November 30, the Political Police searched journalist Carlos Serpa Maceira's home and took the following: his library, a Tecsun brand radio, two press recorders, film cassettes, videos and his note book.

On October 19, Officer "Tamayo" from the Political Police (full names or true names are never given) summoned journalist Mario Echevarria Driggs and threatened him because of his activity.

On November 22, the Political Police of the city of Santa Clara (Center), raided a journalist's training workshop given by "Foro de estudios sociales Marta Abreu", a free cultural institution founded in April 2001 by the journalist Omar Ruiz and imprisoned in 2003 for a term that expires in 2021. In many cases the police try to stop this type of meeting by visiting each one of the attendants and sometimes, not allowing them to leave their homes, as happened here.

Currently there are more than twenty journalists in prison with firm sentences. In the prisons they are submitted to more personalized harassment.

Victor Arroyo Carmona, a journalist

from Pinar del Río, is on a hunger strike seeking better conditions and his life is at risk.

During the second semester of 2005, journalist Mario Enrique Mayo was released from prison under extra penal "license" which does not mean he has completed his prison term; license merely grants provisional suspension. He is the seventh journalist released from prison as a result of international pressure and in his case, serious health problems.

In the case of the better known journalists, the Cuban regime prefers to send them into exile. This happened to two of Cuba's greatest journalists, Raul Rivera (exiled to

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Spain) and Manuel Vazquez Portal (exiled in United States).

While the cell doors for some journalists were opened, others were imprisoned. For example, sixty one year old Oscar Mario Gonzalez from the Grupo de Trabajo Decoro, was arrested for having participated on July 22 2005 in a demonstration in front of the French Embassy.

Albert Santiago Du Bouchet Fernandez, from Havana Press and member of the board of Asamblea para la Promoción de la Sociedad

Civil, was arrested on August 6 2005.

The Europa Press Agency on August 25 reported that his wife, Barbara Perez, learnt that he had been sent to the Melena del Sur Prison nine days after being arrested and he had been sentenced. This meant that he was not present at his trial and not allowed to name a defense lawyer. Journalist Alberto Triay Casales was arrested on November 9 in Havana and it would appear that so far no charges have been filed against him.

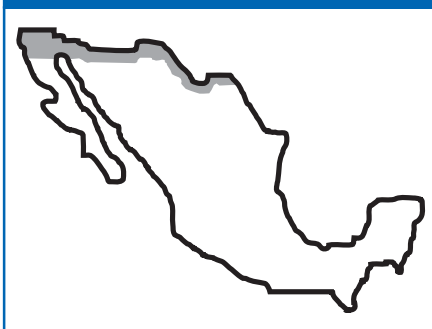
On July 14, State Security Agents did not allow Lamasiel Gutiérrez Romero to travel from Isla de la Juventud to Havana. Lamasiel is a journalist for Nueva Prensa Cubana Agency and she is married to a conscientious objector, Rolando Jimenez Posada, who is in prison. Vladimiro Roca, spokesman for Todos Unidos Movement informed that: "After her husband was arrested, she became very active and was working as an independent journalist. In August she was placed under house arrest but on October 24 she was jailed for seven months for "civil disobedience". Her husband in protest went on a hunger strike in his prison. Lamasiel is the first female journalist to have been imprisoned.

The European Union awarded the Andrei Sajarov prize to the Damas de Blanco (Ladies in White), a group of Cuban women who seek the release of conscientious objectors. The regime did not permit them to travel to Strasburg to receive the award. Of the five who were meant to travel, three were wives of journalists currently in prison and one is married to a journalist who was released under extra-penal license at the end of 2004.

(To read the Cuban court rulings against the journalists, please go to: [http:// www.ruleoflawandcuba.fsu.edu](http://www.ruleoflawandcuba.fsu.edu))

**RED AREAS: The law protects freedom of press but the State does not implement it so journalists/media are in constant physical risk. Every case where the authorities were involved in a crime against a journalist is included in this category. Red Areas can be more dangerous to a journalist's life than a Black Area regardless that in Red Areas there is supposed to be more press freedom. Democracies that have not managed to build effective national states offer freedom along with the risks of anarchic situations.**

#### NORTHERN BORDER (Mexico)



Last October, at a SIP meeting in Indianapolis, the Mexican editors stated that the previous eighteen months had been the most dangerous period the country had known.

Violence in Mexico, which is mostly drug related, has worsened not only for journalists but for all the population. The Mexican editors informed that an "independent

recount carried out by the El Universal newspaper of the executions attributable to drug trafficking exceeded one thousand cases in less than nine months". Obviously, journalists also suffered the effects of this increase.

#### BOGOTA (Colombia)



During the last semester the Colombian capital has become exceedingly dangerous. Top names in television journalism have been threatened. Daniel Coronell, director of the Noticias Uno news program; Juan Gossain (RCN's news Director), Mauricio Vargas (Cambio), and Julio Sanchez Cristo (Caracol's Radio W).

Coronell carried out his own investigation to find out where the threats originated and wrote an article in the magazine La Semana revealing his findings. He detected

that varios electronic mails had been sent from the home of ex-Senator Carlos Nader Simmonds. This person has been in prison in United States: on May 18 1983 while he was Senator for the state of Cordoba, he was arrested in New York attempting to sell ten kilos of cocaine to a DEA agent. Nader pleaded guilty and received a three year prison term. The electronic mail he received was signed as Zarovich, the name of Russia's Imperial prince, heir to the throne. The electronic mail's address was "ojrana2000@yahoo.com." Ojrana was the name of Tzar's Political Police.

According to Coronell, Nader is Russian history enthusiast to such a point that one of his sons is named Dimitri. In an interview with the El Tiempo newspaper, Coronell informed that he decided to go into exile when he learnt that his daughter went to the same school as Nader's son. Coronell ended the interview by saying: "Given his background, I consider that

the anonymous threats cannot be taken lightly. I publicly denounce him with the same right that someone who has been riddled with bullets has to write the name of his murderer with his blood”.

Coronell went into exile to United States on August 14 and writes his column from there.

Other journalists also escaped from their regions. According to Reporters without Borders (RSF), during 2005 at least six journalists emigrated: Claudio Gomajoa Buesaquillo, who worked for the La Dorada Estereo radio station in the town of Putumayo, Sur; Antonio Colmenares, La Opinion newspaper and Jorge Corredor, La Voz del Norte newspaper from Cucuta City, Noreste; Julian Alberto Ochoa Restrepo, from the television channel AUPAN, Antioquia, Noroeste; Edwin Alberto Mojica, from the radio station 88.3 Tame FM Stereo (Arauca, Noreste); and Fanor Zuñiga Hurtado, cameraman and chief editor of the television channel Mas Noticias (Buenaventura, Oeste);

After so many years of violence in Colombia, the way the threats are made have become routine:

■ “Cut out talking on the radio or I’ll put a bullet in you”. This is the message Enrique Alfonso

Camargo Plata received on October 2 at the Cesar radio station where he works.

■ Galo Bravo Picossa, chief editor of the El Pilon newspaper of Valledupar was told: “If you publish the file on the mayor of Aguachica, we will burn you”.

■ Miguel Macea received the following telephone message: “Pal, no don’t know how much I’d appreciate if you lowered your voice on the subject of Autodefensa (a paramilitary organization called Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia). You know that we are in the process of negotiating a peace treaty and if this fails you and your family will pay the consequences”.

■ Enrique Camargo received the following anonymous telephone call on September 1 at the radio station in Valledupar where he works: “SOB, you queer, we are going to kill you”. He disregarded the call and the next day at 11.29 hours he received a text message on his cel phone: “You big queer, don’t talk so much on the radio or we are going to sew up your butt with bullets”. (FLIP)

This wave of threats exacerbates self censure and makes the journalists more dependent of official sources. These are the sources that increasingly regulate the information and give their interpretation of the events.

Chip Mitchell in a report requested by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) regarding self-censorship in Colombia (“Untold Stories”) said: “As the journalists go self-censuring themselves, they depend more on Government sources”. Before reporting an event, many times they wait till the military or police announce it. At local level, internal conflicts that are not publicly disclosed by Government, police or military sources tend to be ignored by the media. International or national media are generally in a better position than the local media to cover events because they are less exposed to reprisals from those affected by the information.

Self-censorship facilitates impunity and therefore makes the violence against journalists more effective.

Adonai Cardenas Castillo, correspondent in Buenaventura for the Cali newspaper, El Pais declared: “If we could publish all that happens, we would put a stop to impunity (Untold Stories, pg.8).

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**Galo Bravo Picossa, chief editor of the El Pilon newspaper of Valledupar was told: “If you publish the file on the mayor of Aguachica, we will burn you”.**

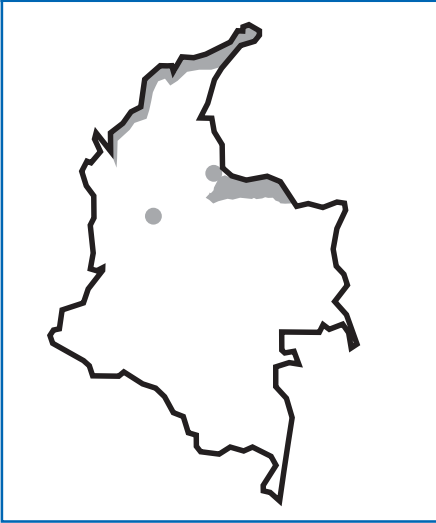
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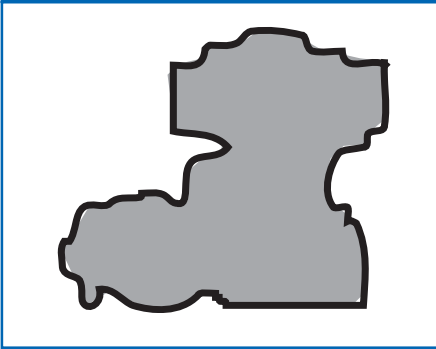
**CÚCUTA,  
BARRANCABERMEJA,  
ARAUCA, COSTA CARIBE.  
(Colombia)**



These are red zones that continue to be extremely dangerous although in this last semester there have been no serious incidents or journalists murdered there. The main Colombian journalist protection organization (FLIP) held their yearly workshop with their correspondents to analyze the situation in each region.

Their conclusions were: generalized self-censure, pressure from paramilitary and guerilla organizations on the press for these to publish “their vision of the conflict”; communications and “actions”; and in the areas where the armed groups have been demobilized, an increase in ordinary delinquency. The FLIP’s overall conclusion was that: “Although the number of threats and aggressions to journalists have diminished, the situation in the capital of the states and municipalities is far from being supportive of freedom of press”. The Mayor of Cucuta, Ramiro Suarez Corzo, vetoed the reporter from the local newspaper, *La Opinion*, Gala Marcela Peña Alvarez because she attempted to investigate the use of public funds. The Mayor was detained for eight months after having been elected because of supposed links with paramilitary forces but the Supreme Court ruled that there were not enough proof. In these areas there is less violence, but freedom of press has not increased as a result of this.

**HAITÍ**



In Haiti, the chronic problem of creating a minimal order of coexistence is now reflected in the wave of kidnappings where journalists are also targets. In early December the radio announcer Wadson Desir was kidnapped and released in a few hours after a “reasonable ransom was

paid”. The Cultural Head of the newspaper *La Opinion*, Jacques Roche, was not as fortunate. He was kidnapped on July 10 and four days later, he was found murdered with his body mutilated.



**PERNAMBUCO  
(Brazil)**



In Brazil the murder of a journalist is not as common as in Colombia and now in Mexico, but it still can occur in any place and at any moment. This time it happened in Pernambuco, in the northwest of the country. Jose Candido Amorin Pinto had been conducting a program for 19 years on Alternative Community Radio and was also a Town Councilor for the Workers Democratic Party in the city of Carpina. He had been shot at from a motorbike on May 21 and again on July 1. This second time they were successful, killing him in a garage. People close to him accuse the Town Mayor and other important political figures. By mid December the investigation started to show results. Three people were arrested: two were soldiers of the Military Police and the third an ex-Corporal of the same force who was then made head of the town’s Municipal Security.

## **BROWN AREAS: The law protects freedom of press but there is a constant harassment that unnerves the journalists though they may not be in immediate physical risk.**



There are similarities between the situations in Cuba and Venezuela that are not common in other Latin American risk areas. In these two countries it is the Government who promotes press restrictions while in other countries, principally Mexico and Colombia, it is private groups or in some isolated cases, Government authorities, who impose it.

In Venezuela controls to limit the press freedom are in place and ready to apply: there is a law that can be used to control television. The prison penalty for defamation has been increased and the Supreme Court, final bastion of freedom of press, is totally controlled by the Government

The same occurred in Cuba when Law 88 was passed but though it was not applied straight away, it soon became the legal tool used to sentence nearly three dozen journalists to extended prison terms. If the Venezuelan Government continues on this course, the country could change from being considered a Brown Area to Black without first qualifying as Red.

If Hugo Chavez' Government continues to impose legal and administrative measures to curtail all criticism, it will soon reach a point where it will be impossible, by law, to practice freedom of press.

At that moment, for this report Venezuela will join Cuba as a Black Area. The Government has increasingly more legal and administrative tools to harass the

media that opposes them. The neutralization of the classic controls that exist in a democracy (judicial and legislative powers) impedes the other control that should be present in all democracies: the Press.

The Venezuelan delegation of editors that attended the last IAPA meeting held in Indianapolis in October expressed: "In a situation where the Presidential hegemony reaches all control bodies, it is utopian that freedom of expression and press can exist".

In President Chavez' television program called "Alo Presidente" last November 13, he again described the opposition, including various of the main media, as: "The opposition, that group that encompasses, in the first place, the United States Embassy, because it provides economic and political support; the widowed parties from the IVth. Republic; the pro-coup media such as *El Nacional*, *El Universal*, *Radio Caracas Television* and *Globovision*, who in the past have encouraged violence; some recalcitrant economic groups who refuse to accept that Chavez is firmly in government and who dream of removing him through some adventuresome action; and some retired officers. These basically fascist elements cannot accept that in Venezuela there is justice". He continued: "They obviously prefer a country with no justice or with a slanted justice, rigged in their favor. In other words, justice dictated by the owner's of the media. They expect to impose a parallel justice on the Venezuelans, *Globovision's* justice that decides which investigations made by Prosecutors or judges' rulings are fair; the same is true for *El Nacional* or *El Universal*, or *Channel 2 (...)*".

In the State owned media, any dissent with the official line is persecuted. Last September 15, Walter Martínez Parada's program "Dossier" on *Venezolana de*

*Televisión*, was taken off the air when the journalist said that "we are tired of people who put on the red beret in order to steal. We have had enough of people who play at being Chavists without Chavez". After the program was taken off the air, the State channel's Board demanded that the journalist present proof of the reported corruption to the State General Prosecutor.

As happens when power becomes hegemonic, those who are close to the center of power tend to use their influence arbitrarily. The following are some examples regarding the press:

■ **Presidential security guards** . On September 19, members of the Presidential security guards suppressed a group of **Chapista** sympathizers when they crossed over protective barricades. Press photographers posted in a nearby building that houses two Caracas newspapers , photographed the incident. According to the Press and Society Institute: "The guards later entered the newspaper building, spoke to the Photographic Department Director Esso Alvarez and it was agreed that the photos would be destroyed".

■ **Government house staff**. On November 1, journalist David Ludovic, who writes a column in *El Nacional* newspaper called "At the gates of the Palace"(A las puertas del palacio), was recording an interview to two women at the entrance of the Citizens Social Services offices located in the Presidential Palace. Three members of security interrupted demanding that he hand over the tape and they took him inside where twice he was "thoroughly" interrogated. Ludovic is critical of the Government and he had already written testimonies of



people who came to these offices seeking help.

■ **Government party politicians.**

Probably the most unusual episode happened on June 29 when a journalist with a cameraman from *Ultimas Noticias* newspaper were preparing a news item at the Andrés Eloy Blanco Plaza, close to the Chancellery and Miraflores Palace. They were intercepted by a group of men and according to the Press and Society Institute, and the roll of film confiscated because the plaza belonged to Lina Ron, a political leader sympathetic to President Hugo Chavez and that nothing could be done there without her authorization. They were taken to an office and locked in for two

hours until Lina Ron arrived. She confirmed her ownership of the plaza and berated the journalists for other articles published by their newspaper.

■ **State General Prosecutor.**

On July 25, the newspaper *La Universal* published an editorial headed: “Justice on its knees”. On July 29 the General Prosecutor declared: “The editorial is an offense against the country’s democratic institutions. We are carrying out the pertinent procedures and are close to concluding that it is a punishable deed which the newspaper will have to assume responsibility for”. On August 3, the General Prosecutor through one of his Prosecutor’s, filed a lawsuit before the Supreme Court

claiming that “presumably it involved an offense of institutional insult contemplated in the Penal Code”. The Supreme Court rejected the claim. The editorial that was written is a criticism made by many newspapers in any democracy. *El Universal*’s defense was not convencional: its Editor, Elides Rojas, wrote an ironic article titled: “20 points” that begins with the following paragraph: “If in any aspect of the Bolivarian revolution a worthy job has been done, it is precisely in the Judicial Power and all its related branches. There is no country, not even among the developed ones, that has a judicial system of excellence, bordering on perfection, such as Venezuela”. (*El Universal*, August 3 2005).

### *El Universal editorial*

## “Justice on its knees”

Subordinating justice to an ideological dimension minimizing its autonomy and efficiency is comparable to unhitching the locomotive from the wagons, leaving these defenseless and abandoned on the tracks. As a result there is a process of de-legitimization of the Public Office and the courts.

The focus of interest regarding news centers on delinquency, guerillas, para-military groups and general insecurity. The criminal can also be the center of interest but where the public administration must concentrate all its efforts, is on the penal process since the ratio of convictions is extremely low and therefore, impunity reigns.

This is the context in which the Executive Director of COFAVIC, an NGO that protects and promotes human rights, analyzed specific modus operandis’ that reveals deviations and abnormalities within the police forces and courts. This is a serious call of attention as in Venezuela all the population is exposed to a high risk.

COFAVIC points out that the political influence in the penal system and its inefficiency, in addition to the inexistence of a criminal policy (the combined actions to prevent and reduce criminality in a scientific and rational manner), results in ever increasing insecurity.

The penal justice must be professional and coordinated with prevention, investigation, repression and the penitentiary system because the relationship between justice and society tends to unsettle this last one even more. This compounds the feeling of insecurity when presented with information provided by Governments and their manipulation of statistics.

Most policies and procedures regarding social control require in-depth revision and the first priority is the rational fight against poverty with all social, economic and political sectors participating. Combating poverty is not anyone’s exclusive responsibility but that of the entire Nation understood as a coherent and productive whole.

It is necessary to work in close coordination with local and foreign specialists, maintain a decentralized police force structure, improve regional coordination mechanisms and strengthen justice making it professional, autonomous and objective. This is the populations’ maximum desire.

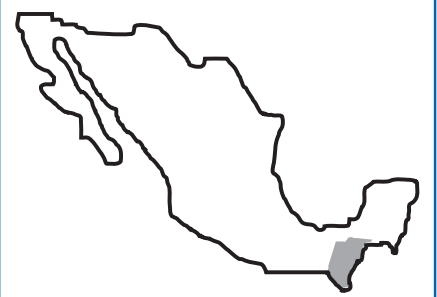
## TOCANTINS (Brazil)



In the State of Tocantins a succession of incidents against the press shook local journalists. Salomao Aguiar, a journalist working for *TV Palmas*, was punched in the face by a Government employee while covering a police operation in the state's capital, Palmas. On August 11 in the same city, police attacked various local television crews who were on their way to cover the trial of two policemen accused of extortion. On August 17, a local politician, Deputy Fabio Martins struck Edson Rodriguez, director

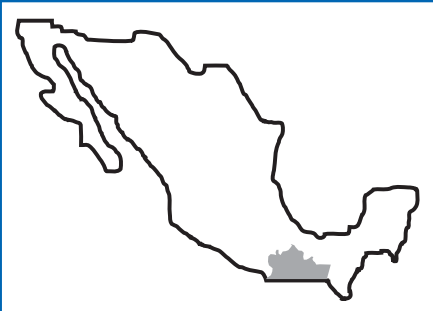
of the weekly newspaper *Paralelo 13*, on the floor of the State Legislature.

## CHIAPAS (Mexico)



The Legal Code establishes that the punishment for slander can be up to nine years in prison (see Indicators December 2004)

## OAXACA (Mexico)



Mexico's southern states have historically been more prone to using violence to solve personal conflicts. An extraordinary situation happened starting on June 17 in Oaxaca City, capital of the state of the same name. That day a demonstration by members of the Revolutionary Workmen and Farmhands Confederation (CROC), a pro-state government union, entered the offices of the local *Noticias* newspaper, demanding that the journalists join the strike.

As the journalists did not agree, the union members blocked the journalist's exit for nearly a month. During all this time the journalists continued printing the newspaper even though on June 20 the strikers cut the newspaper's light and telephone lines. On June 28 an announcement by Reporters without Borders was caustic: "These thugs that respond to the

local authorities have forcibly held thirty one journalists for eleven days in the newspaper's offices". On July 18 the journalists were violently ejected from the offices by "a group of masked men armed with pick axes". The police at no time intervened which according to Reporters without Borders "confirms that the Governor, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), was responsible for this episode with the intent of silencing the newspaper".

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## IMPUNITY IS RETREATING

Thanks to efforts by international organizations, mainly Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), measures are being taken to fight impunity.

In response to crimes against journalists, the Mexican Government is following Colombia's footsteps. In response to the death of journalists, and under pressure from editors and freedom of expression organizations, such as CPJ, President Vicente Fox named Miguel Angel Meneses Maciel as special Prosecutor for crimes against journalists.

Colombia had also established a "Unit to Investigate Murder of Journalists" but, according to Eduardo Bertoni's report last August for the OAS, no personnel had yet been assigned.<sup>1</sup>

Promoted by IAPA, a Meeting of Editors of the Northern Border was held in August that reached important agreements and the intention is to incorporate editors from the center and southern regions of the country. They drew up the "Declaration of Hermosillo" and the 3<sup>rd</sup>. clause is of note:

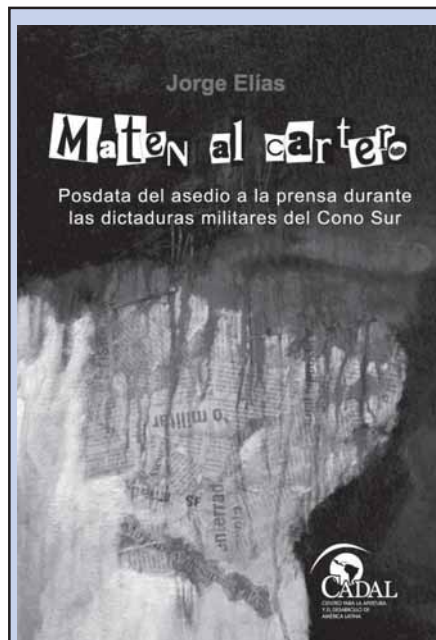
*"We decided to form a special team of investigative reporters to carry on with the work being done by murdered journalists. We have a commitment that the findings will be published by all the participating newspapers".*

This type of action was carried out at least once in Colombia. It was named Manizales Project, the name of the town where the journalist Orlando Sierra was murdered. The coalition of local and national media that was organized to carry on with Sierra's investigation led to solving the crime. As mentioned in the previous report: "In Latin America it happens that not only is there legal impunity, but also journalistic impunity. In nearly all cases, after a freedom of press violation, the victim's press colleagues do not publish an account of what happened or of what was being covered up".

There was also an IAPA promoted meeting in Peru that produced the "Pucallpa Declaration". Its content is similar to the Mexican declaration and has the same objectives. This was as a result of the murder on April 21 in Pucallpa of the journalist Alberto Rivera Fernandez. The investigation carried out was successful and the material and intellectual culprits were identified.

In Peru, the murder of radio announcer Antonio de la Torre Echeandia that took place on February 14 2004 in the town of Yungay, was also solved. He was knifed to death on the street at night by two men and before dieing he managed to give the name of one of them, who turned out to be the town Mayor's chauffeur. Torre Echeandia had denounced the Mayor. The investigation of the case proceeded and on December 14 2005 the Mayor was convicted to seventeen years in prison. The two material authors were also convicted and the Mayor's daughter, who was also implicated, is fugitive. The residents of the town, convinced of the Mayor's guilt, walled up the entrance to the Town Hall so that the Mayor could not enter his office.

<sup>1</sup> Free Expression Office: "Impunity, self-censure and internal armed conflict: an analysis of the state of freedom of speech in Colombia", August 2005 (Impunity, self-censure & armed conflict: an analysis of freedom of expression in Colombia". August 2005.



**This book was written based on documents and testimonies at the time and in later years. Curiously enough, these again have become topical subjects as if time had stood still, as if the wounds had never healed. The military dictatorships have ended but the threats and aggressions against journalists continue.**

**Neither has crime ended in a region bereft of confidence, particularly in its institutions.**

Available in the main bookstores in Argentina. Also available in pdf at [http://www.cadal.org/libros/pdf/Maten\\_al\\_Cartero.pdf](http://www.cadal.org/libros/pdf/Maten_al_Cartero.pdf)

## THE POLICE FORCE AND JOURNALISM

The state of the Latin American police forces is an indicator of the low democratic quality of the region. It is becoming increasingly difficult to organize police forces that are effective guardians of the laws and respectful defenders of human rights.

In Bogota, German Palma, a cameraman for *Noticias Uno*, was beaten by the police in the street and then taken to the precinct. In Bolivia, the police did not intervene when a band of smugglers stoned a journalist who happened to be covering an accident

Edwin Pastor, a journalist of a program called “TV Enfasis” on a local channel in Chiquimula (Southeast Guatemala), began receiving threats on July 25 2005 when he published information regarding an “aggression by the Criminal Investigation Service (police) to a group of youngsters”. Pastor holds the police responsible for his “physical and psychological integrity”.

In Chiapas, the Director of the Municipal Police of Tuxtla Gutierrez, Mariano Rosales Zuarth, when drunk asked one of his subordinates to kill the Director of a local newspaper, Concepcion Villafuerte. According to Reporters without Borders: “He asked Commander Deonicio Elevit Nolaesco to finish off Concepcion Villafuerte if she continued writing in the newspaper *La Foja Coleta* or any other newspaper. He was to cause her car turn over so that the crimewould appear as an accident. *La Foja Coleta* was publishing information regarding police work conditions.

Not only do police abuses against journalists occur in the interior of Mexico, it also happens in Mexico City. Arturo Garcia, a radio announcer for *FM 98.5*, was attacked by police in the Federal District’s Historic Center on November 3 when he was reporting on the arrest of a taxi driver. When he intervened he was told that the taxi was “interrupting the traffic”, to which Garcia responded that: “that wasn’t sufficient reason”. The policeman replied: “I am going to kill you with this hand”. Then approximately ten policemen began beating the journalist.

In Argentina, in the last semester the police in the Province of Entre Rios and Cordoba have been involved in episodes where journalists were ill treated.

Private organizations and some Governments carry out workshops concerning freedom of press for journalists, who have no doubts regarding this subject. It would be more beneficial to apply these resources to design programs to work jointly with the local police force to end abuses and violence against the press.

## GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING AND “SUBTLE CENSORSHIP”

The lack of empiric studies is an element that to a certain extent reinforces the oppression of the press.

When those empiric studies are made, the problems become more visible, less abstract and have more possibilities of being considered by the Government and different sectors of society.

An example of this is an investigation that has just been published by Civil Rights Association (ADC): “Subtle censorship: Abuses with Government advertising and other

restrictions to freedom of press in Argentina”. For the first time it describes in-depth the discretionary use of the Government advertising funds to control the editorial tone of the media. It has been a customary practice ever since the origins of the media in Latin America but has never been documented. The economic relationship between Government and media is in itself, is one of the lesser transparent areas. Added to this, the political group in power has certain hostility towards the free exercise of journalism so the

Government uses the allocation of their advertising to exert heavy pressure.

The study provides information on the allocation of advertising by the national Government and four provincial Governments (Cordoba, Neuquen, Rio Negro and Tierra del Fuego). Even though there are different parties in power they all behave similarly with the media affecting the population’s right to be informed. It describes how the advertising decisions in all cases are centralized in a public official close to the center of power.



## Words to be remembered I

### (1) A President's dangerous error.

*The Colombian President Alvaro Uribe is critical of the media's role covering the violent conflict in his country. Some months back, while on a flight, he made a statement that incriminated a journalist. Eventually it turned out that it was based on erroneous information and the President apologized. But meanwhile the journalist had to leave the area fearing for his life.*

June 27 2005.

**“President Alvaro Uribe Vélez:** ¿Can I explain to you a concern I have regarding the case of a journalist?

**Julio Sánchez:** Mr.President, please go ahead.

**Presidente Alvaro Uribe Vélez:** Look, our security is democratic because it is committed to public liberties; it's committed to pluralism, because it is security for the businessmen and the workers. Publicly and privately I repeat to the Armed Forces: look, we need to provide security to those closer to the Government as well as to those who are critical of it.

We have indicators that measure daily what happens to the Mayor's security, what happens to the Legislators' security, what happens to the journalists, what happens to the teachers, what happens to the union officials. The Presidency keeps a record of these indicators because they are essential to measure the democratic implementation of our security. A security that is not concerned about the teachers, the union members, the mayors, the legislators, the journalists, it is a security that is not democratic.

I am deeply concerned because the terrorists summon journalists to get press coverage of their actions. The Government does not have how to stop that, this is a democratic Government. The only way I have is calling on them to reflect. It is very sad to be on a plane with 22 coffins of 22 patriots and to know that one of the television cameras arrived at Putumayo three days before the attack and I ask myself repeatedly, why an international camera, why is there still this communication between terrorists and the press. I have no way of stopping it. Colombia has a democratic tradition and our democratic security is committed to improve security for

the wellbeing of democracy. I simply want to express this sadness so that you, as communicators, analyze it, see how we can establish a difference between the respect for liberty, the press' guarantees and the condemnation by all of terrorism. One thing is that the press be critical of the Government, that it denounce the Government but what is worrying is that the press has direct communication with the terrorists.

**Julio Sánchez:** Mr.President, who is the media that had that information and arrived three days before the attack?

**Presidente Uribe Vélez:** Julio, leave it at that. I'll leave it at that because I have to draw a line between the reasons for my sadness and concern and fact that I can't make accusations. I simply say it to reflect on it”<sup>1</sup>

Hours later, the Presidential press service sent by electronic mail an announcement where President Uribe Velez regretted having made this statement based on “inexact information”

The message read: “The mention that the President of the Republic made this morning referring to the presence of international journalists in the Department of Putumayo was made based on inexact information regarding the date in which the reporters arrived in the area.

The President of the Republic regrets this mistake and reiterates the Government's will to protect and guarantee public liberties.”<sup>2</sup>

This means that the decisions are political and not technical. There is a case of a public utility company in Neuquen that has no control over its advertising budget and in many cases its advertising appears in media that does not reach the company's consumers. It is clear that currently in Argentina at national and provincial level, state advertising is a political assignment, not technical.

The Supreme Court rejected a demand made by a newspaper from the city of La Plata (*Hoy en la Noticia*) complaining that it did not receive official advertising. The Court's response was that it never

had. They are now waiting for another Supreme Court decision, filed by the newspaper *Rio Negro* against the Neuquen provincial government that could be used as jurisprudence to protect freedom of press. In this case, the provincial government withdrew the advertising that they had assigned to the newspaper after it denounced a case of corruption where the Governor was involved. Another method of punishing the more unruly media is to withhold payment of advertising already published (the complete report can be found at [www.adc.org.ar](http://www.adc.org.ar)).

<sup>1</sup> Interview given by President Alvaro Uribe Velez transmitted by W Radio on the morning of Monday June 27 2005 and filed on the radio's web page as “Uribe: we must unite so as to remove the terrorist nightmare”.

<sup>2</sup> Presidential communiqué sent by the press office SNE, the afternoon of Monday June 27 2005. (Taken from <http://pabloprensa.blogspot.com/2005/06/memata-latrizeza-del-presidente.html>).



## NEOPOPULISM IN THE MEDIA

The different expressions of neo-populism that are surfacing in Latin America have points in common regarding the media. The most notable example is the Venezuelan Government but there are other countries where neo-populist traits are also evident. One case is the Argentine President, Nestor Kirchner and it could also be happening with the new Bolivian President, Evo Morales.

Morales' victory could represent a threat for liberty of expression if he decides to follow in the path of two presidents who have publicly praised him: Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez.

Despite Bolivia's turbulent conflicts in recent years, up till now Bolivia has not had serious problems with freedom of expression. However, some statements made by the new ruling Bolivian group raises the question as to their democratic notions regarding the media

A reporter from the Lima newspaper, *El Comercio*, had the following exchange with the campaign leader of the Socialist Movement (MAS), Walter Chavez:



"Why didn't Evo Morales want to debate with the other candidates?"

"Debates were made so that the second has an opportunity. Furthermore, they are promoted by the media. (Jorge) Quiroga (the candidate who was placed second in the polls) has had government experience and what's more, is very loquacious and they were going to make us debate on the subject of Government administration". (December 18).

In Venezuela, Yuri Pimentel is President Chavez' Minister of Information & Communications.

The previous minister is now the Director of Telesud television channel. Pimentel previously was Vice Minister of Communicational Strategy and edits a magazine called *Patria Grande* "oriented towards the Cuban-Venezuelan integration". According to an article published in *Granma*, the main Cuban newspaper, Pimentel maintained that the magazine's objective is to "combat the vileness of the media's power and to make known the achievements of the Agreement signed by Cuba and Venezuela". (*Granma*, January 31 2005)

In a recent article written by the Mexican intellectual Enrique Krauze regarding populism in the region, there were three "specific characteristics" that may help explain why these Governments coincide regarding their relationship with the press.

Krauze mentions: the exaltation of the charismatic leader ("there is no populism without the figure of the providential man who will resolve, once and for all, the people's problems"); seizing the power of the word ("the populist believes he is the supreme interpreter of the general truth and also the people's news agency"); fabricating the truth ("the 'popular' Governments interpret the voice of the people, elevates that version to the rank of official truth and dreams of decreeing the exclusive truth"). ("Populism's Decalogue", *El País*, Madrid, October 14 2005).

The points in common that the populists have regarding the media are the following:

(1) Journalism is only a political weapon. The neo-populists analyze the media exclusively as a political battlefield. They use war metaphors when defining communication strategies. These Governments talk about "battle of ideas", "armies of journalists", "communicational struggles", "media terrorism". In that stream of words loaded with war terminology there tends not to be much space left for free criticism, expressing ideas, democratic conversations or deliberative democracy. The freedom of expression speeches is one of the enemy's greatest lies used so as to preserve the status quo. At times, "ingenuous do-gooders" get tangled up in it. Yuri Pimentel, Venezuela's new Minister of Communications and Information, in a recent speech delivered when distributing equipment to more than fifty local radios said that: "this equipment must be the weapons to mold the conscience of our people and defend ourselves from the media's attack". (November 16).

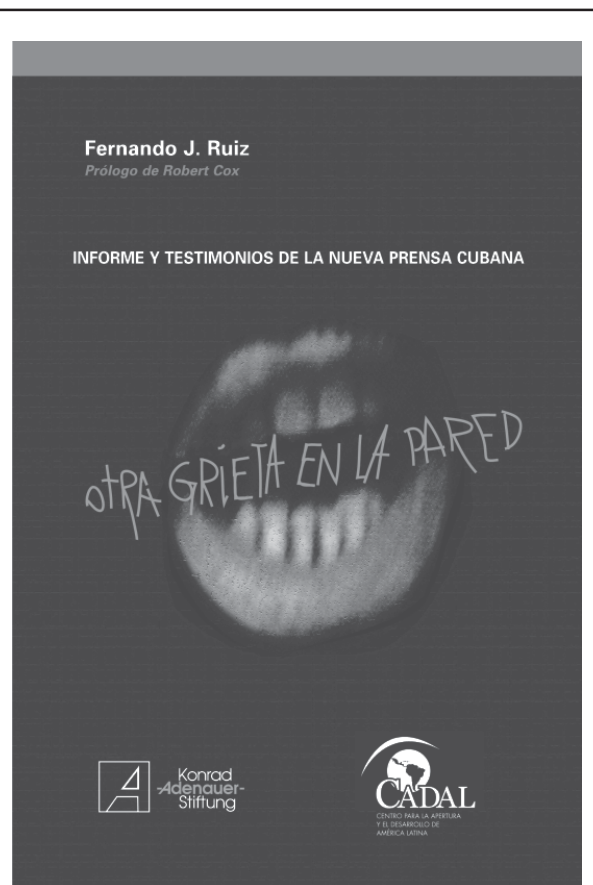
(2) Since it is a political battle, they form a media army. This army must be organized with a centralized structure and have a homogenous delivery. The official or para-official organization becomes the country's main spokesman and the private or independent media loose power. As the state owned media generally does not lack resources, they become very strong.

In Venezuela, the Minister of Communicatios and Information is in the process of regionalizing so as to centralize all the broadcasts. To build up this media army they also resort to co-opting the small local media or creating new ones.

When handing over the equipment to local stations, Minister Pimentel made it clear that they had a specific purpose: “Provide the community media with the tools to create their own expressions from the base of the organizations and this way, breaking the monopoly by which the commercial media had all the communicational power”. In Venezuela, the technical support for the local media is provided by the Government and the Cuban company, Copextel.

President Kirchner’s government has a custom that can be very aggressive regarding the role of the media. Finishing his third year in office, he has yet to give a press conference to local or international press. He has substantially increased the advertising budget and uses these funds to win the media’s support. One of Argentine’s most respected journalists, Joaquin Morales Sola, in an article published in *La Nacion* newspaper said: “those diatribes and brutal censorship against independent journalists is showing an unfortunate trend in the relationship between the power and journalism. We may be seeing just the start of more serious and structural attacks against the press”. A survey carried out by the Argentina Journalists Forum (FOPEA), shows that 38% consider that the current Government is the one that “exerts greatest official coercive pressure on journalism since democracy was reestablished in 1983”. ([www.fopea.org](http://www.fopea.org)).

The latest edition of “Latinobarometro” analyzes Latin American public opinion between the years 1995-2005. It presents two interesting charts showing the relationship between journalism and democracy. First, the publics perception of the power of the media appears to have decreased significantly compared to previous studies (refer to “Increasing conceptual discussion regarding the media’s political role...” Indicadores, December 2004). In response to Latinbarómetros question. “Who has the power?” the survey shows that the media only appears in seventh place. The other important finding is the reply to the question “How much confidence do you have in each of the following groups/institutions?” the media appears in third place behind the Fire Department and the Catholic Church. Among the media, radios figure first, followed by newspapers then television. ([www.latinobarometro.org](http://www.latinobarometro.org)).



**“Ruiz has been able to compile the history of marvelous people who expose themselves to fight a cruel system, in a regime where lies and betrayals are daily occurrences.”**

***Robert Cox***

**Available in the main bookstores in Argentina & available in pdf in [http://www.cadal.org/libros/pdf/Otra\\_Grieta\\_en\\_la\\_Pared.pdf](http://www.cadal.org/libros/pdf/Otra_Grieta_en_la_Pared.pdf)**

## Words to be remembered II



“¡Welcome to Cuba, where journalists have no rights!” Reporters without Borders organized a demonstration on occasion of the Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs’ visit to France.



“Right now in Cuba the journalist Víctor Rolando Arroyo is dying. At dawn today he entered his 25th day on a hunger strike. He started it to demand that the Minister of the Interior remove an officer called Armesto who is in charge of suppressing him in the Guantanamo prison since Spring of 2003”. Raul Rivero, “Cárceles cubanas: la muerte como alivio”(Cuban prisons: death as a relief), *El Mundo*, Madrid, October 3 2005.

“I have tried to find out his dossier number but he doesn’t have one ... All they tell me is that he was a journalist , they wont give me any other explanation”, Mirta Wing told the Committee to Protect Journalists. Her husband, Oscar Mario González, had been arrested in Havana on July 22 and no charges have been filed against him.

“I prefer to leave rather than to remain silent”. Fanor Zúñiga Hurtado, camareman and Chief Editor of channel Más noticias (Buenaventura, Colombia).

June 24. “What a shame, why are you crying? Just cry, it’s good for you”. Words spoken by the First Lady of Peru, Eliane Karp to Fabiola Noriega, reporter for the newspaper *La República*, after she had been attacked by the President’s security guards.



**Regarding Jesús Blancornelas.** “In Hermosillo, Sonora. There are few people like him. He’s unique in the world. His decision to declare war on the narco-power made him a hostage to himself. He is a journalist who resigned not to live a normal life, such as being able to go out with his family.

He decided to make journalism a crusade to denounce the scourge of drug traffickers and their complicity with the police and political power.

During the meeting of the Editor’s of the Northern Border that took place in Sonora’s capital, Jusus Blancornelas, director of Tijuana’s *Semanario Zeta*, was the center of attraction. His arrival at the Hotel Fiesta Americana was an event in itself. Because of security, they had reserved a whole floor for him, guarded by Mexican Army. Then when he arrived at the venue of the meeting the host newspaper *El Imparcial* described the scene: “The corner of Sufragio Efectivo and Mina streets were paralyzed. Three armored vans drew up and more than 20 soldiers descended and fanned out. When the car in which Blancornelas was traveling arrived, his bodyguards descended first and rapidly ushered him in by a side door. Inside the meeting, he undoubtedly was the most admired figure, besieged by the local reporters who he spent half an hour with. His departure was equally spectacular, surrounded by dozens of soldiers from the 38th Infantry Battalion.

Four years ago Blancornelas was nearly killed. The *Semanario Zeta* published an investigative report that revealed a network of complicity between the police and the Arellano Cartel, at that time the most powerful drug cartel in Mexico. They also published a photo of the relentless and blood thirsty leader of the Carte, Ramón Arellano Félix. This caused Arellana to decide to sentence Blancornelas to death. Soon after Arellana’s henchmen riddle the van in which he was traveling with bullets. Blancornelas was seriously wounded but his chauffeur and bodyguard was not as lucky and died.

After dozens of operations and a long recovery, Blancornelas continued as a journalist and has become a crusader against the dirty and criminal drug trafficking business. Today he is the champion and symbol of the press’ fight against the many head narco-monster. He is the only person in the country that runs these risks, including his family. That is the cost to be paid”. “Un símbolo llamado Jesus Blancornelas”(A symbol called Jesus Blancornelas), *Tinta & Papel*,. Mexican magazine of Journalism & Communication).



# ZETA

**Jesús Blancornelas writes.** “Judges and Journalists”, *Semanario Zeta*, August 30 2005.

“Many of the mafia get mad with the journalists. They don’t like the truth to be published. They threaten some journalists so as to scare them and they are successful. If others don’t take heed, they put out a “contract” on them. Doesn’t matter who does it. This way anyone wanting the reward can carry it out. In Hermosillo, journalist Alfredo Jiménez from *El Imparcial* newspaper wasn’t threatened. He realized that a pair of hit men were following him but he managed to give them the slip. But then he was betrayed. He answered a telephone call from an informant. It was a trap. When he arrived at the meeting I suppose they didn’t kill but they kidnapped him. They probably took him to a “safe house” and tortured him. There they half killed him or finished him off. I’m surprised that the police haven’t traced the betrayer’s call or got his telephone number. It must be in the telephone company’s records. For the last couple of days I have been asking a high official in the Government and on Friday he told me: “Alfredo Jimenez is dead”. When I asked how and who did it, he replied that there were still some “pending investigations”. I also asked him about the three theories regarding Alfredo’s body: Buried south of Sonora in Alamos. Burnt in northern Agua Prieta. Or his body disintegrated with acid. The official’s reply was clear: “I am not totally sure”. I insisted: Buried? ‘No’. Disintegrated with acid? ‘No’. Burnt? ‘Could be, could be, but nothing definite yet’.

Alfredo’s is not the only unresolved case, there are many more.

For me the saddest part is: First, the lack of support among journalists. The newspaper’s logo or the owner’s opinion is more important than the life of a journalist. We have reached a point where what interests us most are the facts about crime rather than getting together, investigation and resolving it. Or we pay no attention simple because the victim was a competitor. Some time back in *ZETA* we discovered that a given person was not my co-worker’s Francisco J. Ortiz Franco murderer. We published it after other newspapers and television channels stated the opposite. We finished up in a deaf confrontation. That is why SIP, Reporters without Borders or the New York Committee to Defend Journalists have so much moral authority in Mexico.

Second: Taking the murder of journalists as an excuse, the bureaucracy increases and effectiveness diminishes. Now the PGR has decided to name special Prosecutors in each State. Their only job is to: “Receive reports against freedom of expression”. Pure drivel. To the contrary, attacks and crimes must be considered as federal offenses. It’s no use just appointing special Prosecutors.

The position hasn’t even been defined. There are pending cases where the motive is suspiciously non-press related. The victim’s friends say he was killed because he wrote. In other newspapers they say the contrary. The same thing happens when an individual or a Government official is mixed up in a murder. Despite the press’ claim, the Prosecutors won’t touch it. They do as much as possible to avoid attracting the attention of the Federal authorities. That is why many cases were buried in oblivion. They have been pending for 50 years. If this continues, the same will happen to murdered judges and journalists. Just a lot of noise”.

“We would investigate all the cases if it weren’t that they’d shut us up for ever”, Javier Sepulveda Ramirez, Kapital Radio, Arauca, Colombia). (Interviewed by the Committee for Protecting Journalists).



“I want to return immediately and start a newspaper with total freedom of expression, with opportunities for all the sectors and all the population. Cuba

needs it because for a democracy, a free, open journalism without limitations, where everyone can express their opinion, is very important. I think its possible in the short or medium term, because its not a dream or a whim, but a need that the Cuban society has to open up, develop, give back to the individuals their freedom and start to rebuild the country on a democratic base”, Raúl Rivero.

October 8. “In my dusty cell, what makes my hope for freedom seem closer is the news of friends all round the world writing articles about my case or simply mentioning the sentence I have received. A prisoner’s greatest disaster is not the amount of years he of his sentence but to be forgotten. We have the moral obligation to defeat oblivion. I ask that we permanently remember the imprisoned Cuban journalists”. Raúl Rivero in his speech to SIP in Indianapolis.

December 22. “During nearly three years of confinement, the lawyer and independent journalist Mario Enrique Mayo, Director of this Agency, spent them in six different prisons; he suffered a variety of illnesses; three times tried to commit suicide and with a knife carved on his chest, arms and face the letter L for Liberty, proclaiming his innocence and demanding justice”. Nueva Prensa Cubana / Reporting from Camagüey, Maydelín Guerra / Félix Varela Agency [Maydelin is Mario E. Mayo’s wife].

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Libertad de Información México

Sindicato de Periodistas del Paraguay

Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Prensa (Venezuela)





The Center for the Opening and Development of Latin America (CADAL), based in Buenos Aires, was incorporated as a Foundation on February 26 2003 with the object of strengthening democracies, rule of law and the economic freedom in the countries of the region. To that end, CADAL carries out activities analyzing, investigating, promoting and training in the following areas: Latin American Politics, Human Rights, Journalism and Democracy, Economy and Rule of Law, Modernizing the Political Parties, and Development and Institutional Communications.

CADAL has received two international awards for its work: "2005 Templeton Freedom Award Grant for Institute Excellence" y "2005 Francisco De Vitoria Prize for Ethics and Values".



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# THE WORST AREAS TO PRACTICE JOURNALISM IN LATIN AMERICA

DECEMBER 2005



## REFERENCES:

**(A) BLACK AREAS**  
The law prohibits freedom of press and the law is enforced.

**(B) RED AREAS**  
The law protects freedom of press but the State does not implement it so journalists/media are in constant physical risk. Every case where the authorities were involved in a crime against a journalist is included in this category. Red Areas can be more dangerous to a journalist's life than a Black Area regardless that in Red Areas there is supposed to be more press freedom. Democracies that have not managed to build effective national states offer freedom along with the risks of anarchic situations.

**(C) BROWN AREAS**  
The law protects freedom of press but there is a constant harassment that unnerves the journalists though they may not be in immediate physical risk.