

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST THREATENED IN HONDURAS

On 5 January, a journalist was followed and threatened with a gun in the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa. Later, he also received death threats by text message. Honduras has become increasingly dangerous for journalists: up to 10 media workers were killed in 2010.

At 7.45am, on 5 January, **Esdras Amado López**, a journalist and the Director of Honduran TV channel Canal 36, was driving from the airport towards the centre of Tegucigalpa. He noticed from the rear-view mirror that a green Jeep vehicle with two people inside was following him. The driver of the vehicle, dressed in army uniform, was holding a pistol, which he proceeded to load, while the passenger was taking photos of Amado López's car. When both vehicles stopped in a traffic jam, Amado López got out of his car and asked them why they were taking photos of him. The man with the gun got out of the vehicle, holding the pistol, and told Amado López: "I know who you are and I'm not frightened of your TV channel. Your channel and you are criminals." ("Yo conozco a vos y no te tengo miedo de tu medio. Tu medio y tu lengua son delincuentes"). Amado López asked him to put away the gun. The man replied: "I have had a gun all of my life, I am from the army" ("He tenido pistola toda mi vida, soy military"). As he feared the situation could escalate, Esdras Amado López decided to leave. The green vehicle followed his car for a few blocks and then changed route.

At around midnight that night, Amado López received five threats by text message, all referring to the incident and threatening him with death. One of the messages read "Stop talking shit...I hope someone kills you and buries your tongue, son of a bitch" (Deja de estar hablando mierdas...Ojalá que alguien te mate y que te entierren la lengua, perro hijo de la gran puta) Another message read "The army trains officials to defend this country from sons of bitches like you" ("Las fuerzas armadas forman oficiales para defender esta patria de hijos de puta como vos").

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued precautionary measures in favour of Esdras Amado López on 29 June 2009. To date, they have been only partly implemented and the journalist is still at risk.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- Calling for an independent, thorough and impartial investigation into the incident and the threats against Esdras Amado López, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- Urging that the authorities take immediate steps to fully comply with the IACHR order of 29 June 2009. The form of protection provided to Esdras Amado López must be agreed with him and reflect his own wishes;
- Urging the authorities to take immediate action to fulfil their commitment to protect journalists

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 FEBRUARY 2011 TO:

Minister for Justice and Human Rights

Ana Pineda
Ministra de Justicia y Derechos Humanos
Casa Presidencial
Boulevard Juan Pablo Segundo
Palacio José Cecilio del Valle
Tegucigalpa, M.D.C.
Honduras
Fax: +504 2290 5129

Salutation: Dear Minister, Estimada
Sra. Ministra

Minister of Interior

Oscar Alvarez
Secretario de Estado
Secretaría de Estado en el Despacho de Seguridad, Plantel Casamata, subida al Picacho, Tegucigalpa, M.D.C, Honduras
Fax: +504 2220 1756
E-mail: despachoministro@yahoo.com
Salutation: Dear Minister / Estimado
Sr.Ministro

And copies to:

Canal 36
Colonia Tepeyac, Calle Froylán Turcios
100 mts. Del Hospital Las Lomas
Medical Center,
Edificio "Piedras de la Gloria"
Tegucigalpa, M.D.C.
Honduras

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 26 November 2010, three armed men went to Canal 36 and asked for Esdras Amado López, apparently in retaliation for a news programme exposing corruption. They went there outside working hours and took photos of the staff of the TV station, speaking aggressively to a journalist.

Following the *coup d'état* on 28 June 2009, there were closures and occupation of media outlets by military personnel, media workers were beaten and physically attacked, particularly those investigating organised criminal activity, human rights violations or speaking out about the *coup d'état*, were subjected to threats and intimidation. Canal 36 was forced to close down on 27 September 2009 during the *coup d'état*. It started broadcasting again after three weeks. The TV channel had been active in denouncing the role of the army during the *coup*, a period when the police and army clashed frequently with protestors.

In 2010, according to local NGOs, ten journalists were killed in Honduras. Among those killed, was Nahúm Palacios, who had been granted precautionary measures by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

During a review of the human rights situation of the country at the United Nations Universal Periodic Review in November 2010, the issue of the killing of journalists was raised repeatedly. The authorities responded that all such cases were under investigation and that the appropriate measures were being taken to bring those responsible to justice. In addition, the Honduran authorities announced the development of a strategy to protect journalists, social communicators and human rights defenders with a view to protecting their lives and physical integrity.

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