

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 24/001/2003 (Public)
News Service No: 160
4 July 2003

Embargo Date: 4 July 2003 06:00 GMT

Costa Rica: The Medina investigation a test case for justice

Amnesty International today added its voice to those who will be protesting in Costa Rica on 7 July at the failure by the authorities there to properly investigate the murder two years ago of the popular Colombia-born radio journalist, Parmenio Medina Pérez.

"Medina's murder was the first known murder of a journalist in modern Costa Rica, and it shocked that normally peaceful society. Now, two years later, the authorities' apparent unwillingness to pursue those who ordered his killing is equally shocking," Amnesty International said.

"The government must ensure that there is a genuine investigation into this killing, and that those responsible, whoever they may be, are brought to justice."

"Costa Rica's judicial system must not be allowed to suffer the same fate as its Central American neighbours. If justice is not delivered in a case of such prominence as the Medina inquiry it is questionable whether justice can be done in Costa Rica."

"We share the concerns of Costa Ricans, particularly journalists and broadcasters, that the failure to clarify this crime is a threat to press freedom and places all broadcasters and journalists in potential danger, if they publish anything which reflects badly on politicians or church figures," Amnesty International concluded.

Medina was shot down at close range near his home just outside the Costa Rican capital, San José, on 7 July 2001. He had just finished taping the latest edition of his popular weekly satirical radio show, *La Patada*, (the "Kick"). Medina, who was widely known and admired in Costa Rica, used the show as a platform to expose corruption, degradation of the environment, misuse of public funds and other wrong-doing by public figures wherever he saw it. His latest crusade was directed at apparent financial misconduct at the Catholic Radio station, Radio María.

Background

Parmenio Medina came to Costa Rica in 1968, fleeing violence in Colombia. Fellow journalists are not satisfied with the official inquiry into his death, but are reluctant to carry out their own inquiries, because under the Costa Rican penal code, they could be charged with defamation if they report anything considered to fall foul of the country's "crimes against honour law". Under this law anyone who libels, slanders, defames, or reproduces offensive statements against anyone, even public officials can be fined or imprisoned. In a poll last year, 56% of the journalists interviewed said they had been threatened by public officials who took exception to their reporting. Seven had received physical threats and 37% said they had been threatened with charges of libel, slander and defamation.

Since Medina's shooting there have been a number of arrests of common criminals suspected of being the actual triggermen. However, as the second anniversary of the crime approaches, Costa Rican organisations are again planning street protests, to express widespread concern that the investigation to determine who put out the contract on Medina's life is going nowhere, reportedly because those involved are too powerful to touch.

Public Document

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