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## **Dominican Republic: Journalist's killing must spur better protection**

Authorities in the Dominican Republic must ensure journalists are given adequate protection to carry out their jobs without fearing for their lives, Amnesty International said today after a television presenter was abducted and shot dead in the east of the country.

The body of TV journalist José Silvestre was found yesterday near the city of La Romana with two bullet wounds in the abdomen, several hours after four people were seen beating him and driving away with him in an all-terrain vehicle.

“The Dominican authorities must ensure a prompt and full investigation into the circumstances around José Silvestre’s death and bring to justice those responsible,” said Susan Lee, Amnesty International’s Americas Director.

“If it emerges that his death could have been prevented through better protection, the authorities must make that information public and ensure more is done in future to protect journalists at risk.”

In recent months, Silvestre, who worked as a presenter for regional station Caña TV, had faced attacks following his reporting on drug-trafficking issues, in which he implied businessmen and anti-drugs officials had a role. He was arrested in May on defamation charges after denouncing local Prosecutor José Polanco Ramírez for having alleged links to a drug-trafficking network.

Shots were fired at Silvestre’s house in May and, according to his sister, unknown assailants tried to kill him last week.

Because of the attacks, in May the national press workers’ union (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Prensa) had requested police protection for Silvestre. The authorities did not follow up on this request.

National Chief of Police José Polanco Gómez is reportedly overseeing an investigation into Silvestre’s death.

Many journalists in the Dominican Republic face threats and attacks, especially when they report on drug-trafficking and expose alleged ties between public officials and drug-trafficking networks. According to the national journalists’ union, more than 30 journalists and press workers have been attacked between January and May of this year.

“Given numerous reports of attacks and threats against journalists, the Dominican authorities should strongly condemn these incidents, fully investigate each case and provide adequate protection to journalists,” said Susan Lee.

“Journalists must be able to carry out their jobs without fearing for their lives.”