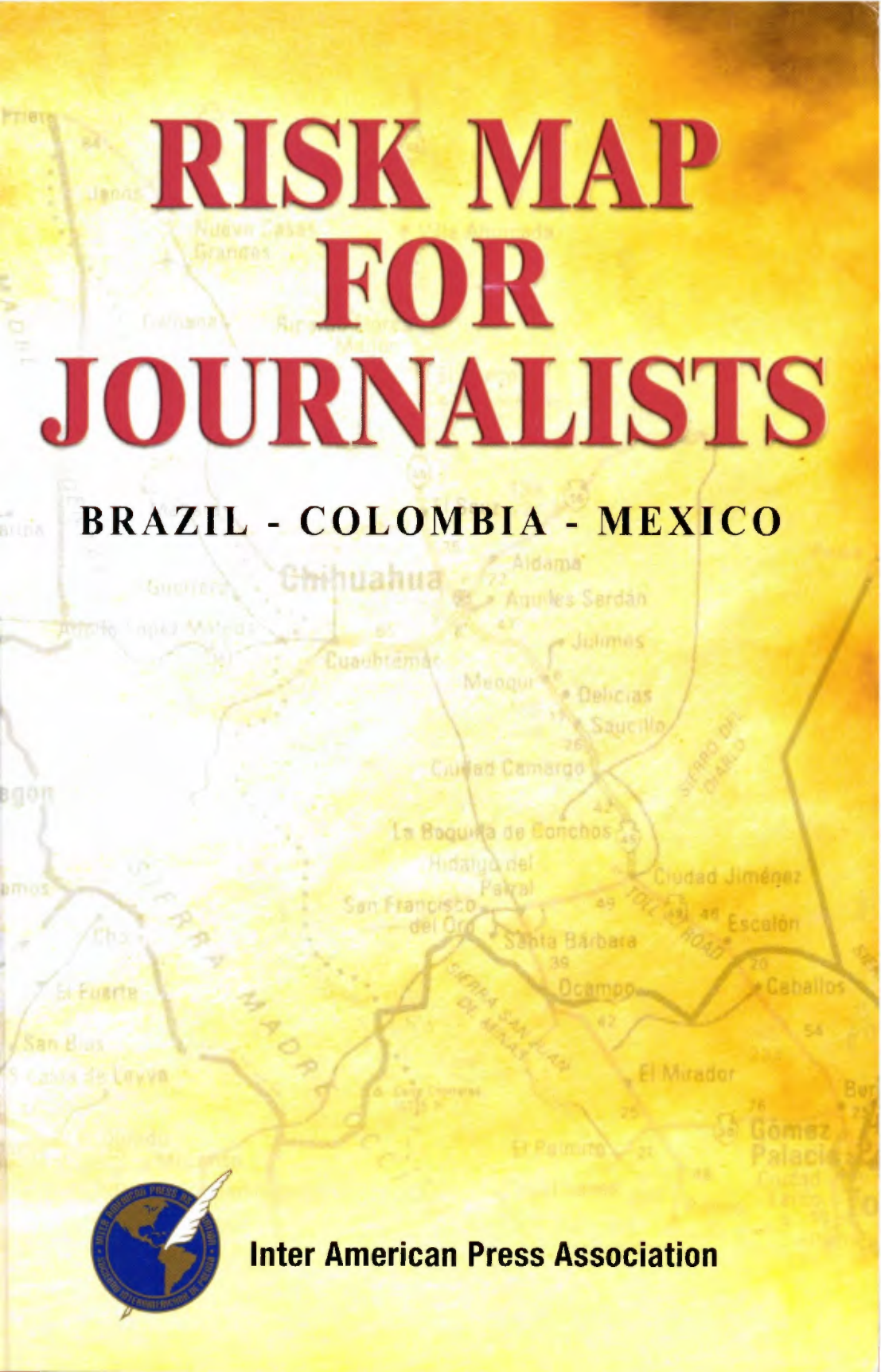
RISK MAP FOR JOURNALISTS

BRAZIL - COLOMBIA - MEXICO



Inter American Press Association

RISK MAP FOR JOURNALISTS

BRAZIL - COLOMBIA - MEXICO

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Prefaces

Our Aim

The publication of **Risk Map for Journalists** has two fundamental purposes: first, it documents the violence against journalists, tracks down its sources and shows how it influences their daily work. Our second purpose is to alert and educate journalists and foreign correspondents on the dangers inherent to news coverage in the hope they will take preventive measures to eliminate or at least lower these risks. Prevention is essential. No journalist should have to put his life at risk in order to report the news.

This is the fourth book published by the IAPA through its **Project Against Impunity** under the sponsorship of the *James L. and John S. Knight Foundation.* Earlier publications covered the investigation of imprecise procedures employed in hundreds of unsolved murders of journalists and led us to advocate legal and judicial changes through governmental and inter-governmental organizations in the fight against such impunity.

Violence against journalists in Latin America has not faded in the past few years, rather, its sources and geographic areas have changed. By 1984, the IAPA had already published *Surviving Dangerous Assignments* in response to the violence that arose from political turmoil in several Central American countries and South America's fledgling democracies. While this phase of instability has calmed, today's main sources of violence are organized crime and governments' susceptibility to corruption.

Statistics on murders of journalists in recent years have identified specific "no-man's lands" such as the northern Mexican border with the US, the border between Brazil and Paraguay and areas ruled by the guerrilla and paramilitary groups in Colombia, where the absence of rule of law and scant administration of justice severely cripple journalists' ability to exercise their profession.

Our aim is not only to diagnose and prevent, but also to make a plea to the international community to create and implement tools to fight impunity and violence against journalists. Beyond protecting journalists and a person's exercise of free expression, we staunchly defend and promote the public's right to receive information without barriers. ❑

Diana Daniels
IAPA President (2005 – 2006)
Vice President, General Counsel and Secretary
The Washington Post Company
Washington, D.C.

Zero Tolerance

The existence of the Inter American Press Association and similar organizations is evidence that the defense of freedom of the press and expression is an ongoing and necessary process requiring a great deal of energy and dedication.

Threats are countless and come from sources as varied as they are creative. In no country is there complete freedom of the press and nowhere does there exist unlimited tolerance for the media and journalists. Political pressures, economic sanctions, legal mechanisms, judicial reprisals and threats of imprisionment are some of the forms used to silence or, at least, manipulate the messengers.

But all this is tolerable. What is not tolerable and what merits "zero tolerance" from the IAPA is the elimination of the messenger and, as a result, the loss of his message.

Violence against journalists is the foremost attack against press freedom, not just for the attack itself, but also because violence can have a domino effect on other journalists and media outlets. What this **Risk Map for Journalists** does, through the voices of hundreds of editors and newspaper publishers, is bring to the forefront the greatest consequence of violence: self-censorship.

The problem demands greater efforts by government officials and the courts to reach those responsible. Beating impunity and punishing the guilty means breaking the vicious cycle in which violence thrives.

But it is also true that the death of a journalist is not only in retaliation for an opinion, criticism or denunciation. At times, reporters – and their editors –work negligently, carelessly and without taking the necessary safety precautions to lessen the risks and still produce good quality.

This **Risk Map for Journalists** exposes the external and internal weaknesses of the profession. It completely validates the efforts and leadership of the IAPA in the defense of the profession by championing the rights and guarantees of the journalists, their training, and increased public awareness. ❑

Gonzalo Marroquín
Chairman
IAPA's Committee on Freedom of the Press and Information
Editor
Prensa Libre
Guatemala City, Guatemala

Where Are We Heading?

The publication of this **Risk Map for Journalists** is one more significant step in our **Project Against Impunity** and the beginning of a new stage that obliges us to double our efforts and effectiveness.

In 1995, we launched the **Unpunished Crimes against Journalists Project** with the investigation of six murders. It was the first time an in-depth study was done on the causes and consequences of impunity and it seemed to be a titanic, and perhaps Utopian, adventure. Since then, however, and after investigation of some 60 cases we have learned, evolved, and perfected our fight against the horrible existence of unpunished murders of journalists in the hemisphere. And, our work has been strengthened through organizations such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights which has demanded that American governments respond to complaints.

Our work has led to some countries reopening cases that were about to expire because of a statute of limitations, as well as the creation of special prosecutors to deal with crimes against journalists. Other results include legal reforms calling for increased sentences for aggressors, changes in jurisdiction in some cases, and moral and financial compensation for victims' relatives. We helped international organizations, such as UNESCO and the OAS, create instruments against impunity and we strengthened bonds between journalists and editors in Peru and Mexico who committed to fighting impunity together as a result.

In recent years, with the generous and unconditional support of the *John S. and James L. Knight Foundation*, we took on another enormous and important task: we launched investigations, the training of journalists and an educational advertising campaign that calls on all citizens to join in sending complaints to the governments. Because, as Nobel Prize winner **Rigoberta Menchú** said at one of our meetings, "the fight against impunity is everyone's responsibility."

Where are we heading?

We cannot abandon a single battle front: investigations, working with the courts, remaining proactive with international and governmental organizations, training journalists, massive educational campaigns, and exerting constant pressure in the courts. We have learned that this work requires the involvement of legislators, judges, justices, lawyers, prosecutors, and attorneys general. Because today we have no doubt that to fight impunity the best antidote is counting on the administration of quick and effective justice. ❑

Enrique Santos Calderón
Chairman
IAPA's Project Against Impunity
Director
El Tiempo
Bogotá, Colombia

Our Support

A determining factor in the success of the Press Freedom Program and, in particular, the **Project against Impunity**, is the generous and unrestricted support given to the IAPA continuously since 1992 by the *John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.*

This foundation has always included great visionaries and journalists that have fought for press freedom and against impunity. Beginning with **Lee Hills** and continuing with the Foundation's Presidents **Creed C. Black**, **Hodding Carter III**, and particularly in this new era, **Alberto Ibargüen**, they have shared the vision and leadership of the IAPA in its battle to defend and promote freedom of the press and of expression in the Western Hemisphere. It is also important to mention the commitment of the directors of the Journalism Program, namely, **Del Brinkman** and **Eric Newton**.

An important aspect of this project is how it complements IAPA principles and programs. This support totalled funding in the amount of $4,941,155 since the end of 1992 through February 2006. Besides this extraordinary support from the Knight Foundation, it must be noted that no other project in our organization, including the Press Freedom and **Project against Impunity**, would have achieved the success it enjoys without the support and commitment of every one of the IAPA members. It should also be mentioned that this initiative began in the IAPA but later expanded to practically all the press organizations worldwide.

The support of the organization's members, by representing IAPA at forums, conferences, and missions comprised of international delegations several times a year, represents a total of $3,000,000 annually. To this

ad campaign. All these generous joint efforts have allowed the necessary working strategies to thrive and keep the IAPA's mission alive. ❑

Julio E. Muñoz, Ph.D
Executive Director

Prologue

The Silent Violence

The profession of journalist in the Americas is one of high risk. At every IAPA activity reporters ask me for statistics on murders of their colleagues to validate and highlight this fact.

When citing the statistic that 290 journalists have been murdered in the Americas in the past 17 years, mentioning the country that leads in murders or stating which decade was the most dangerous, I ask myself if these are reliable measures of the danger of the profession.

These figures are so misleading because they show only obvious and tangible violence like an iceberg whose huge mass hides under the surface. Today, there is another kind of violence, equally perverse, less obvious, and despicable. It is a subtle violence of creative threats disguised as an anonymous phone call, the morbid message of sending a funeral wreath to a newsroom, placing the last name of a journalist on a "black list" of people to be executed or labeling him a "military objective." At times it appears in less subtle ways, arrogant and loud, exhibited through a shove on the street or a simple warning with a raised finger: "If you file a complaint or publish....we know where your children go to school."

It is a form of silent violence, just as effective or more so than the murder of journalists. It is difficult to quantify because few complaints are filed or there are too many for organizations to handle. Some journalists do not even pay attention to them since they have grown accustomed to living with them, and others do not report them because they will end up being victims; others simply cannot find the necessary interest. They are silenced by the threats and, even worse, their voices are hushed.

Its repercussions are uncontainable. Many, threatened with death or fearful flee to other countries in search of refuge; others, frustrated and with crushed dreams, move on to safer professions. One way or another, this violence infests the backbone of a newspaper and its newsroom, weakens professional self-esteem, and causes reactions of self-protection, leading to another more profound kind of violence that directly affects the flow of information: self-censorship.

Self-censorship was mentioned in late January 2006 by many newspapers and journalists in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico during a seminar organized by the IAPA to examine strategies on how to confront the violence from the drug trade. On the northern Mexican border with the United States, where organized crime has penetrated and gained control in countless activities, including government agencies and even journalism, everyone feels defenseless and vulnerable.

Fear is high. And survival means not investigating, not denouncing, and much less publishing.

What should we do? Confront the drug traffickers? How? Why? "Look at what happened at *El Espectador* in Colombia", a panelist remarked, reminding everyone how the drug traffickers had destroyed one of the leading newspapers in the world in its fight against **Pablo Escobar** and his henchmen. It was an unfair fight, the strength of the pen against the strength of guns and bombs. The result was catastrophic for the newspaper. Its publisher, several journalists, managers, and distributors were murdered; the newspaper's headquarters was completely ruined and its business destroyed. *El Espectador* was followed by other newspapers. After multiple dynamite attacks bombed hundreds of radio and television antennas, after more than one hundred journalists were killed, and after hundreds were forced into exile and thousands threatened, many media outlets and journalists chose silence.

Jesús Blancornelas, publisher of the weekly *Zeta* in Tijuana, who was attacked in 1999 and whose editors **Héctor Félix Miranda** and **Francisco Ortiz Franco** were murdered, said in early 2006 that six Mexican newspapers had decided not to continue reporting on drug trafficking. "I cannot name the newspapers and much less the names of the editors. I would be jeopardizing them, perhaps fatally." Journalists are not only censoring themselves when

they have to report news, but also when they have to denounce threats against victims. This was perhaps the most surprising discovery when writing this book. The large majority of more than 400 journalists that were interviewed preferred to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation.

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

The IAPA decided to produce a **Risk Map for Journalists** to list the most common affronts faced by journalists in the most dangerous regions to practice journalism in Latin America and answer the question of how violence affects the work of journalists.

Among other objectives, this book intends to provide the knowledge for the IAPA and journalists to devise working strategies to fight violence and impunity and to put pressure on governments to develop policies that safeguard freedom of the press and the journalism profession.

To this end, in late 2004 and during 2005 the IAPA asked the members of the Rapid Response Unit (RRU) to undertake this project. For this they would travel to selected locations – some very isolated – where practicing journalism is the most dangerous and where criminals enjoy impunity: areas in Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia.

During this period, member journalists of the RRU, **María Idalia Gómez**, residing in Mexico; **Diana Calderón**, in Colombia; **Clarinha Glock**, in Brazil; and **Jorge Elías**, in Argentina, conducted some 400 interviews with reporters, photographers, editors, newspaper publishers and officials from the three branches of government. They visited 73 cities in 48 states, provinces or departments of these three countries. Another important part of this task was **Jorge Elías**' work focusing on additional regions which will be included in the online version of the **Risk Map for Journalists**.

Besides its work for this book, since its creation in 2000 the RRU has shouldered the important responsibility of investigating crimes against journalists to determine if they were committed as a result of their profession and researching murder cases that remain unpunished.

To date, the RRU has investigated 57 cases.

Clarinha Glock visited 32 cities: Porto Alegre, Foz do Iguaçu, Londrina,

São Paulo, São Bernardo do Campo, Presidente Prudente, Rio de Janeiro, Niterói, São Gonzalo, Vitória, Belo Horizonte, Brasilia, Cuiabá, Campo Grande; Ponta Porã, Salvador, Itabuna, Eunápolis, Santana do Ipanema, Maceió, Fortaleza, Limoeiro do Norte, Recife, Timbaúba, Teresina, São Luis, Timon, Belém, Marabá, Rio Branco, Porto Velho and Manaus. These cities are located in 19 States: Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Espírito Santo, Minas Gerais, Distrito Federal, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Alagoas, Bahia, Ceará, Pernambuco, Piauí, Maranhão, Pará, Acre, Rondônia, and Amazonas.

María Idalia Gómez traveled to 15 cities in 6 states: Tuxtla Gutiérrez, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Tapachula, Acapulco, Chilpancingo, Atoyac de Álvarez; Tijuana, Mexicali, Mazatlán, Culiacán, Los Mochis, Hermosillo, San Luis Río Colorado, Chihuahua, and Ciudad Juárez, located in the States of Chiapas, Guerrero, Baja California, Sinaloa, Sonora, and Chihuahua.

Diana Calderón visited 13 cities in 12 departments or provinces: Valledupar, San Vicente del Caguán y Florencia, Cali Armenia, Barranquilla, Neiva Santa Marta Cartagena, Ibagué, Bucaramanga, Tunja, and Cúcuta, located in the Departments of Cesar, Caquetá, Valle del Cauca, Quindío, Atlántico, Huila, Magdalena, Bolívar, Tolima, Santander, Boyacá, and Norte de Santander.

Jorge Elías visited 13 cities in 5 South American countries: La Paz, El Alto, Catavi, and Santa Cruz de la Sierra, in Bolivia; Trelew and Mar del Plata in Argentina; Asunción, Capibary, Ybu Yaú, and Pedro Juan Caballero, in Paraguay; Santiago in Chile; and Montevideo and Baltasar Brum in Uruguay.

During their travels, the journalists of the RRU experienced first hand some of the risks their colleagues face.

María Idalia Gómez reported that during her trip to Acapulco, in Guerrero state – a common meeting place for political, economic, and social groups, and even organized crime – she noticed she was being watched. "Two reporters told me that I had a 'tail', as they call surveillance. One of them, at my request, investigated further and discovered they were military from the intelligence section. The surveillance, according to them, was due to the fact that they thought I was a foreigner investigating issues of human rights.

I called several sources in the Armed Forces to inform of the mistake and the fear I had. They accepted the error and apologized and said they would continue the watch, but only for my protection. I could already see my circle of 'protection' was gone. I was afraid because in Guerrero there are local political bosses, guerrillas and drug traffickers and also horrible human rights violations committed mainly by the Army. Therefore, it was critical to clarify the situation before a misunderstanding led to something serious."

Diana Calderón mentioned that besides the threats, interviewees told her about risks they face when they go to rural areas, something she also experienced: "I also felt fear in the Departments of Caquetá and Magdalena because of the presence of paramilitaries and guerrilla groups in those areas and especially because it is known that common people like taxi drivers, storekeepers, and even some of those interviewed are informants for illegal groups."

Jorge Elías also faced risks. In northern Paraguay, while he was investigating the murders of **Benito Ramón Jara** and **Salvador Medina Velásquez**, he was told that it was not advisable for him to spend the night there. "On the way back to Asunción, on a road filled with potholes, I had a truck of men with frowning faces and bushy mustaches follow me until I reached the main road.

"On more than one occasion I had to pretend to be a distant relative or even the doctor of one of the victims of violence in order to gain access to detention centers or to get through police check points. On others, it became risky for the sole reason that I was a stranger in distant towns where my mere presence raised suspicions," added **Jorge Elías.**

Within this uncertain climate, the authors' work revealed a high level of indifference by many journalists to the violence that affects them and showed that many cannot even identify the risk factors they face. Some did not even consider the drug trade a risk, since for many years they have chosen not to report on it in order to buy themselves a few moments of peace. Others were able to identify some risks such as constant court citations or government pressures only after being questioned by the interviewers and reflecting on the issue.

The creation of this **Risk Map for Journalists** also served as an open

space for many journalists who could, for the first time, talk about their problems, threats, and risks they are exposed to. "Many reporters after long conversations, ended by telling me that they had much to tell but nobody had ever listened. Their experiences with risk, their daily fears, and even their working conditions were issues that they wanted to discuss as much to confront the risk as for their own personal development," **María Idalia Gómez** stated.

EVERYONE'S OBLIGATION

This **Risk Map for Journalists** is a diagnostic. It reveals a vicious and dynamic cycle marked by violence, impunity, and self-censorship. All the sectors involved are obligated to seek and support solutions for the safety of journalists and the defense of freedom of expression and of the press. No one is exempt.

The State and its governments are responsible for protecting constitutional guarantees, upholding the rule of law and guaranteeing that the administration of justice provides order. Organized crime and corruption are the sources and breeding ground for violence and intolerance against the press and journalists. Without law and justice, there can be no strategy to fight impunity.

The media cannot remain satisfied with self-censorship as the sole means of fighting violence. They must face the challenge and responsibility of analyzing and devising strategies that will allow journalists to inform with creativity and bravery, as well as provide them the needed security and training.

Nor can journalists become passive actors in the process. Besides their duty to their newspapers, they have the ethical obligation to create their own plans for training and personal safety and to detect and avoid dangers more readily. Therefore, it is the obligation of institutions dedicated to press freedom to keep vigil and take the lead to safeguard a free and safe press and to promote public awareness of the profession and the essential value of freedom of expression, democracy and the common good.

APPENDICES OF THIS BOOK

In the struggle against impunity Guatemala City, Hermosillo, Isla Margarita,

Nuevo Laredo, Paris, Pucallpa, and Tegucigalpa have something in common. In each city, the IAPA has promoted and helped prepare documents that call attention to the fight against the violence that surrounds the press and journalists.

These documents, included at the end of the book, support actions that should be adopted by individuals and groups of different perspectives and persuasions: from governments, inter-governmental organizations and NGOs, to press associations, journalists' unions, media and Schools of Communication. The first originated in 1997 from within the IAPA during the Hemisphere Conference on Unpunished Crimes against Journalists held in Guatemala City

At the end of that same year, UNESCO adopted at its headquarters in Paris Resolution 120, and, in 1998, the concern over impunity was included in a resolution of the Organization of American States during its General Assembly on Isla Margarita in Venezuela. These documents were essential to the OAS's decision to create the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; a request the IAPA made explicitly in the Guatemala document.

More recently, in 2005, the solidarity of editors and publishers in Mexico and Peru is evident in the declarations of Hermosillo and Pucallpa, both of which lay out immediate action plans to fight impunity. Finally, in January and February 2006, the conclusions from seminars in Nuevo Laredo and Tegucigalpa contained specific objectives for the protection of journalists and reduction of risks in reporting. ❑

Ricardo Trotti
Director of Press Freedom and the IAPA's Press Institute

Mexico

By María Idalia Gómez*

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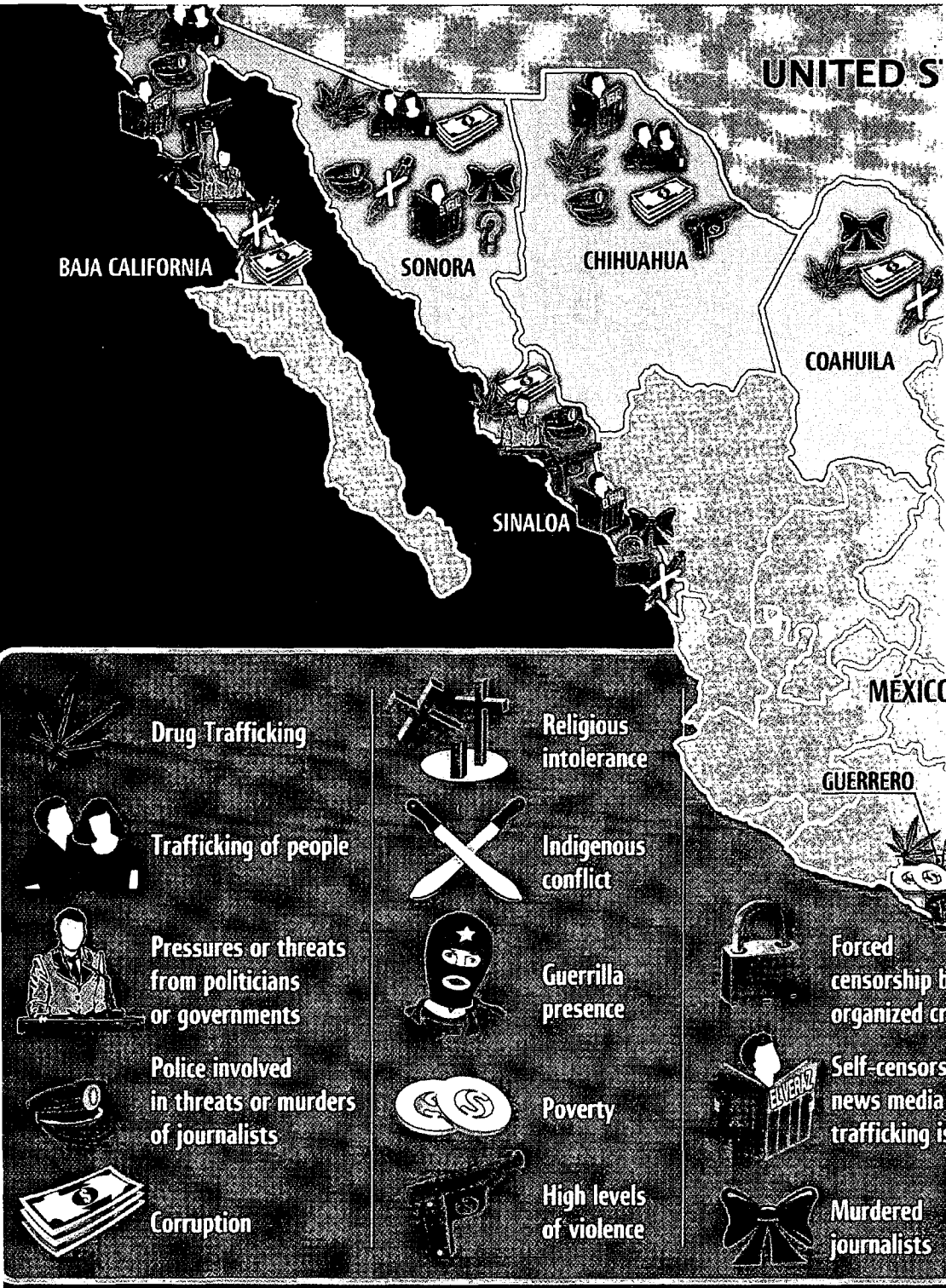
* **María Idalia Gómez Silva** is a freelance journalist from Mexico specializing in national security, justice, and human rights. She has contributed to *El Universal* newspaper, several magazines, and XEW-RADIO in her country and abroad. She worked for Agencia Detrás de la Noticia (Behind the News Agency), *Milenio* newspaper and *Milenio* weekly, and for *El Independiente*, *El Economista*, *Reforma*, *Norte* and *El Universal* newspapers. She studied communications and journalism at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Her articles and stories have been published by the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City. In 1998, she received the "Outstanding Achievement" award from *El Universal* newspaper. She is co-author of «Con la Muerte en el Bolsillo, seis desaforadas historias del narcotráfico en México» («With Death in the Pocket: Six Tragic Stories of Drug Trafficking in Mexico»), released in 2005, in Mexico and Argentina, by Editorial Planeta publishing company. The book received first prize in the 2005 Planeta Journalism Award. Since January 2004, she has been the investigator for the IAPA's Rapid Response Unit in Mexico.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Drug Trafficking
Trafficking of people
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Police involved in threats or murders of journalists
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Indigenous conflict
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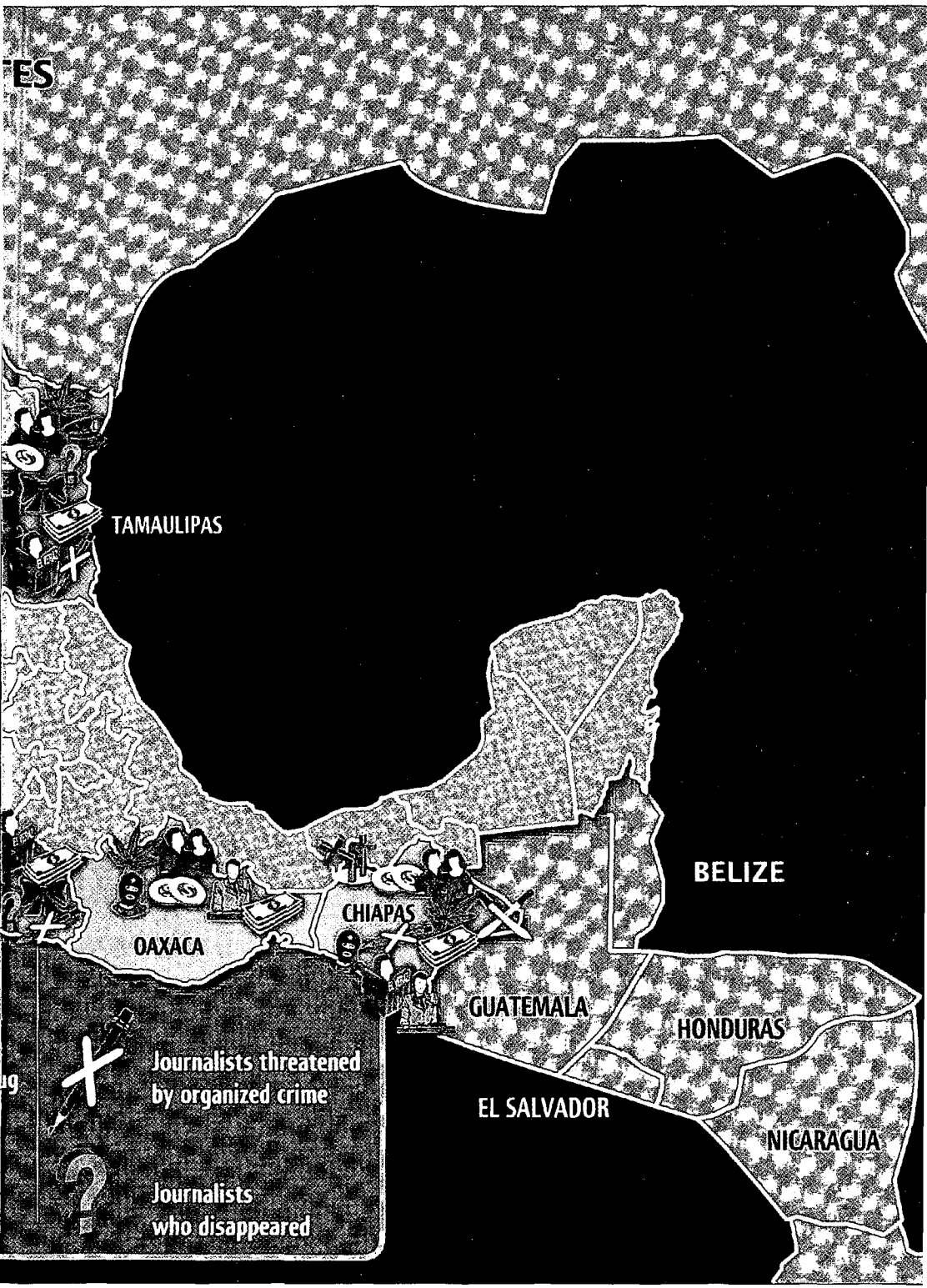

TAMAULIPAS
OAXACA
CHIAPAS
BELIZE
GUATEMALA
HONDURAS
EL SALVADOR
NICARAGUA
Journalists threatened by organized crime
Journalists who disappeared

Introduction

A serious threat to the unfettered practice of journalism exists in Mexico today. Organized crime, protecting its own interests, has emerged in various parts of the country as the censor and guardian of its own profession.

In some places the evidence is palpable, in others it is harder to identify because it is surreptitious and disguised. The overwhelming majority of reporters have opted for self-censorship. They don't investigate or even report on the crime bosses or their far reaching tentacles. In those cities or regions where journalists dare to confront the challenge, the response is threats, pressure and harassment and, in the worst cases, death.

In the north of the country, mainly in the border cities, and in southern Mexico, threats and the murder of local journalists are commonplace. The situation does not appear to be as serious as it really is because of the self-censorship they resort to in those areas. Otherwise, the number of murders would probably be even greater.

"We don't want to be either heroes or victims," says **Gregorio Medina**, editor of Diario *El Debate* de Mazatlán. That is the explanation, as the authorities are failing to do their job.

Living with fear and seeing death day in and day out is no easy thing as is the case, for example, in Chiapas, Guerrero, Tamaulipas, Sinaloa or Baja California. Worse yet, denouncing corruption and drug trafficking does not produce positive results – on the contrary, the conclusion is that "it just wasn't worth it," according to **Jesús Blancornelas**, a journalist targeted by drug traffickers who have put a price on his head.

This danger that permanently besets journalists working on the Mexican border is not reported in the central part of the country. Only a few voices there are raised in solidarity or to report what is happening, either out of disbelief or a lack of awareness.

The IAPA carried out a tour of Mexico through the states where statistics show journalists are at greatest risk, focusing on those that are on the northern and southern borders where conflicts are more prevalent. Included are Chiapas, Guerrero, Baja California, Oaxaca, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Chihuahua and Coahuila.

The Mexico Risks Map is a mosaic of stories related by the protagonists who reveal tale by tale the intolerance, impunity, political power, fear and resignation that journalists in Mexico face. But it also shows that there is little awareness in this country of the threats that exist to this profession and which directly or indirectly have a bearing on their daily work. There is no discussion or consideration of these issues; perhaps that is why the vulnerability is greater.

Today the situation in Mexico in terms of freedom to exercise the profession and the risks that endanger reporters lives may be ranked as follows: **Extreme high risk areas:** Tamaulipas, Baja California y Sinaloa. **High risk areas:** Sonora, Chihuahua y Guerrero. **Risk areas:** Veracruz, México, Nuevo León, Coahuila, Chiapas, Michoacán y Oaxaca. **Unsafe or difficult areas:** Distrito Federal, Jalisco, Morelos, Campeche y Yucatán. In the rest of the country the risk factor appears to be normal.❑

I
Known Warfare: Baja California and Surroundings

It was a relaxed afternoon in March 2000. The birthday party for a reporter from *La Crónica* of Baja California promised to be a pleasant event in the small, sun-drenched city of Mexicali.

For **Marco Vinicio Blanco** and his photographer colleague it was also a relief to not have to cover the breaking news because for two years now they had been on the police beat and that meant their normal working day could easily extend into dawn the next morning – something that might seem strange to an outsider in such a young city (founded in 1903) with a population of around 764,000 and covering an area of some five square miles.

But that was the way it was; in Mexicali there could be a dawn execution in the middle of the street, a gunfight between gang members and police, muggings or drug deals in any of the 500 undercover drug houses where you could find cocaine, marijuana and, increasingly, synthetic narcotics.

That is why reporters had to always be near a phone and the radio to monitor police broadcasts. But that day in March, for a change, everything seemed quiet. Several hours went by and the drinks and sodas were nearly all gone, threatening to end the party so Marco Vinicio and his comrade in arms offered to go out and buy some more. A few blocks away they came across a shop and went in to make the purchase.

Within a few minutes, they saw two pickup trucks park outside the store. A serious-looking, well-dressed man accompanied by some evil-looking men got out of his vehicle. He went straight up to the newsmen and introduced himself as **Miguel Angel Barraza Rodríguez**.

"I heard that you were given some false information," he snapped.

The man and his remark took Blanco by surprise and he responded with a quizzical look.

"Yes," Barraza went on, "it seems that the agent misunderstood the intention of the message and went so far as to threaten you. 'El Licenciado' wants to talk to you and clear things up. Because that wasn't it; it was like friends."

The newsmens' surprise mounted and they became afraid, remembering that he was referring to an encounter they had had some weeks earlier at the Lucerna Hotel with a police officer known to Blanco, but who, on that occasion, was acting as a messenger:

"'El Licenciado' called me and said since I knew you he thought I would be the best channel to send you a message which is a two-part one – good and bad. The bad part is that you withdraw the information or you die. Is this personal? The good part is, how much do you want?"

This episode had occurred in late February, after the reporter had carried out an investigation and then published a number of exclusive stories about a clash between two groups of drug traffickers in a place known as "La Ahumadita," a village some six miles from Mexicali where state police officers set up a roadblock and took **Israel Coronado**, one of those injured in the melee, to a local clinic, left him some money and then departed. Some hours later his family removed

him from of the clinic and took him to San Diego. Coronado was the nephew of the former local police chief and was working for **Gilberto Higuera Guerrero**, a presumed member of the Tijuana drug cartel although at the time little known. No one knew just how important a role he was playing in the Arellano Félix brothers' organization. And Blanco, without knowing, was uncovering the truth.

Upon hearing the message that the agent brought him, Marco Vinicio asked for some time to talk to his newspaper since he was not responsible for the paper or its contents and the threat was being made against those in charge and reporter **Carlos Lima**.

At the *La Crónica* newsroom the executives, managing editor, Blanco and Carlos Lima held a long discussion on what to do and concluded that "no news item is worth risking a life." Nothing further was published on the matter.

Blanco thought that the matter was now behind him and he would have no further problems. That was not to be the case: that March afternoon he found himself faced by a stranger who was accompanied by some nasty-looking men saying that "El Licenciado" wanted to talk to him.

Trying not to show how his heart was thumping and pretending not to be nervous, he tried to put on a friendly face and show calm.

"Yes, with pleasure I'll talk to him, but tomorrow."

"No, right now. I'll meet you in an hour outside the Oxxo store on Quintana Roo Avenue," Barraza countered, without waiting for a reply.

The men left. The *La Crónica* reporters, in a reflex action, checked their watches. They realized then that they had only an hour left to live. So they called two friends and told them that if they did not hear from them in one hour to call the newspaper and everyone else possible to make as much noise as they could. "That's the only thing we can tell you," they stressed.

They went to the address Barraza had given them and waited around 10 minutes before the two pickups appeared along with two motorcycles. They were signaled to come over and join the group – the reporter's car then wedged between the two pickups and flanked by the two motorcycles in an entourage worthy of a government official. They drove through downtown and on to the parking lot of some pool halls.

The place was poorly lit. Several cars were parked and you could see their drivers slumped over the wheels. They stopped and Barraza got out of his truck.

"You stay here," he said, pointing to the photographer, "and you," referring to Blanco, "are going to get into that car (one that looked like a *Grand Marquis* or *Crown Victoria*) beside the driver."

"I've had it now," Blanco thought, believing he was being taken away to be killed. He followed instructions and got into the car, whose interior was dark. Even so, he was able to tell that there was a man inside who no doubt had to be the boss.

"I am Gilberto Higuera," the man said in a serious tone.

"Marco Vinicio Blanco, Mr. Higuera," Blanco replied.

"That idiot went to threaten you," Higuera said, "but no, that wasn't the purpose. It was nothing more than to find out what's with you, if you had something personal against me, or whether they were paying you to get me, or what"

"No, it's just my job," Blanco replied right away. "The information we receive is what we publish."

"What happens is that on many occasions," Higuera said, "enemies get into a fight with us over things we have nothing to do with. In the ("La Ahumadita") affair I stopped the guy, I made sure that he was transferred without any problem, but I had nothing to do with the shootout or anything like that."

Marco Vinicio listened carefully. The way Higuera was talking made him think that, at least that day, they would not kill him. He began to feel less scared.

"I'm one of the good guys, we work with the authorities," Higuera declared. "A little while ago they kidnapped a foreign exchange dealer; well, who do you think rescued him? We did, the local people, and we turned him over to the police and they came out shining. We're helpful people, I don't get involved here, don't get involved in troublemaking, I don't kill or anything like that... just so they leave me alone and let me do my work...."

45 minutes went by very fast. They parted company amicably and before getting out of the car Higuera gave Blanco his cellphone number.

"When you have something concerning me, let me know, I'll tell you whether it was me or not. If it was, I'll tell you; if not, then I'll tell you more or less who it was. There, take this car," Higuera said.

"No, what are you thinking, I can't show up in this car," a startled Blanco replied.

"Then have this," said Higuera, taking some money from his wallet.

"Look, if you want to help me at all, do it with information."

"OK, no problem."

The journalists left the scene and some blocks away stopped, took a deep breath and began to call their two friends to let them know that nothing had happened to them, that they "were okay."

Higuera kept his word. Several weeks later he sent *La Crónica* newsroom a dossier on the murder of **Alfredo de la Torre**, then local municipal police chief, with information that included photos. The file was supposed to be in the sole possession of the authorities. A follow-up telephone call shed light on the delivery.

"We have a deal, no?" the reporter heard from the other end of the line. It was "El Licenciado."

Marco Vinicio had no further communication with him. Four years later, in August 2004, he confirmed that this was the bossman of Mexicali, the one who had done away with local enemies and competitors. The National Secretary of Defense reported an arrest and showed a photograph. The reporter then was able to confirm that this was the man he had talked to.

SIGNS OF CHANGE

In Mexicali, as throughout the northern Mexico border region, fear rules how things are reported, sets the limits and defines what path will be followed. The chosen path has, in most cases, been that of self-censorship.

There is a common thread that runs through the Mexican states where journalism is synonymous with danger. That common thread is organized crime. In each place, however, the monster threatens, controls and attacks in a different way, with different hues and limits, with its own codes and risks, amid different contexts and realities that make each unique. There are places where strong-arm tactics rule, others where corruption is more pronounced, organized gangs are more virulent or the social structure is apathetic or even intolerant.

In all cases the risk that a journalist faces is more serious if the ability to apply the law is low or non-existent on the part of those who have the responsibility to do so – the municipal, state and federal governments.

So far none of the homicides, attempted murders or threats suffered by journalists in Mexico have been investigated in-depth or all the guilty brought to justice. As a result the news media and those working for them have faced a mounting number of threats, attempts on their lives and murders.

THE OASIS AND THE EYE OF THE STORM

To live in Baja California is to live at two extremes while sharing a border with the world's most powerful nation. Some 180,000 people cross that border every day; it is to live in a place where a million people cross over with the intention of reaching the United States. Hundreds of crosses hang on the border fence, a demonstration of the high number who died while seeking to work as "wetbacks." Close at hand there is the majesty of the deserts, the sand dunes and the woods.

This is one of Mexico's youngest states, created in the 1950s by presidential decree and with a population of under 3 million. It comprises five municipalities – Mexicali, Tijuana, Tecate, Ensenada and Playas de Rosarito. The first three lie along 156 miles of the border with the United States.

This place has both its pros and cons. In its favor is the fact that it is a primary commercial gateway; it has 900 "maquiladoras" (assembly plants) providing a livelihood to more than 200,000 people; it exports a large part of the domestic production; it boasts one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. On the downside, the list is serious. Just to cite some figures: 12% of the population is addicted to some kind of drug; narcotics smuggling is rife; and the levels of violence and lack of safety continue rising to the point that it has the nation's highest number of reported crimes – nearly 115,000.

Baja California is a land of passage, of the search for opportunities, and of social violence. It is both an oasis and the eye of the storm.

It was for a decade unregulated territory for the Arellano Félix brothers,

considered the bosses of the Tijuana cartel, who were able to sell a ton of cocaine into California. They bribed officials and ruled the region under a reign of terror, the revolver and automatic rifle. Despite the death of Ramón and the arrest of his brother Benjamín, the situation is only getting worse.

WORKING IN MEXICALI

Mexicali has the feel of a small town, of narrow streets and little traffic, chocolate-colored because of its dark brown earth. To arrive there is to be in a very deep valley, below sea level, and in an oasis after the desert that you must cross to get there.

Ten years ago it was quiet, especially if compared to a city such as Tijuana, which has always been beset by violence and corruption. Reports by the Mexican Attorney General's Office claim it was a region where drug traffickers wanted their families to live until the mid-1990s when they began to move to Ensenada. Mexicali lost the benefit of that protection and began its role as a channel for drug smuggling.

The city, which you can cross in 20 minutes, has been changing and deteriorating. In 2003 there were some 50 executions attributed to drug traffickers; the following year there were more than 70 and in the first half of 2005 alone there were 30.

Without a doubt journalists in Mexicali face the greatest risk from drug trafficking heightened by corruption and impunity.

Marco Vinicio Blanco, currently a reporter for the newspaper *El Mexicano*, knows this. That is why after being threatened he changed his view of journalism.

"It always stays with you" he reflects. "I'll never forget that feeling of being close to death. When I leave the office I still take a different route home each day, always looking over my shoulder and thinking there might be somebody lying in wait for me."

Blanco is of medium height, with small and slightly almond-shaped eyes, unpretentious and cheerful when he speaks. A journalist for 10 years, he recognizes that this experience has made him reflect, become more mature and learn. He now prefers to cover city affairs and only provides support to colleagues on public safety issues.

"I learned to think twice before deciding how to approach a news story and to detect signs that might put my life in danger. I learned to treat topics more rigorously, to backup information. I also learned that you should keep in constant communication with colleagues to know what is happening in the state or city and for the occasions when we need to take risks together," Blanco said.

Five years have passed since he and **Carlos Lima** were threatened and there have been many new dangers. The most serious one, they agree, is that the codes the drug traffickers used to respect are now being ignored. These days anything can happen even if a journalist follows the old rules of not publishing personal or family details on the drug traffickers, writing the truth and not targeting any one group.

Previously one did not live in fear in Mexicali and the threats that were received were easier to handle. "For example", Lima tells, "in March 2000 five federal

police officers were chasing a man whose car had accidentally blocked a road. Realizing he was being chased, the driver, for his own safety, headed for a local police precinct. But the feds got there, ordered him out of his vehicle and shot at him. Some 30 local officers ran out to see what was going on, a shouting match ensued and before things flared into a fight higher-ranking officers stepped in and called a halt."

That incident was being noted by the *La Crónica* reporter until the federal police realized they were being photographed.

"For taking a photo and reporting, for doing our job, they began to tell us, 'you'll pay for this, we're going to kill you!' That threat was for me and **Alberto de la Olla**," Lima said. "The report was carried in the paper, and the Attorney General's Office opened an investigation and took statements. Nothing more happened."

"Now the threats, no matter how innocent they may seem, are being taken more seriously, given that this kind of crime has become more savage," Lima says. "But the authorities do not investigate. A threat gets in the way of their daily routine."

Lima is editor of the of *La Crónica*'s Mexicali section. He is a man of few words and an easy smile. He has been in journalism for 16 years, has been threatened a number of times and has witnessed the deterioration of the city and the state and how the job has changed.

"In Mexicali," he says, "nothing surprises you any more. Ten years ago an execution was worth an eight-column spread. In 2004 there were more than 70 murders, at least half of them linked to drug trafficking. The executions used to be carried out beyond city limits, in the Mexicali valley a body would turn up on the road or in a canal. Now, in just one week there have been eight executions and in some cases the bodies have been dumped just a few blocks from a police precinct or other public offices. Now there are holdups in broad daylight. The most serious part of all this is that the authorities justify the executions by saying 'it is just drug dealers killing each other'. They fail to investigate them either because of complicity, fear or incompetence."

According to Lima, local residents no longer see anything unusual in small planes loaded with drugs appearing on the outskirts of the city, or that small stores have sprung up where cocaine or marijuana is sold, or the existence of drug houses where buyers shoot up heroin or smoke crack. The police know all about this and are unable to eradicate it. People prefer to remain silent.

It is a fact that in Mexicali, as in Tijuana, it is difficult to trust the police and government authorities in general. There have been many cases in which public servants have been charged with having links to organized crime and many others have been murdered for not holding up their end of a deal.

"Drug trafficking is a recurring risk for the press because it is growing uncontrollably and it has even infiltrated the police," Lima declares.

A MESSAGE IN FLAMES

A small explosion preceded a fire that quickly consumed everything in its path and destroyed much of the inside of the car which, at 1:40 a.m., was parked outside the home of reporter **Héctor Galván**.

Police officers who were patrolling the area and a taxi driver looking for passengers passed by the car when the fire started. They got out of their vehicles to put out the flames and awaken the owner of the house, who had heard nothing.

It was March 2004. Some months earlier Galván had received threats over his work as photographer and writer for a Mexicali newspaper, but he did not know what was behind them. He had been covering the police beat for more than 20 years and nothing like this had happened before.

Although he filed a complaint with the Baja Califronia State Attorney General's Office he never found out who sent the threat or why, and the matter remained a mystery. The only certainty was that someone wanted to send him the message that he and his family were vulnerable.

Since then he has been more careful, but says that he has not changed his way of working. "I'm scared, but I am not going to let them rule me, I just protect myself," Galván says.

THE COYOTES

These stories are just a few vignettes of how the press operates in Mexicali where the salary of a print media reporter ranges from 3,500 to 12,000 pesos (approximately $350 to $1,200) a month, in a city where you need at least 10,000 pesos ($1,000) a month to live decently.

On the list of risks there emerges another actor that represents danger – the trafficker in people, known locally as pollero (or coyote). They are capable, says **Luis Arellano Sarmiento**, Mexicali correspondent of the weekly *Zeta*, of stalking photographers and cameramen to seize their equipment and threatening them with death.

"Those engaged in smuggling people across the border have acquired a great deal of economic power and in general they are not very well educated and don't know what to do with the money," adds **Marco Vinicio Blanco**.

A final risk, in the opinion of Mexicali's reporters, are the summonses by local officials. Under any other circumstances these might not pose a threat, but corruption is so widespread that officials seek to make up for their own inadequacies by using the press – and this poses a danger.

Take the case of **José Manuel Yepiz**, a *La Crónica* reporter. He has been called in 10 times in four years in state and federal investigations. Complying with the summonses "means you become discouraged in your work and you lose a lot of time. It is a form of pressure in which they don't tell you why you are going and you don't know who you are supposed to testify to; you don't trust anybody and

you don't know how much corruption there is."

It may seem strange that in a city where violence is taking over the streets and the threats are so serious no journalist has been murdered. It could happen at any time, certainly, just as it has in neighboring cities only a two-hour drive from Mexicali like Tijuana and San Luis Río Colorado (Sonora state) where drug traffickers have pulled the trigger.

One theory is that reporters and the news media have set limits when they report on drug trafficking activities.They do little investigative reporting on the control these groups excercise locally and, when they do, it is published without a byline. Those news media that do dare to publish investigations handle the reports with great care.

"The conditions are not right in Baja California to get involved in investigating such cases," Yepiz says. "In the normal course of work, where companies are not willing to risk their staff's safety and the reporter himself prefers not to take any risks, it means that no investigation is done except in very rare cases."

CHEATING DEATH

It had already been several weeks that he had had to put up with carcasses of animals shot to death being dumped outside his home. **Benjamín Flores** had mentioned this to his friend **Sergio Haro** who was concerned for him because in San Luis Río Colorado to speak of bullets, death, blood and drugs, corruption and coyotes is to speak once too often. But to publish and expose them is to commit suicide. *La Prensa* did it for more than five years, since Flores founded the newspaper.

"And aren't you afraid they'll kill you?" Haro asked Flores once in a phone conversation.

"Sure, but what am I going to do?" he replied with an air of self-assurance, perhaps because this was not the first time he had received threats; there had been quite a few already – just like the libel suits and even charges of sedition leveled against him.

Some days later, on July 15, 1997, Flores, just 29 years old, was murdered on the way to his newspaper office. In broad daylight, in front of his colleagues, he was gunned down by an AK-47 automatic rifle and then given the coup de grace with three rounds from a caliber 22 pistol.

It was impossible for Flores not to talk about drug traffickers and corruption in a place like San Luis Río Colorado, a strategic corridor for drug traffickers who picked up the drugs in the Gulf of California or at some nearby place on land to take them to Arizona or California in the United States. There is little vigilance on either side of the border and many Mexican police officers augment their meager salaries with bribes.

It is a small city (some three square miles) in the middle of the Altar desert, the most arid part of Mexico. Its barely 145,000 inhabitants derive a living from trade,

industry, fishing, farming and cattle raising. On the map it appears in a corner of Sonora state, the farthest point from Hermosillo, the state capital, an eight-hour drive away. That is why residents feel closer to Mexicali, and never quite like Baja Californians. Every day five house burglaries are reported – the most common crime – as well as the arrest of undocumented persons seeking to cross into the United States.

There is a lot of dirt in the streets – most are unpaved. It is an unpretentious place, but one of strange contrasts. Out of nowhere, among modest houses and dusty streets, huge mansions have been built, most of them with swimming pools, game rooms, expensive decor and where the latest model SUVs are parked. The large number of foreign exchange bureaus stands out, open day and night, as if the economy of the city were booming, while in fact it barely gets by.

One of the businesses that has prospered most are the so-called "picaderos" (drug houses), where drugs are dealt and consumed. In San Luis Río Colorado alone there are an estimated 5,000 drug addicts in addition to those foreigners who cross the border from the United States to buy their drugs more cheaply than at home.

The local residents know what is going on, who are the drug dealers and who are not, or if officials pocketed some of the proceeds. All in all, the place still has the feel of a small town where everyone knows everyone else, knows their histories and knows who are outsiders. But they prefer not to talk openly about it because they do not trust the local authorities. For that reason *La Prensa* has been playing the role of confidant for the past 13 years.

Benjamín Flores was 24 when he founded his newspaper. He lived a fast life, passivity annoyed him. He was a reporter for a while and later private secretary to the governor of Baja California, Ernesto Ruffo. He returned to his hometown to found the newspaper whose aim was to be critical.

A two-story house that always gives the impression of being an improvised office, or one in the middle of a move, has since then been the headquarters of *La Prensa*. On the newspaper's pages are stories about fraud, places where drugs are dealt, excesses of the army, abuse of power and corruption in the local police departments.

Flores' column, outspoken and aggressive, was titled "Unconfirmed." It had first-class sources and it gave proof of political corruption and the network of drug trafficking and its links to local government in that northern border region. In May 1997 it reported the "disappearance" of nearly one ton of cocaine from the offices of the then Federal Judicial Police; in another it revealed a military dossier that implicated Bustamante Salcido in the construction of landing strips for small planes carrying drugs. That was **Benjamín Flores**.

His murder was never solved. The man who fired the fatal shots and the person behind the crime remain free, only two accomplices were arrested and convicted.

At first, a number of news media followed up the case but as time passed fewer and fewer reports were published, to the point of virtually disappearing. The

weekly *Siete Días* in Mexicali investigated the case, questioned officials and ran reports for several months. It got one response: "You don't know what you're getting involved in, you son-of-a-bitch. You're going to die," **Sergio Haro** heard a voice say on the telephone.

He received more threats in those days of 1997. He did not know what they were all about, so he went back through his articles and arrived at the conclusion that it had to do with the **Benjamín Flores** case and might involve people close to **Jaime González Gutiérrez** – identified by the State Attorney Office of Sonora as the alleged mastermind of the murder. Fear struck like a lightning bolt and led him to change his daily routine since the murder of his friend showed clearly what they were capable of.

Haro filed a formal complaint with the Baja California State Attorney General's Office and a group of officers was immediately assigned to protect him; but he could tolerate that for only three months and resumed work by taking his own special precautions.

"In Hermosilllo they see San Luis Río Colorado as being very far away and Mexicali as being a part of Sonora state. With the passage of time people forgot Flores' death, and so did the press," says Haro, a tall man with black hair streaked with gray, and, as a good northerner, a straight-talker. He is editor of *Siete Días*, a weekly respected for its accuracy and combative nature. After more than two decades of experience, he knows that it is very risky to publish stories about drug trafficking and violence but he is convinced that they must be investigated and reported. Otherwise, "I would become an accomplice and in that case I would be better off dedicating myself to other things," he declares.

"There are those who say you should not touch anything to do with drugs," Haro says. "In San Luis Río Colorado it is not that they are courageous, they are not even aware how delicate this is; for them it's normal because of the way they live. This is daily life for this area. We must assume those risks."

La Prensa news editor, **Humberto Melgoza**, confirms that things have not changed since Flores' death; in fact it is worse because now "any common criminal threatens you if you take photos or publish an exposé with all the details."

Melgoza has received a number of threats, most of them subtle – "Watch out, don't get involved in this," a local resident once told him while walking in the street. "When El Meño gets out [of jail] he says the first thing he'll do is come for you and then he'll come for me," a police officer told him some years ago after reports appeared in the press about the privileges enjoyed by the man accused of several murders and drug trafficking. But Melgoza believes that when they want to kill him they'll give him no warning.

One explanation is the breakdown in law and order that drug trafficking and people smuggling have wrought in the region by bribing officials and imposing a climate of fear at gunpoint.

"The coyotes are crazy," Melgoza says. "They have a lot of money and weapons. Drug traffickers are very dangerous people, they have murdered police officers.

Any good exposé published in San Luis brings problems and reprisals could come when you least expect them. Reporters are scared. There is a lurking risk."

In Mexicali, as in San Luis Río Colorado and in many other border towns, Haro says, "our safety as journalists hangs by a thread."

SURIVING IN TIJUANA

It is nearly 10 o'clock in the morning. The Avenue of the Americas is closed off for a few seconds as men in civilian clothing, armed with assault rifles, pistols and anti-flak jackets stop other vehicles from entering until an armored car parks at the garage of house number 4633. Throughout this incident more than 20 men keep an eye on rooftops, pedestrian and parked vehicles. Their mission is a delicate one in the heat that emanates in Tijuana, Baja California.

A thin man, dressed casually in a coffee-colored jacket, gets out of the car, crosses a tiny garden that leads to a glass door, takes a few more steps, and opens another wooden door that is always locked and can be opened only with permission.

The sober-looking, light-skinned, bespectacled man with almost white hair and beard, an anti-flak jacket under his coat, immediately gives a friendly greeting to people around him.

He goes up the stairs that lead to his office, a simple, comfortable room strewn with papers, the computer switched on and the telephone constantly ringing. Outside the house armed men stand guard.

So begins each day for journalist **Jesús Blancornelas** at the weekly *Zeta* where he is co-editor. It is sometimes tiring after living for eight years with a bodyguard and on alert. There has been a contract out on his life since 1997 and many of the Arellano Félix brothers' hitmen are ready to do the job.

The Blancornelas case has come to be a symbol of character and courage in journalism, of commitment to information and loyalty to the reader, and a clear demonstration of the decline and failure of the government to provide security. It is also simply a miracle.

The story began in the mid-1980s, when the Arellano Félix brothers, Benjamín and Ramón, began to take over Tijuana and surrounding areas. For nearly two decades they controlled the city as well as each gram of drugs passing through, each common criminal who wanted to ply his trade and each official who accepted bribes. Their method: corruption and death.

It was in the northern part of Baja California that the activity of what would become known later as the Tijuana Cartel began to be noticed. Bodies appeared alongside the latest model SUVs and the consumption of narcotics grew quietly and slowly. Throughout the 1990s Tijuana was a place of free passage under absolute control of the Arellano Félixes.

The weekly *Zeta* persistently reported what was occurring – the metamorphosis that the city and state were undergoing. "Drug trafficking", Blancornelas recalls, "arose in front of us as a social issue that needed to be aired." In April 1988 **Héctor**

Félix Miranda – nicknamed "El Gato Félix" (Felix The Cat) – co-editor of the newspaper, was murdered under circumstances never fully clarified.

Despite the loss of this editor, his work carried on. The practice of journalism was perceived as an attack on and an offense against the cartel bosses. The bosses' displeasure erupted when, for three straight weeks, *Zeta* published details of the organization based on statements by one of its alleged members, **Everardo Páez Martínez**, and later a complaint by a mother who told how the Arellanos had murdered her son despite being his friends; a third article reported who had killed two military officers outside a courthouse.

"That was enough for these people to get really angry," Blancornelas said.

Subtle threats and veiled messages followed as the drug traffickers sought to instill fear and stop the reporting. The weekly and Blancornelas persisted only by taking a lot more care.

Violence in Tijuana was a fact of life. Reports of clashes, executions and disappearances had now become a regular item. By mid-November 1997 things were no different for **Jesús Blancornelas** who still carryed out his usual reporting and publishing responsibilities.There was, however, something out of the ordinary:

"You should not go out on your own," **Luis Valero** warned Blancornelas.

Such advice could not be ignored by the journalist, because Valero was a respected former officer of the Baja California Judicial Police who had chosen to devote himself to his tow truck business rather than continue supporting corruption.

In an attempt to look further into that warning, Valero told him that some old friends had called him to tell him to keep away from Blancornelas because "there's going to be a dance" – a popular euphemism for "trouble is brewing."

Valero, out of friendship decided to offer Blancornelas his support and work "to take them on." Along with another person he trusted they became his protectors.

But on the morning of November 27, 1997 it was difficult to protect him from 10 well-armed men. They opened fire in broad daylight, killing Valero, who had managed to kill one of the attackers, CH, a hitman for the Arellano Félixes.

Blancornelas was shot four times. Miraculously he did not take more hits when the assailants emptied their weapons; it was also a miracle that he survived, given the gravity of his wounds.

Since that day, well-trained military personnel dressed in civilian clothes and armed with the best equipment protect him day and night. Blancornelas trusts them, his life depends on them. Another group has taken charge of ensuring his family's safety. Since then he has changed his daily routine. He knew it was a matter of personal revenge and fear set in.

He rarely goes out, the risk is too great. Just late last year he learned that **Ismael Higuera Guerrero**, a.k.a. "El Mayel," right-hand man of the Arellano Félixes, asked presumed Colombian drug lord **Jairo Sánchez Cristancho** to arrange for guerrillas in his country to kidnap and kill him during one of his trips there between 1999 and 2000. Fortunately for Blancornelas the guerrillas did not agree, as they held nothing against him.

Blancornelas has had to suffer the grim reality in silence in order to move on and survive in Tijuana.

DISORGANIZED POWER

Tijuana looks like a great city that covers just five square miles. There is no stopping the violence that runs through its streets, no one can contain it. It is the most unsafe city in the state.

The lack of safety is quickly felt; that's why at sundown the residents have little interest in walking the streets and avenues. For outsiders it is frightening to go downtown or to the outskirts of the city where coyotes and drug houses are barely hidden.

On the map it is the northernmost city from Mexico City, sought by those who have nothing and intend to cross over to the United States. It holds 50% of the inhabitants of the entire state, with a little over 1.6 million residents. Its proximity to California enables that duality already referred to, of pros and cons – trade, assembly-line industry, and services make up the economic base, with tourism and farming occupying second place. In contrast, the level of violence is very high. In 2004 alone 492 murders were logged, of which, the authorities estimate, around 20% were linked to organized crime. In the first half of 2005 there were already more than 100 murders, 10,000 automobiles were stolen; there were more than 4,000 burglaries and 3,000 people were assaulted.

"Institutional weakness, the lack of political will to tackle organized crime and escalating violence further complicate the scene in Tijuana," warns **Raúl Ruiz**, managing editor of the newspaper *Frontera*.

"We were surprised when we first came here that they executed people on the street in front of so many people. Then that stopped surprising us and instead we were shocked by the degree of sadism in the killings: strangulation, beatings, putting the bodies in drums and destroying them with acid, plus many other crimes that indicate mental illness. Now even that no longer shocks us because the degree of violence has become more sophisticated and one can only wonder, 'what's next?'" Ruiz said.

Blancornelas has a theory. He thinks that in the United States it is not known who the drug traffickers are, but the reporters here do know Mayo, Azul or the Arellanos. He adds that this happens because in the United States there is organized crime while in Mexico there is disorganized crime. "There, they go about their work calmly, without problems, there are no executions or anything like that; here, anyone feels powerful because he carries a gun or an assault rifle and does what he likes."

He added, "If a journalist there says so-and-so is a drug trafficker, that person is going to sue him and make him prove it. Here, you can say so-and-so is a drug trafficker and that person stays silent because he's scared. There's a huge difference. We have a lot of freedom to mention names, but in doing so disorganized power turns against us."

THREE'S A CROWD

Francisco Ortiz Franco investigated for *Zeta* Tijuana news such as trials, laws and courts and, from time to time, drug trafficking issues. For a long time he had been one of the weekly's editors. On June 22, 2004, his bodyguard did not accompany him. He was simply out with his children. It was 11:30 in the morning in downtown, a few blocks from the police precinct.

Ortiz got into his car and was putting on his seatbelt when a hooded man got out of a *Jeep Cherokee* and in seconds fired four shots from his .380 pistol. He was a pro. The bullets hit with precision, all four were fatal. Ortiz Franco had never received any prior threats, just a warning in which he was told that **Arturo Villareal**, a.k.a. "El Nalgón" (Big Buttocks), an Arellano henchman, allegedly was very annoyed by his most recent report.

In his report published on May 14, 2004, Ortiz described how members of the Arellano Félix cartel had paid $70,000 to staff members of the Baja California State Attorney General's Office for them to hand over their I.Ds. He named names and published photos. This information cost him his life.

The murder has yet to be solved. Only by chance have two people been detained. The Mexican Attorney General's Office continues to investigate. In each case, the weekly has been the first to investigate and expose those responsible on its pages. But there are still no results.

Ortiz is the third person from *Zeta* to die in this quest to investigate, denounce and practice good journalism. "It is a difficult equation and in retrospect it might seem we lost the wager since three colleagues have died," says Blancornelas. "But we are doing it and we have the faith and conviction it takes to pursue the issue until the crimes are solved."

Since then the *Zeta* co-editor has issued an order in the newsroom: no one else should investigate matters concerning drug trafficking, only he may, and the stories will be run under his byline. The reason is that he is the only one who has a bodyguard capable of protecting him. So far, this has been the only way to protect his news team.

Blancornelas and his people are forging ahead, "complying with a moral duty," he says, "in the face of the lack of political will that the authorities have shown", even though in this battle it would appear on occasion that *Zeta* is going it alone.

"There is no solidarity," he says. "When they killed Ortiz Franco a newspaper in Tijuana reported that I was glad they had killed my colleagues because that increased my newspaper's circulation. The lack of solidarity makes the cases (of attacks on journalists) fade away and later we no longer even remember them."

But he has become used to the slings and arrows that his work has brought.

"The important thing is that I have freedom. Despite the fact that physically I am restricted (for security), I do have the freedom to work. I seek information and I do not feel tied down. The day I no longer have protection it will mean I am no longer in danger."

CREDIBILITY

Months went by and following the attempt on Blancornelas' life and Ortiz's death new threats emerged. They came by e-mail and phone calls. The most recent occurred in July and August 2004.

"They hired someone who just came out of prison. He has nothing to lose and he is going to launch a suicide attack on the bodyguard protecting you. He is my cousin, 'El Niño' (The Boy). Publish it to stop it from happening," said a male voice on the telephone.

"Yes, I'll publish it, but identify yourself," Blancornelas responded.

"We'll see each other ..." and the man hung up.

Blancornelas did not publish, thinking it would cause a scandal and he was not even sure that it was true. If it was not, he would lose credibility – something he was not ready to sacrifice. "Better to lose the story than lose credibility," is his philosophy, posted on the walls at the newspaper for all to bear in mind.

On October 14, 2004, a new call: "They killed the person they had hired," said the same voice he had heard weeks earlier.

"When?" he asked, surprised.

"The one who turned up on Saturday (October 9) in a burned-out truck in the Lomas del Sol district was my cousin, 'El Niño'." That was the last Blancornelas ever heard.

The body referred to was listed as unidentified. Blancornelas verified the information and managed to confirm that it was **Jorge Eduardo Ronquillo**, a.k.a. "El Niño" – perhaps the most recent hitman to be hired to kill him and, it appears, also a participant in the murder of **Francisco Ortiz**.

That is the way **Jesús Blancornelas** lives, the man who when he speaks does so with enthusiasm, a simple hard-working man with a dry humor. Together with his team of no more than 50 people he has managed, every Friday, when *Zeta* hits the streets, to sell some 60,000 copies – a figure that many newspapers envy.

With the passage of time he is convinced that the drug traffickers will not have an opportunity to kill him. "After the attempt on my life I was scared – but not right now," he declares.

THREATS AND TRIGGERS

Between 1999 and 2000 a death squad appeared in Tijuana with a contract to do away with a group of drug traffickers. The city was the scene of a series of executions, the product of a war between rival gangs.

The enthusiasm of the reporters working for the newly-launched newspaper *Frontera* led them to publish details on the executions – names, dates and places, a lot of information that no other news outlet had. "Stop publishing that or you're fucked...," various voices on the phone warned them.

In considering what to do in the face of such threats they decided that being

threatened in Tijuana was a serious concern and it was unlikely that the authorities would investigate. "They decided to stop publishing those stories for awhile, to let things cool down," recalled managing editor **Raúl Ruiz**.

Those phone calls were only the first experience that *Frontera* was to have. In no time at all they would learn that in order to hide the truth or deny a report drug traffickers would not hesitate to resort to threats or the triggers on their AK-47 assault rifles.

They received other threatening calls and, in 2002, three drunken men visited their offices and at gunpoint demanded to enter and speak to the editor because their names had appeared in one of the reports. The newspaper's security guards did not allow them to enter and they left.

The newspaper's executives filed a criminal complaint and three years later the authorities have still been unable to establish anything.

Ruiz has been a journalist for 18 years. For a time he was given a bodyguard. He has had to deal with those anonymous phone calls that threaten his life, he has had to learn to take care of himself and his family and to ask his team members to do the same. He has had to learn to run a newspaper in a bloody war zone that has never wanted to be recognized as such.

He has also had to learn how to know what to publish and what not to publish, or how to handle information so the drug traffickers do not become angry; how to put the brakes on an exclusive, a piece of information, a disclosure; what to do when after intense work you get the news but it never gets into print and ends up just another folder in the reporter's filing cabinet. It's no simple task, especially when a printed line can mean the difference between life and death.

A PSYCHOSIS OF FEAR

On arriving at the *Frontera* offices on June 7, 2004 **Ernesto Alvarez**, a reporter working the police beat, found a message from a television colleague telling him that a truck loaded with drugs had been left in the parking lot.

"At first I was sure that it was a joke," Alvarez recalls. But when he saw how serious **Joel Galeana** of Televisa – the one who tipped him off – was, he, another reporter and an editor went down to the parking lot to see what it was all about. There they found a truck with tinted windows, and through the windshield they could see several open packages apparently containing marijuana.

The army and police arrived and closed off several streets adjacent to the newspaper. They discovered there was a little more than 780 kilos of damaged drugs – their owners had let them become wet and the market price would be very low.

After that day – when the paper barely made it to the stands because of all the confusion – the question was inevitably "who did this, how and why?" They went through recent issues of the newspaper to see what stories might have provoked such a reaction from the drug traffickers, but could find no clear answers. What they did understand was that it was a very dangerous warning and that they had

been shown just how vulnerable they were.

Uncertainty and fear grew among the staff, not only the reporters. "We did a staff survey to see how people's spirits and motivation were," Ruiz said, "and it was clear they felt unsafe, they were scared that the newspaper's building would come under fire and someone could be killed. Working like this is very complicated, it generates an unnecessary psychosis."

The vulnerability they experienced led *Frontera* executives to revisit the security of the staff and the company. They increased building safety measures putting in high-quality closed-circuit TV cameras, increasing the number of security guards, installing a caller ID machine at each telephone, and recording all incoming phone calls. The employees were trained to respond to any telephoned threat that might be received. *Frontera* became the only newspaper in Mexico to take such security measures.

Not even this put an end to the telephoned threats. On June 22, 2004, the day Ortiz Franco was killed, the phone rang again and the message was taped: "We've gotten rid of one from *Zeta*, and more journalists are going to follow."

THE POLICE, TOO

The attack can come from any quarter, even when you are on a photo shoot.

"You cannot take photos," yelled a police officer dressed in black. "Of course I can, I'm in the street, it's a public place," replied **José Luis Camarillo**, a photographer from *El Sol* in Tijuana.

"No you can't and get out of here if you don't want trouble," the angry federal agent repeated, this time more forcefully and in strong language.

The photographer insisted, he did not care, he knew he was dealing with an important police operation because there were about 30 officers from Mexico City and they had no doubt arrested a drug trafficker. He wanted an exclusive story and didn't give in. He made a single call to the reporter from his paper, **Juan Manuel Cordero**.

A group of federal police officers from the Attorney General's Office surrounded him. Once again the officer told him to move and once again the photographer refused. They took him by force to a truck, shoved him in face down, seized his camera and threatened him with a gun.

Camarillo, a 20-year veteran of news photography, had never undergone anything similar. He was scared; there were no colleagues to come to his aid or at least know in whose hands he was if he were to disappear.

Fortunately, that Monday, July 12, 2004, news of the operation began to circulate among reporters who were arriving at the Tijuana airport where the police were. They realized that Camarillo was being held and asked for his release. He was released with a broken camera, without his I.D. card or cellphone to find that his car had been searched and rolls of film, a tape recorder and another cellphone were missing.

The following day the news was reported in most of the local media. Camarillo filed a formal complaint with the National Human Rights Commission, which he did not follow up.

Camarillo says that it wasn't until two months later that he could talk to **José Luis Santiago Vasconcelos**, deputy prosecutor in the Attorney General's Office's Specialized Organized Crime Investigation Unit, who allegedly promised to investigate and reimburse him for the damages. Neither ever happened.

What did happen is that when he goes to police operations – which tends to be frequently – Camarillo no longer goes alone. Now he always tells his colleagues so they can protect each other.

THE LOST BATTLE

What, then, protects or saves a journalist or an entire news media outlet from the pressure and fear engendered by organized crime in Tijuana?

"We have been learning little by little – and that is risky, very risky," says **Raúl Ruiz**, "because it is by trial and error, and you don't know if what you did was the right thing, you don't know how they'll react. Previously, there was a known code on what issues not to get involved in and as a reporter you knew what not to publish because that represented a real danger. Now, you don't know what the limits are, they have been lost."

He adds, "Fear makes you feel it is not a good idea to run such risks. There are reporters and editors who have left the northern region because they cannot live and work in fear.... I agree with what **Carlos Monsivais** used to say: 'a live journalist is more useful than a dead one'. I believe that it is better to safeguard the reporters' lives, because I believe that we are here to do bigger things."

Reporting can't just stop in this climate of danger which is only escalating.

"One suggestion could be to bring journalists together to investigate certain issues until things become clearer," Ruiz says. "It is very important to be clear about how the media are going to handle the issue of organized crime, since up until now it has been a lost battle and a matter of very high risk on the border."

Blancornelas suggests that "the most important thing is to always write the truth about people connected to organized crime. A start should be made on discussing what is happening to the press in Mexico, its status and the risks it runs; also, attacks on journalists should be regarded as federal offenses."

Some reporters are unequivocal – "employ self-censorship as a means of protection and publish only the official version" is the recommendation of a national newspaper correspondent who claims this is common practice in Baja California. Another believes that "it is sufficient to be careful about news sources, how news is reported and always quoting sources."

Any measures taken do not necessarily guarantee that journalists will be safer or that things will change.

Tijuana continues reinventing itself, crime is taking on new forms and mechanisms,

it has a special chameleon-like ability to hide from view and emerge with a new look. The political context in the municipality makes things even more difficult. The outlook in the medium term is for little change, much less for improvement.

The cities in the northern Mexican border region are parts of the country where prudence is the virtue that enables you to carry on working. Reporting in those places often means to be on your own, to hear but not listen, to see but not observe. It is to remain silent in order not to be killed.

In Nogales and Agua Prieta, in Sonora state, in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and in Ciudad Acuña and Piedras Negras in Coahuila the greatest risk that journalists take is to investigate corruption and criminal groups whether drug traffickers, coyotes or arms smugglers.

In a number of those border towns, where it is stifling hot and the earth is parched, there are no authorities they have either become accomplices or have fled to other places out of terror. Criminals have taken command and assumed the roles left vacant. There is no law, much less justice; their guns give them control and power despite the army and the federal police.

And what about Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa, Miguel Alemán, Matamoros or Ciudad Victoria in Tamaulipas state, places of blood and fear? In those northwestern Mexican corners reporters have been left between the devil and the deep blue sea. It is here where more journalists have been killed because of their recent work, where more have been threatened and where they do not know what to expect.

Those who go after the news, those who report, those who investigate, those who believe journalism is a service are held hostage by those in power who control everything, not only by the assault rifle and pistol but also by grenade launchers and bazookas. Day by day an unbridled war is unleashed between rival gangs that have chosen Tamaulipas, especially Nuevo Laredo, as their battleground, although they extend their bloodbath and lead to other cities in the state if necessary.

The equation that results is a simple one on the northern border – self-censorship and self-protection. The reporters all agree; it is the only way to survive.

Organized crime has managed to take over, at least for now. There is silence and fear.

MYSTERIOUS ABSENCES

It was a little after 7:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 2, 2005. Although it was early, he was already home in his apartment after winding up the day's work at the newspaper. **Alfredo Jiménez Mota** was a workaholic; he stayed tuned to the police radio for any information that might interest the Hermosillo newspaper *El Imparcial*, where he had worked as a reporter for the past six months.

One of his best friends at the paper, a woman, called him to invite him to come and drink a few beers since they would be off the next day. They joked and agreed to get together some hours later, because he had to see "a contact who was nervous," according to what he told her.

He showered and changed his clothes. Shortly before 8:00 p.m. he was ready to meet with one of those "contacts." It was **Andrés Montoya García**, the warden of the state prison, with whom he presumably chatted for more than half an hour about an inmate nicknamed "El Estudiante" (The Student) who had recently been released. They had been presumably sitting in the warden's truck, driving around until parting company at 9:00 p.m. because, Alfredo said, he had to go and see "another contact."

It is not known what happened next. The authorities have only the record of a telephone call that Alfredo received at 11:04 p.m. from the local deputy chief of the Mexican Attorney General's Office, **Raúl Fernando Rojas Galván**, one of his main sources.

Alfredo disappeared. Night covered his tracks – and those of the people that took him away.

In the beginning, the Sonora State Attorney General's Office investigated, but without any result. As days went by the Mexican Attorney General's Office took over the case file and assigned the inquiries to "the most experienced and bold" investigators, who lasted just a few weeks. They were replaced by other "excellent" investigators.

Nothing happened. The investigation bogged down and has been stalled ever since. There are many suspects, most of them drug traffickers and public officials linked to organized crime, but no one has been arrested. Months have gone by and the puzzle remains unsolved, with no arrests and Jiménez Mota's whereabouts still a mystery.

Where is he? What happened to him? Is he alive? Why did they take him away? It is probable that the answer lies in the stories he published. He investigated police activities, he named names of drug traffickers and wrote how they operated and what their organizational structure was.

His disappearance came as a blow to *El Imparcial* and caused it to change its routine. The journalists united, protested and staged street demonstrations, they searched for him in the streets and the surrounding desert, they followed up on phone calls, leads and information. Nothing – just his absence, which weighs more heavily than death itself because it makes one imagine everything and be certain of nothing.

Hermosillo, the capital of Sonora state, is a friendly, tranquil, small town some 14 square miles in area. The heat can be oppressive at some times of the year and the cold chill you to the bones because it is in the middle of the desert. Its nearly 700,000 residents are simple, hard-working people who make their living from farming, industry, cattle raising and commerce.

But Sonora is a region of extremes. It is part of one of the most important agricultural regions of the country, being one of eight states that together produce almost 50% of the Gross National Product in that category and in cattle-raising. But when you talk about the living standards of the people of Sonora, who total 2.2 million, the figures of the National Statistical, Geographic and Computing Institute (INEGI) show that 50% to 70% of them have an income "that does not allow them sufficient nourishment."

Hermosillo has grown, changing slowly. In 2002 one began to see the construction of mansions for outsiders, the appearance of luxury automobiles and, on the negative side, executions on the outskirts of the city with the bodies later appearing dumped on city streets.

In Sonora, it was known that in the north, in the border towns and those adjoining Sinaloa state – Navojoa, Ciudad Obregón and Guaymas – drug traffickers were operating. It was no secret that the hillsides were fertile ground for the cultivation of marijuana. Sonora is part of the so-called golden triangle, along with Chihuahua and Sinaloa, where authorities rarely venture because it is the land of drug production and the bullet. Only the army dares penetrate the area and when it does it goes with entire battalions armed with the best equipment.

All that seemed a long way from Hermosillo. Newspapers in the city began to report on the deaths and clashes that were occurring around them. Little by little they became front page news.

In this case, caution reigned. A number of newspapers did not byline investigative reports in order to protect their reporters. Many online and print media decided to carry only official information and state the facts without going any further, so as to avoid problems. That was what they were doing in other states, as well as in Sonora municipalities, such as Ciudad Obregón, Navojoa or Nogales, where it was such a dangerous topic to touch the philosophy was "just scratch the surface or don't write about it at all," says **José Manuel Yépiz**, who worked for five years as a reporter in Sonora and now does so in Mexicali. "They don't write so they won't suffer the consequences or because some have become associated with criminals," he explains,"In those places the local people know who is who, what they do and what they are capable of doing."

It was soon discovered in Hermosillo that the execution of six people in 2004 was the result of a fight between gangs that the arrest of **Benjamín Arellano Félix** had left without a leader. The gangs assumed power and wanted to take control of the town.

Jiménez had arrived in Hermosillo from Culiacán, Sinaloa state, where drug trafficking accounts for more than 500 deaths a year.

Weary and feeling at risk there, he managed to land a job at *El Imparcial* thanks to his impeccable journalistic credentials. He is an enthusiastic and impulsive young man, determined to get ahead and that is why he demanded that his reports carry his byline "because they cost a lot of effort," he told his editors. Within a couple of months he began to look into the activities of organized crime in the area. Some say that he hit on one group more than another and perhaps they used him. But Jiménez is a journalist, a very young one, just 25 years old, and until he disappeared his thing was to do investigative reporting, not be a member of the mafia.

"They think that by making a journalist disappear what he writes about will also disappear, but they're wrong. There will always be someone writing, describing what is happening every day, everywhere," said radio, television and newspaper journalists in a letter they delivered to the Sonora authorities in demand for an in-

depth investigation into the case.

For now, those who made Jiménez disappear have managed to fill other journalists with uncertainty. Silence has filled their pens, their voices and images of drug trafficking – the official versions and the bare facts are all that appear now.

TWO ALTERNATIVES

Drug traffickers became hoteliers, restauranteurs, the owners of taverns and discotheques – and entrepreneurs in the news business. That is what happened in Agua Prieta, a young city incorporated in 1942 and some two square miles in area located in northeast Sonora state across the Mexico-U.S. border from Arizona.

Since the 1980s it has been a crossing point for smugglers of drugs and illegal immigrants headed for the United States. Twenty years ago the drug traffickers were not the same kind of people; their faces, habits and strategies began to change, very slowly and subtly, until five years ago they became the new local business class. And they also started to kill.

Many streets in that city remain unpaved and, while there is work, it is for low wages in industry (especially the assembly-line plants), services, commerce, cattle-raising and farming. People live a simple life, although more and more residences occupy an entire city block, with funds coming – the local people know – from two very profitable businesses there – drugs and smuggling of illegal immigrants.

Agua Prieta has some 80,000 inhabitants and 17 newspapers, most of them free papers funded by "those people," says **Antonio Palomares Nieblas**, executive editor of the Agua Prieta weekly *La Verdad*.

The drug traffickers are the ones sponsoring the newspapers, under offers of money or advertising. In general the latter is preferred to avoid problems and not have to deal with the matter any further. If the offer is not accepted there is danger, although not as much as when it is accepted and the local authorities and their businesses are criticized.

The worst of it is that the newspapers that do not accept the deal cannot compete under those conditions. "Their competitors are full-color papers that give away copies and ad space; the reporters drive around in late-model SUVS and are dripping in jewelry," Palomares adds. "There is another reason why drug traffickers sponsor newspapers. That way they can have 'reporters' in public offices, especially in the police precincts, and know what is going on."

Palomares arrived in Agua Prieta 40 years ago as a linotypist and he stayed "because it was a very attractive place and there was a lot of work." Five years later, he recalls, he began to publish his own weekly newspaper and has not stopped since, despite the crisis, although he has been forced to publish only eight pages per edition, with a circulation of 1,500 copies distributed throughout the area.

With the passage of time he has been witness to the changes that have come about and the extremes to which the city has been subjected. A number of businesses have had to close down because they could not compete with restaurants that hire

very expensive northern music bands or the five-star hotels that offer attractive discounts.

The deterioration is obvious. It is very rare for the authorities to solve a crime much less an execution. In order to wash their hands of the problem, they claim that the bodies that turn up in the desert are immigrants and do not bother to identify them.

In May 2005, the murder occurred of **Mario Sotelo Martínez**, a candidate for the chairmanship of the Agua Prieta city council and the attorney of the Paredes Machado family, whom the Mexican Attorney General's Office identifies as one of the leaders of the alleged leading drug cartels, as well as the city's most prosperous businessman.

For those living in Agua Prieta it is difficult to work, for fear of being in danger, and that is why in the majority of cases people resort to self-censorship in talking about drug traffickers and immigrant smugglers. "There is no need for threats. They just shoot," Palomares declares.

EXTREME SILENCE

He proposed to his chiefs that he investigate certain activities of a number of businessmen who, apparently, had been able to make a profit out of nothing. It was a tip that he had received because the Mexican Attorney General's Office was already investigating them and all that was needed was corroboration. That was in mid-2004.

That day, the reporter from a newspaper in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas state, went on the Internet, made a number of phone calls and set up appointments for the following week. A colleague came up to him and asked him what he was doing. He told him about the matter he was investigating.

A couple of days later, two men stopped him very close to his home and forced him into a truck. Once inside, they held his arms and stuck a pistol into his stomach.

"Get his balls!" shouted one of the men, a young, rough-looking fellow. "What are you talking about?" asked the reporter, who could not move. "Come on, we know you are going to investigate about our friends. It's better if you don't get involved," they warned, without backing down.

The dialogue was over. Some minutes later, after driving around, they let him out of the vehicle and then sped off. The reporter, who had been working for some years now, had heard similar stories but this time it touched him directly and he was dazed, scared and almost in tears.

He talked to his bosses about what had happened and they concluded that there was an enemy within the newsroom, that a colleague had betrayed him. No doubt the colleague was being paid by a group know as the Zetas, hitmen for the Golfo cartel, in exchange for information on what the journalists were investigating and to learn about it before the paper went to press each day.

"Self-protection and self-censorship are all we have left," declares a 10-year

Tamaulipas is to be in the middle of a fierce war that knows no rules or limits, where the state and municipal authorities are accomplices either by act or by omission. At least that is what the federal government must believe to justify holding 300 Nuevo Laredo city police officers under suspicion of serving the drug traffickers.

But in that war the government so far has lost most of the battles. Despite the presence of the army and federal police in that area, under the Safe Mexico program, the executions and clashes between rival criminal gangs and against the authorities continue on the streets in broad daylight.

"There is no authority, just the mafia playing that role," the journalist says.

But how can this occur and be tolerated in a Mexican state located in the northwest of the country, on the border with Texas and where major natural gas deposits have been found? How is it possible that this is allowed in a state that produces 30% of the country's chemical and petrochemical output and where the residents of Tamaulipas, totaling 2.7 million living in 43 municipalities, are hard-working people engaged in services, industry and farming to survive?

It is simply happening. In Tamaulipas reporters are scared, they don't want to talk because they distrust and when they do they ask to remain anonymous and not be quoted on details about what happened to them; otherwise they could be branded as whistle-blowers and threatened, tortured or even killed, depending on the whim of the drug traffickers. That is how they balance their lives.

A WARNING IS ENOUGH

In December 2004, there was a highway accident on the outskirts of Nuevo Laredo, with deaths and injuries. It was a classic police blotter item. But few news media reported on it and those that did barely mentioned what had happened without describing the facts. The reporters were prudent, careful, because those in the accident were members of the organization known as Zetas (hitmen trained by elite soldiers who worked for the Golfo cartel) and they could become angry.

In early 2005, a police chief boasted that he held a record number of arrests. He was the one who had detained most criminals, he bragged. A careful review of the data and double-checking led reporters to a simple conclusion: the man was lying and the majority of his arrests were false; he had inflated the numbers. The information was published and that same day some rough-looking men warned one of the reporters in a friendly tone and not showing their guns, "That's my friend, you better not mess with him."

"Sure," responded the frightened journalist.

The warning was enough.

"There are colleagues who have been warned as many as five times, others three times or just once. There is total control of the print and electronic media by one group or another," explains a journalist who asked for his name not to be disclosed.

In Nuevo Laredo, there is now the worst state of violence ever in the city overall

and, in particular, for journalists. In the rest of the state the types of insecurity and aggression faced are not talked about so much but are no less pernicious.

The city, covering about one square mile, is located amid huge plains. It is a place of climatic extremes, the weather ranging from more than 110 degrees Fahrenheit to below zero. More than 360,000 people live there, earning a basic wage from work in commerce, trucking and assembly-line plants. Nuevo Laredo is an important entrepot in international trade between Mexico and the United States, as 36% of cross-border goods pass through it.

Surprisingly, if drug traffickers there do not like a news item they first threaten the journalists by phone or in-person. If the reporters "do not understand," they are beaten, usually with wooden sticks, and if they still do not heed the warnings they are killed.

Journalists believe that something similar happened to **Roberto Mora García**, who was executive editor of the newspaper *El Mañana* in Nuevo Laredo. In the early hours of March 19, 2004, he was killed as he was arriving at his apartment after a day's work. He was stabbed 26 times.

A week later, police arrested his neighbors, **Mario Medina Vásquez** of the United States and **Hiram Oliveros**, a Mexican, and accused them of being the ones who carried out the murder and his accomplice, respectively, according to police sources. Olivero, as of this writing, remains in jail facing trial on charges as an alleged accomplice.

Medina was killed in prison a month and a half later. He had confessed to the crime, but his testimony was contradictory and the evidence that the Tamaulipas State Attorney General's Office presented turned out to be inconsistent. No other lead was followed up other than that it was a crime of passion. The claims Mora García had frequently made in his column and the stories he compiled with his reporters on corruption in the police and public prosecutor's office, as well as alleged officials' links with organized crime, were ignored.

Time has passed and the authorities are no further ahead in their investigations. Not even the newspaper *El Mañana* continued investigating after those that published information on the case received threats. The alternative was silence.

FIGHT TO THE DEATH

In Reynosa, Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo or Ciudad Victoria when a journalist is "warned" he knows that all he can respond is, "OK." The men that carry out this work in the name of the Zetas or rival gang known as Los Chapos can be friendly, saying such things as, "I don't want you to talk about my friend" or "Don't do it any more." Or they can be rough, employing beatings, guns, torture and warning "Get out of it or else."

Media executives or reporters, it is all the same; they take them and fix them. The drug traffickers control the whole of Tamaulipas, all the other criminals – whether kidnappers or burglars or auto thieves have to pay a kickback in order to carry on.

The Chapos want to seize control of the area from the Zetas and that is what the war to the death is all about.

Stories about the control they exercise over the media can be counted in the dozens. A photographer spent a whole night with one of the gangs because "they didn't like photos to be taken of some of their homes," something that the photographer was not aware of, he was only doing a job to illustrate a report on another topic.

One extreme case was that of columnist **Francisco Arratia Saldierna**, murdered on August 31, 2004, in Matamoros, Tamaulipas state. Aged 55, he was a school teacher and he wrote a column titled "Portavoz" (Spokesman), which was published in the newspapers *El Imparcial* and *El Regional*, both in Matamoros, and *El Cinco de Diciembre* and *La Verdad* in Ciudad Victoria. In addition, he had a business registering imported vehicles.

Eye-witnesses say that Arratia was outside his business office when two persons visited him. They chatted for a few minutes and he then got into his car. An hour and a half later, a truck suddenly braked, its doors opened and a body was thrown into the street just a few yards from the Red Cross facility. It was Arratia, near death.

Treated at the clinic, it was impossible to save his life. He had been subjected to very painful torture in which his hands were crushed – his fingers were all broken. His body showed a number of burn marks. He had been beaten all over his body with wooden sticks and some wounds looked as if they had been inflicted by a knife. Experts believe he had been tortured for an hour and a half. He died in the afternoon from severe brain injury.

One month later, state authorities arrested former military **Raúl Castelán Cruz**, supposed member of the hitmen group Zetas, as an accomplice to the crime. It was found that Arratia was killed for exposing organized crime and its links to the police. Nothing further has been discovered.

NO COMMENT

Gangs control so that there will be no investigation, much less publication, of anything that goes against their personal and collective interests. Anything can upset them. That is why there is no investigative reporting on those matters and only the commonplace gets into print – and sometimes not even that.

In early 2005, a man was murdered outside his home. He was a member of the Zetas group. His rivals machine-gunned him to death. The news that was published said only, "Businessman Killed." There were no details.

"If someone wants to know how things are in Tamaulipas in terms of security, they won't find out by reading the local newspapers, because they all feel under threat, they are all scared," says a journalist living in Reynosa.

CONFIDENCE IS A BAD ADVISOR

What happens in this part of the country, in the north and northwest regions, has attracted the attention of the national and foreign press, but in many cases it has been reduced to a mere count of dead, injured and arrested – almost 200 in the state as of mid-2005.

Reporters act without knowing whether they are right or wrong to take steps that logic suggests they should take. They do not report on any news after 10:00 p.m.; they do not arrive first on the scene of any assault or emergency of any kind; they seek to arrive in a group and only once officials are there; if they feel at risk they withdraw from where the news is, and they never ask any more than necessary in cases connected with organized crime.

"The most important thing is caution. We do no investigative reporting, we merely seek to reflect what is happening, give the facts. We don't know what to do," explains one reporter.

It is hard to know what to do if, when faced with the most minor provocation, the criminals are prepared to shoot a journalist or news media executive.

On April 5, 2005 **Guadalupe García Escamilla** came running to the radio station. She was late for a morning show that the Nuevo Laredo station was to broadcast and she was to take part in. A small young man with a backpack who had been sitting on a bench, on seeing her, got up, took a gun out of the backpack and shot at her from behind. The man sped off and disappeared.

They took care of Guadalupe rapidly and she remained in the hospital at death's door for 11 days until she died. Her colleagues said that it was "confidence that killed her."

It seems that she believed nothing could ever happen to her, confident that she was doing her job, that she didn't go too far. She exposed cases of police corruption, suspicious activity by people in the city that gave the appearance of being drug traffickers, and she told it like it was. That simple.

Early in the year, they had set fire to her car and threatened to kill her over the police radio. One of her last stories was an interview she had in prison with two people apparently linked to the Los Chapos gang who alleged that their bosses were bribing several police officers, especially the police chief. The interviewees were murdered in the prison a few hours later. And Guadalupe aired the interview.

FEAR BREATHES

At first sight, the various Tamaulipas cities seem normal. Walking along the streets an outsider would not imagine the dangers. But it's possible that just a few yards from the main square or in a shopping center a gunfight will erupt during the morning, afternoon or night. It has happened. What you get in those places is a feeling of insecurity, you trust nobody and you are careful, such as not going out at night, not being in lonely places and not responding to people you do not know,

certainly not if they look like people from Sinaloa.

Journalists that go out every day in search of news live under a great deal of stress, always fearing that something might happen. Some news media, attempting to improve conditions for their reporters, have bought life insurance for them. Others have raised their salaries in light of the risks they face.

"You work with fear. It is not a fear that paralyzes you, but anguish, yes," one of the Ciudad Victoria journalists explains.

The reporters do not know what to do, nor do they join forces. Among the local media, totaling some 15 throughout the state, there is little solidarity and support from the national media is not consistent.

How to put an end to the violence that escalated for decades and worsened when **Juan García Abrego**, the Golfo cartel boss, was arrested? How in the face of the apathy or complicity of the authorities? As former state attorney general, **Francisco Tomás Cayuela**, said years ago "in Nuevo Laredo there are no threats because my friends have told me so."

For some time now authority has not existed and silence is enforced at gunpoint. ❑

II
Political Power and Drug Trafficking: a Combination of Forces

"In the province the streets are very narrow," says **Ismael Bojórquez**, editor of the weekly *Río Doce* in Sinaloa. "Everyone knows everyone else and it is very possible that a drug dealer will be your neighbor or will pass you on the street."

The tone of his remarks shows more annoyance than resignation, more reality that conformity.

That goes to explain the fear and silence in Sinaloa, the mistrust and the constant battle of what it is like to work as a journalist in a state where in 2005 there was an increase in threats, veiled intimidation, indirect messages and surreptitious pressure for the journalists not to investigate, not publish photos or even dare to include a line indicating corruption of officials linked to the drug traffickers or their friends.

In 2004, two men, without batting an eyelid, murdered a news photographer in front of his children because, without knowing it, some days earlier he had taken a photo in which a drug trafficker appeared with a local official. That was what the case file recorded.

The danger of organized crime and political power is seen very close up, often disguised but always present. The fear is great, reporters feel it every day. So far, in the absence of any real authority, they all agree, the only antidotes available to them to meet this daily challenge are simple and tragic – keep quiet, publish less, do not take so many risks.

"No journalist is prepared to lose his life for a story about drug dealers. He is afraid to question, to find out about police officers, about the people," reporter **José Alfredo Beltrán** says dispiritedly.

"When dealing with drug trafficking matters," adds Bojórquez, "we censor ourselves, we watch what we are saying, we check facts and we take care not to ruffle any feathers."

It is as simple as that. For decades now Sinaloa has smelled of gunpowder, its streets are stained in red and it exudes a feeling of danger. The state where Mexico's most powerful gang leaders were born and dominate is also where the highest number of murders is recorded – more than 6,000 in the past 10 years. The majority of these are executions linked to drug trafficking.

But faced with the state's violent scenario, how do you explain that in its 30,000 square miles of territory, the violence against journalists is less visible and less corrosive when compared to other areas? Why is it not so obvious? The only answer is the antidote that reporters have been resorting to for years now and which can be summed up in one word: self-censorship.

"We look for ways to talk about the issue without putting ourselves at risk," Bojórquez explains. "We wouldn't practice the kind of journalism that the weekly *Zeta*, run by **Jesús Blancornelas**, does. He haven't reached the point of pointing a finger directly; I wouldn't do that. We cannot be martyrs. I don't want my colleagues to be martyrs."

To some measure, *Río Doce* does publish investigative reporting on narcotics

trafficking, but taking care to ensure it is backed up and accurate and when they believe that the issue no longer presents a risk. Although rare, Ismael says, "when we bring out very heavy stuff there is intimidation or warnings, which usually come from police officers or drug dealers."

Sinaloa has, journalists all agree, seen compliant governments, accomplices or enemies of organized crime, with their respective dose of violence. In the past six years, however, a new context and profile have emerged.

Now the drug scene is more dangerous, Bojórquez believes, due to the levels of impunity that exist in the state. And there is one more ingredient, something unprecedented in the country, says **Manuel Clouthier**, editor of the *Noroeste* newspaper chain – the birth of political drug barons.

This new scenario has brought another negative consequence – a lack of transparency. There is no real access to public records, explains **José Alfredo Beltrán**, who has specialized in these issues since an access law was passed in the state.

"Investigating the corruption of an official will always be a risk when there is such a degree of impunity as that which exists now," Bojórquez says.

BEHIND THE DISGUISE

He is a young man, although he has gray hair. He is tall and has a ruddy complexion. His conversation is affable and direct. His office at the *El Noroeste* newspaper is uncluttered and cool – it is air-conditioned. From the outset you can see that **Manuel Clouthier** has a lot to say, that he feels like chatting and that he is worried.

"The governors exercise power like dictators, but being careful how they do so in order not to be criticized. That has meant for the press that freedom of expression is being inhibited in a major way," he declares.

And, if that were not enough, Clouthier says, in those states where organized crime has a major presence, when those dictators take repressive action against journalists and their companies they "disguise it" as coming from drug traffickers.

"A state with such a problem (drug trafficking) is always more dangerous because it is behind a smokescreen," he adds.

In this scenario there is one more element to add, one that represents the greatest risk to freedom, democracy and the institutions, and it has to do with the new political profile that is developing – "the political drug baron."

"It is said that in Colombia the drug barons have wanted to become politicians and in Mexico it would appear that it is the politicians who want to be drug barons. The easiest means now is through the offer of protection, Clouthier asserts. "It is very easy to make a deal with a drug lord when you are the owner of the state."

In the past six years, during the administration of Gov. **Juan S. Millán Lizárraga**, Clouthier says, Sinaloa has been known as a "a safe haven" (for drug trafficking), because of the collusion between the authorities and those groups, and "those of

us who dared to point it out have had a hard time; we've been put in in constant danger, where we have to fear for our lives and those of our families."

In June 2002, in an editorial titled "Narcopolítica" (Narcopolitics), El *Noroeste* denounced something that was no longer easy to hide. It declared, "We have witnessed how the drug traffickers openly march around Sinaloa and even enjoy full impunity; at the same time we see their businesses grow under the protective umbrella of the authorities while they make donations to the public assistance agencies and give money to political campaigns. They are buying up land in the Tres Ríos development project with the support of our government officials and constructing buildings in front of Government House; they enjoy police protection; and, a number of public safety chiefs are salaried employees and gunmen at the service of drug dealers, with the full knowledge of the most senior officials."

Such words were indisputable in September 2004, when **Rodolfo Carrillo Fuentes** – brother of the disappeared Amado Carrillo, known as "El Señor de los Cielos" (The Lord of the Heavens) – and his wife, who were accompanied by former Ministerial Police chief **Pedro Pérez López** and a group of police officers, were murdered at a shopping center in Culiacán, the state capital.

El Noroeste is one of the highest circulated newspapers in the state because it is distributed in various cities and enjoys great credibility among its readers.

If they have not killed him, he says, it is due to his name and because no mistakes have been made when publishing reports about drug trafficking, thus giving them no pretext.

"If we go overboard in handling information about drug trafficking," Clouthier stresses, "right away we open ourselves up to possible action by the oppressors and their claiming it's the drug traffickers."

He says that those organizations "don't see the press as a danger in Sinaloa, but politicians do because if their links to drug traffickers are exposed and proven then their political careers are jeopardized."

Although there have been no attempts on his life, in six years Clouthier has suffered pressure and harassment. He has been threatened by telephone, with investigations and lawsuits; they have spied on him and robbed him, and they have even wanted to buy off his reporters.

One day an anonymous letter containing a death threat addressed to the editor of *El Noroeste* arrived at the newsroom, a fact which would be repeated three more times.

In 2001, added to this was espionage, not only eavesdropping on his personal affairs but also directed at his business. *El Noroeste* confirmed this two years later when a specialist team hired by Clouthier found listening devices in his office and on three telephone lines. This was documented and a formal complaint was filed, but nothing happened. The then state governor, after denying that his administration was doing the eavesdropping, allegedly declared sarcastically, "This is a matter for the Public Prosecutor's Office and the psychiatrist."

Clouthier made the decision to investigate and continue publishing the cases

of corruption being committed. The topic of drug smuggling, however, would be handled with great care.

In the case of corruption, he inevitably ran into manipulated tax audits, criminal libel suits for allegedly defaming certain persons and the withholding of information by the government despite a transparency law having been passed. "But the trickiest thing was to do the job alone, due to the apathy of the other news media," he says.

"Practicing critical journalism in a state such as Sinaloa has been extremely difficult, not only because of the government's authoritarian actions but, worse yet, due to the omission and complicity of other media that should really be practicing such journalism," he declares.

How to work as a journalist in a place such as Sinaloa? For Clouthier it is just a matter of "taking care of yourself." That is, being careful about the information you publish and not crossing the thin line – not investigating anything to do with drug trafficking but simply publishing official reports.

DAILY VIOLENCE

It is hot nearly all the time in Sinaloa. In some cities the sun is dry and harsh, in others humid and soporific. The land is fertile, a strategically important area for the Mexican economy.

The Sinaloa territory is small, amounting to just 2% of the country. It has four ports and beaches that attract tourists. It is a state in which poverty is not that extreme, where official figures indicate that 90% of the 2.6 million inhabitants have all the basic services and in the 18 municipalities students spend on average eight years in school.

The three leading newspapers in the state by circulation and distribution in the cities are *El Debate*, *El Noroeste* and *El Sol del Pacífico*.

Culiacán is the capital. It is a growing city with wide, heavily-trafficked streets, neighborhoods where mansions jostle side-by-side with more modest homes, buildings being erected at a rapid pace, and traditions that defy this modern scene.

The story of proclaimed saint **Jesús Malverde**, known as "El Bandido Generoso" (The Generous Bandit), is one of those traditions that not only seem unchangeable but also demonstrate one of Sinaloa's faces. The legend is simple: a man took from the rich to give to the poor and since his death has performed miracles. That is the epic side of the story. The reality is that the saint, not recognized by any church, has a chapel in front of the state Government Palace and it is there where drug barons, lesser dealers, thieves, police officers, migrants and people from all social levels take their offerings, including drum music, donations and plaques expressing gratitude for Malverde's protection or help. The poor, the elderly and the infirm go to the sanctuary to receive food, medicine, clothing and even assistance to bury their dead. Every December 25 there is a celebration with music, flowers, candles and alcohol in honor of the light-skinned saint with heavy eyebrows and a dark, thin moustache.

The city of Culiacán with its 800,000 residents seems tranquil. The same

tranquility is believed to exist in Mazatlán, Ahome, Guasave and Navolato, the main municipalities in terms of their financial contribution to the state and number of residents.

But statistics from the state Public Prosecutor's Office show the opposite – every 17 hours a person is murdered, every other day a woman is raped, every month a bank is robbed and every day four homes are burglarized.

There are various forms of violence, such as the residents' custom of carrying a gun or living alongside the presumed drug traffickers, that might seem mild because they occur day in and day out in this state where Mexico's major drug barons were born: **Amado Carrillo Fuentes** and his 11 brothers; **Juan José Esparragosa Morenso**, a.k.a. "El Azul" (The Blue One); **Joaquín Guzmán Locra**, "El Chapo;" **Héctor Luis Palma Salazar**, "El Güero" (The Blond); **Ismael Zambada García**, "El Mayo" (The Mayan); the Arellano Félix brothers, and **Miguel Angel Félix Gallardo**, among others.

Drug traffickers get things done their way or obtain silence by sowing fear, helping people or turning them into partners. The authorities and the police departments in the state do not inspire confidence because of the high degree of corruption and their common abuse of power, while the federal authorities that are not contaminated have to confront them to arrest organized crime bosses. All this happens with a big dose of violence.

"It was a decision of mine not to get too involved in investigating drug trafficking matters," reporter **Luis Antonio Vallejo** says, "because that is social problem number one and it is the modus vivendi of many Sinaloa residents. A lot of interests depend on the drug trade in Sinaloa, more than in any other state. I saw how the drug traffickers were protected by the citizens themselves because they are the ones that provide work and help the community."

During the past year there has been a rise in local violence brought about by changes in the state government and within organized crime. As of September 2005 there were 427 murders. In 2004 there were 516.

THE BREWERIES

The telephone kept on ringing. It was just after 4:00 p.m. and Vallejo did not want to answer the call. He was working at home, concentrating on a report that had to be just right because it dealt with alleged corruption involving the mayor of Rosario, **María Teresa Osuna Crespo**, and her husband. He wanted to hurry and finish this story and others he had pending that he needed to send to the newsroom of *El Noroeste* in Mazatlán.

He could not ignore the phone. He got up and lifted the receiver. At first he heard a lot of noise and then a cold, rough voice that spat out, "You're going to die!" and then hung up.

Vallejo was petrified. For several seconds he was unable to move. Little by little the agitation running throughout his body reached his face, reflecting the anguish

He had no doubt it was true. He was sure that it was more than just a mere warning.

He took up the phone again and called his chief reporter in Mazatlán. He told him, in a trembling voice, what had happened.

"I'm scared," he said.

The chief listened to him carefully and tried to calm him down. He said several times that he should not be frightened.

They both agreed not to publish the story that the journalist was writing at the time and let things cool down for a few days before they would decide what to do. It was a sensitive matter. For several weeks the reporter had been looking into work contracts, parties and even deals with breweries in which the mayor's husband had supposedly been receiving kickbacks. That would have to wait.

"I threw out the entire investigation. I didn't want to get involved in problems. I decided to calm things down," Vallejo explains. "I started working more on the farming and cattle-raising areas than on other matters."

He never found out who had called him or if they would carry out the threat. But they achieved their objective.

"I censored myself out of an instinct for survival," he declares. "Not all of us are a Blancornelas having five bodyguards behind us. As long as journalists' physical safety is not assured our self-censorship will never end – when all is said and done, we are all on our own."

Luis Antonio Vallejo left Sinaloa long ago, preferring to move elsewhere. He now works at *La Crónica* in Mexicali, Baja California state, devoting his time to covering political affairs. Very close to Rosario, where he used to live, is Escuinapa, a city where pressure on and threats to journalists have been on the increase. **Gregorio Rodríguez**, a news photographer, was murdered there in 2005.

ABUSE OF POWER

It was getting dark in Culiacán. It was nearly 8 o'clock in the evening and a group of reporters discovered a convoy from the Federal Investigations Agency (AFI) leaving the city after searching the home of former police chief **Pedro Pérez López.**

Oscar Sánchez, a reporter for *El Noroeste*, heard that the 12 police officers were going to search another house so he decided to follow them along with a photographer from the paper. He tried to keep a safe distance, but they did not take long to notice him; they turned in the darkened and lonely street, stopped and faced the reporters.

"You can't follow us, we are carrying out an investigation and you are getting in the way of our work," one of the officers told them.

"You do your work, we're going to cover the news. We won't get in your way," Sánchez replied, hoping not to lose an exclusive.

The police officers refused and told them they were not allowed to continue.

Sánchez did not back down and the officers threatened to put his truck "out of order."

A similar incident happened to **Martín Urista**, a photographer for the Culiacán newspaper *El Debate*.

This kind of aggression was typical of what reporters in Sinaloa faced – until **Gregorio Rodríguez** was murdered. It had been 17 years since anything like that happened in Sinaloa. Now everyone is scared.

A PHOTO...

It was Sunday. **Gregorio Rodríguez** decided that he and his two small children would dine out in Escuinapa, Sinaloa state. It was 6:30 p.m. He told his wife he would be back soon to put the kids to bed.

They arrived at a modest restaurant where there were few people and several empty tables.

A few minutes passed, but it seemed like just seconds. A car pulled up at the door, two men got out and a third stayed at the wheel. They walked fast and as they did, pulled out their pistols. One of them remained outside on lookout and the other went in and aimed at Rodríguez. From less than three feet away he pulled the trigger of his 9-millimeter pistol and with great accuracy fired five rounds into the chest, head and neck. The body fell to the floor while the men ran to their car and escaped. Rodríguez' 6-year-old daughter ran and hid in a safe place and his 3-year-old son hugged his dead father's limp body. Police and paramedics arrived. **Gregorio Rodríguez**, a photographer by profession, was dead. They murdered him on November 28, 2004 at the age of 33.

He was a quiet and very hard-working man. With his wife, also a photographer, he had opened a studio and frequently went to parties and social gatherings to take photos. Two years earlier, he had begun to work for *El Debate* as its correspondent in the town of Escuinapa, dividing his time between two jobs to augment the family income.

At the newspaper he was always ready to work at any time and for as long as needed. He submitted photo coverage of political, social and sports activities.

Why did he die? Who did it? The same questions were asked by the two reporters who worked with him, his family members and his friends. He had never been threatened and he had no enemies. What happened?

The day after the murder the Sinaloa State Attorney General's Office mobilized 12 investigators and sent them to Escuinapa from Mazatlán to be part of a 20-member team made up of police officers, forensic experts and public prosecutors.

The team interrogated eye-witnesses and people close to the victim. They searched a number of suspicious buildings where they found drugs, weapons, nighttime binoculars and anti-flak jackets, among other things.

Eighteen days later, police arrested **Ernesto Sedano Ornelas**, 20, whom the authorities identified as one of the men involved in the killing, claiming he was

apparently the lookout man while his companions shot Rodríguez. He was put on trial, but his family stated that he is a day laborer who, on the day of the crime, was watching a movie at the home of some friends very close to his own house. Journalists also doubt his participation in the crime.

The court ordered Sedano's arrest but denied a warrant for that of **Antonio Fraustro Ocampo**, an alleged top drug trafficker in the area, never formally accused.

Manuel Ulises was arrested on January 20, 2005 and sent to trial. Reporters believe he was not guilty either.

The investigators came to an initial conclusion – former city police chief **Abel Enríquez Zavala** (fired from the police department on November 30, 2004) was allegedly photographed by Rodríguez in the company of a drug trafficker, which presumably worried him and for that reason, it is alleged, he hired three men from Nayarit to kill him. According to that theory, Rodríguez never realized what he had done. In July, the three men were arrested along with the former police chief and his mistress.

Although the Public Prosecutor's Office regards the case as practically solved, there are still doubts about the inquiries. The motive appears inconsistent – the photo that was supposed to have been taken was never published in *El Debate*, says the paper's editor, **Gregorio Medina**, and it has not been found among his belongings either.

They are running out of evidence. Those arrested claim their innocence and journalists in Sinaloa are demanding justice. The judge is due to pronounce sentence shortly.

THREE RISKS

Los Mochis is a town where the traffic is slow, there are no huge shopping centers or vast concentrations of people. Everything is taken calmly.

It is a small city located in northern Sinaloa state, within the municipal district of Ahome which has a population of nearly 400,000. A 20-minute drive away is the port of Topolobampo; 37 miles away by expressway is the state line with the neighboring state of Sonora.

Near Los Mochis, less than 125 miles away and reached by a road with some difficult stretches, is what the federal authorities for decades have been calling the golden triangle. This is where the states of Sinaloa, Sonora and Chihuahua converge and where the greatest number of heroin poppies and marijuana plants grow. Only the Army enters that area to eradicate the illicit crops, but even it does so well-armed and with extreme caution because it is a highly dangerous place where cunning, guns, money and power rule.

In Los Mochis reporters say that they face three basic risks – drug traffickers, intolerance and summonses by officials.

To deal with the drug trafficking there is a formula that, as in other Sinoloa cities,

reporters observe in order to protect their safety: publish only official facts and figures. Anything else would be to unduly endanger themselves.

Intolerance can arise on any matter: an arrested person being photographed by a news photographer who is threatened as a result, in cases of official corruption and in any news item that goes against some political or financial interest.

For example, a peculiar thing occurs in that region. In the dry season, when the use of water is restricted, officials traffic in it and sell it to farmers in exchange for large sums of money. Ruffling feathers as a result of reporting on this kind of corruption is a serious risk for the journalists concerned, at least so they believe.

Something that has become all too frequent is investigators allegedly calling in journalists in an attempt to undermine their stories through interrogation. Defense attorneys of the accused also force reporters to appear before judges in a ploy to delay legal proceedings against their clients.

STORIES OF BULLETS

On Sunday, February 21, 1988 they buried his father. It was a heart attack that led to this unexpected and rapid decline, and that made it even harder to bear. The following day they killed him. His name: **Manuel Burgueño**, a professor and journalist in Mazatlán.

Two months earlier he had undergone a spinal operation and he was still not fully recovered. He spent that day greeting and chatting with friends, there was nothing else to do. He was a cultured man, a professor at the Autonomous University of Sinaloa, where he earned his primary income. He practiced journalism with rigor and discipline when writing his column, first for *El Noroeste* and later for *El Sol del Pacífico*. He also had a small twice-monthly newspaper that he named *Deslinde* (Demarcation) that he published more for pleasure and community service than for money.

Years earlier, he had managed to buy an apartment in Playas de Mazatlán, which he shared with his daughters, son-in-law and granddaughter.

That Monday, it was the same routine as ever. Burgueño spent a lot of time resting because of the pain and discomfort he still felt. His three daughters arrived to spend time with him and brought his grandchildren for him to enjoy. By afternoon, they were joined by one more person, his friend **Alfredo Sánchez**, a university professor who he chatted with for hours.

They were enjoying the afternoon together when all of a sudden the door opened and three armed men with handkerchiefs covering their faces stormed in. On the doorstep they there could see another man, who stood there watching. The Burgueño family and his friend held their breaths and stayed absolutely still; the children began to cry, they were frightened, their mothers could only hold them tight.

"Which of the two of you is Manuel Burgueño?" shouted one of the masked men.

"That's me," Manuel said, pulling out his university I.D. card

One, two, three – six shots rang out, first at point-blank range and then the pistol was thrown at Burgueño. Cut down, mortally wounded, Burgueño slid down the wall to the floor. The men shouted and fled. "Please help me. Help me. I want to get up," he repeated over and over in anguish.

He couldn't be moved; shots covered his entire body. He was at death's door.

They called for an ambulance and carefully put him on a stretcher; they could see how much he was bleeding. They took him to a Social Security hospital. He could take it no longer. As they attempted to put him on the operating table, he died.

The entire city was shaken by the news. Journalists came out to protest in the streets. Fearful but determined, they found support in Culiacán and Los Mochis for their demand to state governor **Francisco Labastida** to have the crime solved.

The authorities took their time to initiate inquiries. "The lack of interest in investigating the case on the part of the government was clear," says journalist **Fernando Zepeda Hurtado**, a friend of Manuel's.

The journalists, on the other hand, spent several months investigating on their own. Pulling the case to pieces they discovered that the car the killers used to flee had been parked for several weeks near the offices of the state Judicial Police. That gave them the first lead on the motive for the crime, which they later confirmed – Judicial Police officers killed him because he had written about links between policemen and drug traffickers.

"Burgueño's writing was pretty harsh," says Zepeda Hurtado. "He had written against **Manuel Salcido Uzeta**, a.k.a. "El Cochiloco" (presumably identified by officials as the alleged leader of the Guadalajara Cartel since 1989. He was murdered in 1992) saying that he controlled the news media because he owned the newspaper *El Sinaloense*, which was run by the Rojo brothers, hotels and a large number of businesses in Mazatlán. He had many properties – hotels, movie theaters and a sports club. Everyone feared him.

Journalists heard a lot of proposals by the governor, but they were never carried out. The then state Judicial Police chief, **Arturo Durazo Moreno**, accused some years later of corruption and linked to a number of crimes in Mexico City, swore he would never leave Mazatlán until the crime was solved – a promise that did not last very long.

The following year, when the investigations into the murder appeared to have been closed, the Army, in a military operation, detained a number of alleged drug traffickers, interrogated one of them and declared unexpectedly that the person presumably responsible for the crime was a former chief of the state Judicial Police (now called Ministerial Police), **Humberto Rodríguez Bañuelos**, nicknamed "La Rana" (The Frog). At the time Rodríguez, after leaving the police, was supposedly working as a henchman in Sinaloa for the Arellano Félix brothers, the Tijuana cartel bosses.

And he added a further piece of information: "There is a list of at least four

journalists they want to teach a lesson to – **Manuel Burgueño**, **Francisco Chiquete**, **Germán Grande** and **Fernando Zapeda**."

The Army began its own investigation and was able to confirm the information. They searched the hideout of "La Rana" and first came across his brother, **Rigoberto Rodríguez Bañuelos**, who confessed they said, and it would later be announced by the Public Prosecutor's Office on June 14, 1989 – to having taken part in the murder of **Manuel Burgueño**.

The authorities allegedly established that "La Rana" had ordered Manuel's murder and on the day of the crime was nearby supervising so that things would go as planned.

He was charged and taken to court. He spent only a couple of years in prison, escaping along with 95 other inmates. Since then his whereabouts remain unknown, although the rumor is that he was murdered in Guadalajara. There were no further arrests. In March 2001, **Humberto Rodríguez Bañuelos** was arrested and charged with drug trafficking, weapons possession and supposedly taking part in the murder of **Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo** and others. In the four years that he has remained behind bars, however, he has not been charged with the murder of **Manuel Burgueño**.

THE FROG CROAKED

As on June 7 every year a dinner was held for journalists. That year, 1987, the event was at the Cima Hotel in Mazatlán and was attended by **Sergio Galindo** and his wife, Nery. At a certain moment, without their noticing it, the state Judicial Police chief, **Humberto Rodríguez Bañuelos**, went up to their table and pulled a bullet out of his pocket, allegedly declaring, "What a good thing that I have it in my hand and I haven't put it into your body!"

The couple fell silent. No doubt this threat was as a result of what Galindo had written in his column in *El Sol del Pacífico* several days earlier. He had included some words addressed to the then city council chairman, José Angel Pescador, saying that "Chief Rodríguez Bañuelos had better look out because he is going around with drug traffickers."

Despite the gravity of these words, as days went by Galindo, also a correspondent of the Mexico City newspaper *Excelsior*, paid them little importance.

On July 16, 1987, Burgueño died. The official cause was a traffic accident. Journalists did not believe that version, suspicious because he was said to have lost control of the car, and, although it mysteriously overturned on a straight road, the tires were not blown, and the day before he had taken the vehicle out of the shop.

Officials gave no further details in the case and the doubts remain.

The list of journalists murdered in Sinaloa in 20 years totals 14. The motives are unknown. And few people in the state remember the whole list.

FEAR - TO UNDERSTAND SINALOA

Every day **Ricardo González** prepares his camera, rolls of film, lenses and flash. He also checks his car, the tires, gas, horn, radio and scanner with the police and medical services frequencies.

Every day he photographs someone injured, arrested or killed in Mazatlán, where he works for the newspaper *El Debate*. He has to get just the right picture, the best angle, the most complete image. To do so he has had to be ingenious.

The result is successful, he is one of the best photographers in town, able to get himself into every event, overcome fear and shoot a lot of photos.

A couple of years ago, González managed to be the first at a fight. He took pictures of the dead, people who had been arrested, the whole scene. Unknowingly, he was photographing the legendary **Ramón Arellano Félix** lying on the ground; one of the most dangerous and violent drug barons, the Tijuana cartel boss, was lying on the sidewalk face up, dead from a bullet wound. These images enabled the Mexican Attorney General's Office to confirm that this was the drug lord after his family removed the body and it was never seen again.

Mazatlán is a place where violence reigns over drug trafficking and poverty. Murders, kidnappings and robberies are commonplace. It is a port in the south of the state that lives from the sea and tourism. It has a population of 380,000, making it Sinaloa's second largest city, although it comprises only some 1,000 square miles, mostly mountains.

It is a city that is good for having fun, enjoying the sun, beaches, fishing and nightlife, especially at Carnival time. That is also what the drug traffickers like, along with drug shipments coming in by sea. One has to live in Sinaloa and know its history to be able to understand the spiral of violence that exists there, the historic coexistence with drug trafficking and its codes.

"There is a kind of consensus among all the reporters to be careful when writing about the drug dealers," says **Fernando Zepeda**, a columnist for *El Debate* in Mazatlán, "because it implies risk and they think nothing of warning any of us or killing just anywhere."

Investigating all the details, Zepeda says, means not knowing where the interests lie, "because you can't know if the person you are using as a source is in collusion with him or with others, you don't know if the one passing the information on to you at any moment could go with it to another drug trafficker to tell him that **Fernando Zepeda** is investigating this one or has information about that one. What a lot of reporters have been doing in recent years is to write about what happens and not investigate."

"At times," he says, with irritation, "You don't know if in front of you, as you sip your coffee, is a supposed businessman who is laundering money for the drug trade and you start talking about a drug baron without realizing this guy works for him. That's what's hard about it; as journalists we can't identify just how far the drug traffickers' tentacles have reached."

To get involved in investigating, says **Gregorio Medina**, editor of *El Debate* in Mazatlán, is to get yourself in trouble and put your life at risk.

"We practice 'light' journalism in this kind of thing, because we don't want to put ourselves at risk," Medina adds. "We don't want to put our lives in danger, it's not worth it, it's just not worth it."

Medina's words resound in his office, they speak of denunciation, explanation, annoyance.

"They have killed journalists," he goes on, in the same vehement tone. "We have been there. It's frightening, we're scared. Reporters are free to write, but they weigh the risks and if they see danger they step back, even though some of them would like to investigate further. I hand it to the reporters who, when they see a dangerous situation, step back; it's not worth putting your life at risk because here it's all too easy to be killed and disappear. The risk of having an attempt on one's life is all too real."

Medina adds, "This state must rank the highest for danger due to the high incidence of impunity, because 95% of the homicides here are never solved; there's no freedom to report against the powers that be and much less against the drug barons. Sinaloa is a high-risk area." ❑

III
The Southeast: Where Fear Dwells

Southeast Mexico is the poorest, most abandoned region where battle rages permanently. This is the region that has historically led and embraced social causes, both peaceful and armed. But it is also where repression has taken root.

Unlike in the north, risks for journalists here are less visible, less recognized and mostly ignored. People in central Mexico rarely look toward the south and have little understanding of its diversity, contradictions, silences and needs.

The press in Chiapas, Oaxaca and Guerrero states has to put up with intolerance, political bosses, labor unions and religious leaders and corruption and abuses by security forces and the police. It is surrounded by mistrust and, therefore, solidarity is absent.

Here, there is a risk that reporters appear to have become used to, no longer perceiving the change that has come about in their daily work. It is, as throughout the rest of the country, organized crime.

The majority of reporters in those states claim to write on the subject and record what is happening. But several received threats and that was enough for them to stop investigating. "It's not worth running risks, not even the salary makes it worthwhile, much less the lack of support and recognition", they will tell you.

That is why, despite this part of the country being a key center for drug operations and traffic, auto thefts and human trafficking, only a few cases are reported and investigated.

BETTER TO CONFRONT THEM

"We know where you are, what hotel you're staying at and the number of your room," **Manuel de la Cruz** heard. It was an unknown, rough male voice that was calling him on his cellphone.

His heart started pumping harder and for a few brief seconds he was paralyzed with surprise. After all, he had arrived only a few hours earlier in Tapachila, Chiapas state and because he had been in a hurry, he didn't even remember the name of the hotel where he was registered.

"If you don't stop fucking about you're going to turn up dead and we're not joking," the same voice, increasingly unpleasant, continued.

"But what is this all about? I take responsibility for what I do," replied De la Cruz, who did not understand the reason for the call, thinking it was best to confront them and not show fear.

"I want to see you because I want to do away with you," the unknown caller spat out.

In February, 2001, newspaper *Milenio* had sent its correspondent **Manuel de la Cruz** from Tuxtla Gutiérrez to Tapachula to cover the visit of **Gabriela Rodríguez**, United Nations special rapporteur for migrants' human rights. The visit to Tapachula was important because it is the main entry point from Central America to Mexico.

The UN entourage was touring a migrant station when the reporter received the call and as soon as he hung up he told his friend, AP correspondent **Alejandro Ruiz**, what had happened. Manuel's reaction was to confront them to try and stop them from going further since it was clear that they were watching and possibly wanted to capture him.

The meeting was brief and in a public square. Manuel arrived accompanied by Alejandro and another journalist, **Isaac Sánchez**. Upon arrival they found two men, very angered by a report *Milenio* had published a month earlier where state authorities revealed the names and operations of drug traffickers in the area, including those involved in human smuggling.

"We're going to shoot you," repeated time after time a hard-faced young man.

When De la Cruz realized what it was all about, he said, "That document exists, it was done by the state government, I only published it. I'm not the one you should be going after."

"Let's see, give it to me to see if that's true," he snapped back.

"You ask the state government for it; I don't work for you," De la Cruz replied.

The meeting ended with threats.

"At first," De la Cruz admits, "I was afraid they would kill me, because that's the way these people operate. But afterwards I realized that I should go on reporting because that was my life insurance and if I gave in once, I would be giving in forever."

But not all reporters do the same; for their own personal safety many prefer to practice self-censorship in matters related to the drug trade, human smuggling and even corruption, says **Isaín Mandujano**, correspondent of the APRO news agency.

Yolanda is a reporter with 13 years' experience. She tells what happened to her more than five years ago. She is still scared.

One day she was covering a story about some people accused of smuggling illegal immigrants. She gave details of what that organization was doing and named names. When the story was published the State Information Agency received a telephone call from a woman warning that Yolanda had better be careful because "they were going to kill her."

The reporter, without telling anybody, left Tapachila. They had not given up on finding her and she could take no more fear; she believed they would kill her at any moment.

La Jornada, the newspaper she worked for, arranged for her to go to Mexico City where she remainded hidden. She could take no more.

After 20 days, her father's health deteriorated and she had to decide whether to remain in hiding or go back to look after him. She was warned that it still wasn't safe, but she returned to Tapachula anyway at her own risk.

The two people involved were arrested a short time later. The woman was the sister of the gang leader Yolanda had written about and the man was his assitant.

"This left me really scared," she recalls. "At times, you report without thinking through the consequences I hadn't realized how big the story was and what a turmoil it would cause. The experience made me more responsible in what I write, to cite sources and write with greater care."

SOUTHERN GATEWAY

Tapachula, located in the extreme south of Mexico, is the southernmost city in the country and its gateway to Central America. The town is small, with 272,000 residents, although the population is doubled by the business activities that take place. Across the border is the Guatemalan city of Talismán, the main gateway to that country.

In fact, the border does not exist; only the Suchiate and Usumacinta rivers separate the two countries; crossings by any road are a daily occurrence and done openly. It is easy to cross from one side to the other with animals, food and illicit product. Authorities have uncovered in Guatemala at least 10 illegal landing strips for small planes loaded with drugs that sooner or later cross some point along the 600-mile frontier.

The ease of crossing has led to the establishment in both countries of criminal organizations devoted to traffic in people, arms and drugs.

Tapachula suffers the presence of those groups; it is the city with the highest crime rate in the state. Many hotels are used as brothels or to hide illegals; bars employ foreign women and girls to serve their clients for less pay.

In the past 10 years, a report by the Chiapas State Attorney General's Office says, each year the migratory authorities arrest on average "a few more than 100,000 undocumented foreigners in the area." And that's not all. The most common crimes are theft, beatings, homicides (an average of 300 a year) and document forgery.

As if that were not enough, the city is facing another problem with the presence of street gangs whose profile of violence is contaminating the local youth; these, in turn, have begun to imitate them in recent years.

INTOLERANCE

It is February 26, 2004, 9 o'clock in the morning. This work day for reporters **Carlos Herrera**, **Elio Henríquez** and **René Araujo** takes them to the townships of San Isidro and Chajtoj located in the municipality of Zinacantá, in Chiapas state, a half-hour ride from the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas.

That day they were responding to an invitation from a group of the self-styled support bases of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLAN). It was important to be there because early in the month in those townships the EZLN had clashed with supporters of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) over ownership of a well.

San Isidro and Chajtoj are small places where you walk on stony ground. The indigenous people of Zinacantán, which comprises several communities totaling some 30,000, are members of the Tzoztil tribe who dedicate themselves to their fields and animals. Rampant poverty is obvious. Thin bodies evidence little food, and a large number of homes have clay walls and floors. As happens in other places in Chiapas, San Isidro and Chajtoj are communities divided by religion or politics.

The three reporters went to their appointment. Elio is correspondent for *La Jornada*, Carlos for *Cuarto Poder* and René a news photographer who sells his photos to the *Notimex* news agency. All was calm, just a rally and discussions about what was happening.

Suddenly, without warning, residents armed with chain saws began to break through the fence surrounding the well.

They had to get out of there fast, the reporters decided, and without a word jumped into their Jeep and started off. But they didn't get very far – as they were passing through Chajtoj, just before reaching the highway, a man ordered them to stop. Within seconds, four women appeared and stood in front of the vehicle to stop it from leaving. They wanted to know who they were and what they had to do with the destruction of the fence. After several minutes trying to explain what had happened, the result was disastrous. They were held responsible.

Surprise turned to fear. The people were not listening. No matter how many times they tried to tell them who they were, that they had permission to be there and they had done nothing, it all fell on deaf ears.

Suddenly an old *Volkswagen* appeared from Chajtoj's main avenue. In it was a public works official from city hall and two assistants. They asked to speak to the person who was in charge.

"Look, we know them, they are journalists, let them go," said the official.

"No, they can't go, the problem has to be solved first," the man replied.

"Tell me, what is the problem?" he asked.

Without a moments' delay, the man ordered others from the community to restrain the "caxlanes" (as the local people insultingly call those of mixed-race) as well.

The officials were held in the school. But contrary to what might be expected, the reporters' spirits rose now that there were six detainees; the government had already been notified and it was less likely their punishment would be a lynching. They just had to wait.

The anguish went on for six hours before they were freed, thanks to the intervention of the public prosecutor, the governor and legislators. Two months later, in the same area, there was a confrontation between Zapatistas and people from the PRD, with injuries and deaths. Herrera and Araujo admit they were scared, but they returned, only this time taking more care and not going back alone.

"You learn little by little, almost involuntarily, to weigh the risks," one of them

explains. "For example, when we go to any traditional fiesta, I make sure to see that there is security. It might happen that you can't get out and lose the story, perhaps even your life. You go at your own risk, but you have to weigh it."

HIGH DEGREE OF EXCLUSION

Chiapas is, simply put, a state of deep inequalities, absurdities and incongruities. It has traditionally been excluded from the economic and social development of the country, treated with indolence and discrimination. Similar treatment is given to Oaxaca and Guerrero states, where abandonment is extensive. In the National Statistical, Geographic and Computing Institute's classification, the three states are listed as showing "a very high degree of marginalization."

And how else could it be, given that 80% of those that have any work at all earn less than $5 a day, the average person has only six years in school and barely 6% manage to complete university studies.

The forests, hills, ocean, swamps and mountains make Chiapas a very green, fertile and visually beautiful place, but also a difficult place for its 4 million inhabitants distributed across the state's 118 municipalities. Despite its bountiful natural resources, Chiapas, along with Guerrero and Oaxaca, (which also have great natural riches), has the largest number of towns with "extreme" food shortages – that is, the residents there (more than 2 million in total) do not receive the minimum level of nutrition and their health is at risk – according to a survey carried out by **Felipe Torres**, a member of the Autonomous University of Mexico's Economic Research Institute team.

In Chiapas, Oaxaca and Guerrero there is religious sectarianism, narrow-mindedness and, above all intolerance, which comes from the communities themselves: from social leaders, politicians or local bosses who in many cases, take advantage of the people's good will or ignorance.

For those who do not know Chiapas, asking permission before reporting might seem strange. But that's the way it is here; to report in this part of Mexico is quite a task. You must be knowledgable about the dozens of indigenous ethnicities in the state, how they are organized and their customs to avoid violating their traditions.

It is essential to understand the religious beliefs of each group because communities are increasingly divided into different forms of Catholicism (diocesan and traditionalist, for example) in addition to Protestants, Evangelicals and even Muslims. The political affiliations of these groups must be learned because in Chiapas there are marked differences between supporters of the PRI, PRD and EZLN.

If you fail to take into account all these factors and do not understand the area's conflicts and interests, you are at great risk, even in danger of losing your life.

The outbreaks of intolerance might seem inoffensive, but in Chiapas on occasion you get the impression there is a suppressed violence that could erupt at

any moment. In addition, threat is one of the tools commonly used in an attempt to stop journalists from reporting.

The lack of support for reporters from their news media means that the fear is accentuated, that they have the sensation of being abandoned and therefore more vulnerable when faced with those threats that may be overt or not.

In San Cristóbal de las Casas salaries are less than $500 a month, except in some cases of Mexico City newspapers, which pay a little over $1,000 to their correspondents. But the others do not receive any benefits and work without a contract.

"Working conditions are tough; they depend on how the company's business is going. There is no life insurance, not even any expenses or salary raises. Nor is there any stability. If you are threatened, you're on your own and you have to look out for yourself. I take the risk because I like what I do and for now I want to be here in San Cristóbal," says a smiling **Carlos Herrera**, 29, a young man passionate about his job.

'NUISANCE' REPORTERS

Abenamar Sánchez is a young reporter. He was born in indigenous territory, the land of the Zoque. His family lives in Nuevo Naranjo, a village that they and various others founded more than 20 years ago, very close to Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the state capital.

His work as a journalist focuses on social welfare. He grew up seeing how people die for lack of food or basic medicines. He also knew the hard life, working, from sun-up to sun-down for little pay.

In mid-2003, he discovered that a lot of residents of Nuevo Naranjo were falling ill, going to the health clinic with high temperatures and general malaise. There was no medicine to treat them or the means to diagnose its severity.

Abenamar wrote this story after talking to doctors and neighbors. The matter caused a stir in the state, and the best way for health officials to cover up was to put pressure on the indigenous population and convince them that the reporters had been exaggerating.

Abenamar was called in to a two-hour meeting in which he was accused of attacking the community and his morals called into question. His neighbors no longer wanted to talk to him and they even shouted "liar" at him in the streets.

"I thought then," Abenamar recalls, "that it couldn't get worse; to defame you, to treat you like that – you lose what's most valuable, your credibility."

There are many ways of attacking journalists, subtly, moderately or by blasting them, at least that is what happens in Chiapas, where the easiest thing is to deny and lie. Even so, journalists acknowledge that columnists and "so-called reporters" often use their position to attack and obtain some benefit.

The state governor, **Pablo Salazar**, is allegedly accused of putting pressure on newspapers that are not to his liking, such as *Cuarto Poder*, and of calling for the

firing of reporters he regards as "a nuisance," as in the case of **Manuel de la Cruz** at W-Radio or **Isaac Robles**, who, until early 2005, worked at the government radio station.

In the government they say that this is untrue, that the press is against them because since Salazar took office the state has stopped paying "chayos" (money) to reporters and no longer buys eight-column stories as it used to five years ago.

The fact is that in addition to intolerance, journalists have a tremendously bad image and what they do gets little recognition or respect. News companies do not provide them with I.D.s. because they could be used for extortion, they are told; there are no contracts and fewer social benefits. But things are changing; in 1994, when the EZLN first emerged, the press began to undergo a transformation that continues today. It became more professional. The local journalism school is now in its fifth year.

With the emergence of the Zapatista movement reporters had to go national, even international, which required improved skills and performance. So-called newspapers that are really only vehicles of extorsion began to disappear and little by little have been reduced to just 20 throughout the state. And authorities have found themselves increasingly obliged to open up. But much remains to be done, journalists all agree.

A MATTER OF HONOR

Intolerance is found in government and among political and religious leaders; in fact everywhere, even among journalists. One of the most obvious signs of this are the libel and defamation lawsuits filed by individuals.

From 2001 to 2003, a total of 691 preliminary inquiries for defamation and 66 for libel were initiated. The majority were between individuals, of which only 27 involved reporters and, of these, 12 were reporters suing other reporters.

By tradition in Chiapas, a reporter says, reputation is considered one of the most precious assets and that is why when a person feels attacked the first thing he does is demand an apology. It can come to blows or even death – in the best case a lawsuit is filed against the offending party.

When amendments to the Penal Code were introduced in February 2004 and the penalty for defamation was raised to up to nine years' imprisonment, the one sector that was most concerned and criticized the change was the press, for one sole reason: in light of existing intolerance, the law could become the perfect weapon to muzzle reporting and harass reporters.

The amendment remains in effect. The Chiapas state legislature agreed to review the Penal Code and, if necessary, revoke that provision. It has not done so. Nor have there been any cases so far of that clause being used to attack and harass a reporter.

TOLLS

Following the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas military posts were built. Sometimes there are many, at other times fewer. Their presence has changed the way of life of the communities and the work of journalists there.

There has never been any physical assault on journalists, **Carlos Herrera** acknowledges, but their presence and activities are intimidating.

As a general rule, he adds, there is a military post near Zapatista communities and when journalists go into one of them their photos or videotapes are taken, they are ordered to hand over their personal documents and their backpacks, and the cars they are traveling in are searched.

"All the military bases," he says, "have problems about the land they occupy, as none of them have been given permission to set up there. In San Isidro, for example, they blocked off a cooperative's road to install themselves there and the people can no longer use the road to get to their home just ahead. We have written about this and have been given the corresponding scolding and threat that we are on federal land and that they are going to seize our camera and such."

Roadblocks are also set up by indigenous groups when they are having a festivity in their village or when there are inter-communal conflicts, with journalists being able to enter to report only if they pay a 20 pesos toll. There is also a war toll established by the Zapatistas, who in the early years were intolerant, very inward-looking and selective but since 2000 have, slowly, been changing their attitude.

"I would be more afraid to go into another, non-Zapatista community than one that is Zapatista, because here they understand what a journalist is all about," Herrera says.

THE BOSSES

In Oaxaca the stories of coercion by political bosses and community leaders are similar to those in Guerrero and Chiapas, and fall within the same context of poverty, discrimination, intolerance, impunity and corruption.

Certainly the case of the newspaper *Noticias* demonstrates just how far attacks on freedom of expression have gone there. The newspaper's journalists and executives accuse the governor, **Ulises Ruiz**, of being the instigator. He defends himself by saying that it is an internal labor problem.

Nevertheless, in this conflict which began four years ago and has escalated since November 2004, no official has spoken out to defend reporters' rights and keep the newspaper's freedom to publish from being violated.

On November 28, 2004, a group of masked men armed with machetes invaded the newspaper's warehouses where printing materials were stored. The following day, a body was found there and blamed on the newspaper's executives.

The authorities never attempted to remove the invaders, on the contrary they allowed them to settle in and set up homes. The National Human Rights

Commission sent a recommendation to the governor on the negligence of state authorities. The governor did not respond.

The newspaper was closed down on June 18, 2005 by a strike of "workers" who were, in fact, members of a labor organization unrepresented at the paper. Employees did not leave the offices and remained there for 31 days until a group of people armed with sticks and machetes entered the building on July 18 and they had to flee. Those who did not get out in time were beaten.

The governor insists this is a labor dispute and that is why he does not intervene.

Behind this is the newspaper's editorial stance critical of the state government and its actions. The conflict goes on.

OBLIVION AND IMPUNITY

It's a day in November, 2004 in the Mixteca region of the state of Guerrero. A group of children aged 7 to 12 who live in a small community that, at the best of times barely exceeds 200 inhabitants, rises before sunrise, drinks coffee or eats a piece of tortilla and rushes out of the house. On the way children greet each other and continue walking, most of them barefoot, along the rock-strewn dirt road. They have to walk for two hours to get to their school.

José Antonio Rivera, a journalist, was visiting that school to write a story. When he went in he noticed some colored drinking glasses on a bookshelf lined up in numerical order. He asked the teacher what they were for, and the teacher replied that they were used to give the children their only meal of the day, so they were special utensils. And, as if it were her only chance to get it off her chest, she told him softly: "When it's break time each child takes a glass and goes to the well; there, each takes a little handful of dirt and puts it in his glass and then adds water, stirs it and quickly drinks it."

"What, they eat dirt?" the surprised reporter asks.

"That's all they have. The earth makes them feel they have something in their stomach so they can go on all day. They'll be able to eat something when they get back home in the afternoon."

That is Guerrero, a state known for its harsh people, confrontation and combat, where a number of wars have been waged since the War of Independence, where political bosses and landowning copra and coffee producers wield major political and economic influence throughout the state.

The battles and protests by peasants and indigenous folk have never ceased because the area has been poor since time immemorial. Peaceful community organizations and guerrillas alike settled in the hills and on the coast, have left and been repressed and then returned. In the 1970s and '80s it is estimated that more than 500 people – many of them unarmed and others described as subversives – were killed by the various authorities.

From the mid-1960s to the '80s, relates journalist **Rodrigo Huerta**, "the entire

population was in danger because there was no respect for life. The members of the military would take peasants out of their homes and kill them, and nothing would happen. There were massacres. The Judicial Police was feared. Everyone lived in fear."

Huerta, 55, was a young man when he worked at the newspaper *Revolución* where he ran a page for student complaints. It had begun as something fairly commonplace, but as things heated up over the years it became an important place for posting disappearances and denouncing persecutions in the academic world.

The reports bothered the government of the time and it was a miracle that Huerta was able to get out alive after a police chief warned him that an order had been given to put drugs in his car to discredit him. He hid out in the state of Nayarit.

These were times in Guerrero when the press was coerced or bought-off. It was hard not to give in, knowing the smell of death that pervaded that state. And what was even worse, Huerta declares, is that "a crime is never solved, certainly not the murder of a journalist."

There are 79 municipalities in Guerrero with a total of 3 million residents, of whom 13% speak some indigenous language. Together with Chiapas and Oaxaca states Guerrero ranks at the bottom in terms of development. Twenty per cent of the population does not know how to read or write.

THE EXCLUSIVE

It is June 1996. An armed group, the self-styled Revolutionary People's Army (EPR), appeared at a rally commemorating the peasants in Aguas Blancas, Guerrero.

The news media reported on the incident, causing national and international outcry. The government tried to soften the impact, but new facts and details appeared day after day.

To limit coverage they opted for an old strategy in the region. On a day in the second half of the year a list containing the names of more than four dozen persons who were purportedly collaborating with the EPR or belonged to it arrived at newspapers in Guerrero and Chiapas. The list contained the names of more than one dozen journalists from those two states. A number of news media gave credence to the information and published it, saying that the Mexican Attorney General's Office was investigating those reporters for their apparent links to the EPR.

Although the Attorney General's Office denied the stories and none of the journalists felt that their lives were in danger, those whose names were on the list knew that it was an effort to intimidate and pressure them.

"It was a way to harass, a message to inhibit reporters' work. One of the effects was to stigmatize and discredit," says **Maribel Gutiérrez**, a reporter and copy editor for the daily newspaper *El Sur* de Guerrero whose name was listed and at the time was a correspondent of *La Jornada*.

By February 2, 1994, Mexico had still not recovered from the surprise caused by the Zapatista uprising in the state of Chiapas. That day in *El Sol de Acapulco* in Guerrero a news item appeared causing a new shockwave: "Subversive Group Sighted in the Guerrero Mountains." The headline not only caused a major stir but turned the life of the reporter bylined on the story into a living hell.

José Antonio Rivera was that newspaper reporter. He liked to do investigative reporting on the most controversial and thorny issues.

The discovery of the 20,000 weapons smuggled to Guerrero from the United States, which his contacts tipped him off about gave Rivera the motive to look for more information on the use and origin of the arms, most of them AK-47 assault rifles.

He made his way to the mountain and, since he was known there, it was not difficult for him to obtain important details from the local residents on armed groups in the Atoyac and Coyuca de Benítez mountain range who were ready to stage an uprising.

Rivera spent several weeks gathering information. What he was told confirmed that guerrilla warfare would soon break out in Guerrero.

His newspaper published the information compiled by Rivera. The then president of Mexico, **Carlos Salinas de Gortari**, called the owner of the newspaper, **Mario Vázquez Raña**, concerned by what was being published in his Acapulco newspaper. Both the editor, **Eloína López**, and Rivera were suspended, although in the case of the former the employees were told she would be away on vacation for several weeks. The reporter was suspended for 40 days without pay.

At first the problem was not the suspension, Rivera says, rather that around 40 members of the state Judicial Police were waiting for him outside his home to take him, they said, to Gov. **Rubén Figueroa**. When they spoke, he asked Rivera to reveal his sources but when no reply was forthcoming, supposedly snapped, "You are creating news terrorism. And you should know that I am concerned for the security of Guerrero."

Faced with Rivera's refusal, the governor let him go, but he was no longer alone. For two months, up to 16 people form different agencies, including the Army, kept a watch on him. They apparently wanted to harass him and destroy his contacts.

"Behind me there was a convoy of four cars, from the Army, Cisen (National Investigation and Security Center), state Judicial Police and I don't know who else," Rivera recalls. "They were outside my house and wherever I went they followed. On occasion there were three or four people in each vehicle. All they told me was that they had orders to follow me and they were from the government. Meanwhile my suspension at work was changed to indefinite."

"Off and on for three months the phone would ring in the early morning and when I picked it up all I heard were death threats," Figueroa recalls.

Four months later, the newspaper *El Financiero* published an Army document addressed to the Secretary of the Interior in which it mentioned the movement of

those 20,000 weapons that Rivera had earlier reported.

"That took the pressure off me. But more importantly it restored my credibility, I had been the subject of a campaign to discredit me; they even paid for radio spots saying the published information was false. All those months I was a pariah for the press," Rivera declares.

When the EPR appeared in the Atoyac mountain range in 1996 no one could doubt any longer the truthfulness of what Rivera had reported two years earlier and what the government had tried to silence.

EXTORTIONS

In the past eight years in Guerrero one journalist has been murdered and another has disappeared – **Abdel Bueno León**, editor of the weekly *Siete Días*, and **Leodegario Aguilera Lucas**, editor of the magazine *Mundo Político*, respectively.

In both cases there are two versions: first, that officials went after them, to the extent of eliminating them because of their constant denunciations, and, second, their death or disappearance was because, under cover as journalists, they extorted officials and, perhaps without knowing it, even drug traffickers.

Which is the truth? It is impossible to know because the authorities have not dug to the bottom in their investigations. It was easier to let time pass, to let time fade the facts and the memory, leaving it as merely one more piece of the equation of deaths and disappearances in the press in Guerrero.

Bueno León was killed on May 22, 1987. His body was found on the outskirts of Chilpancingo, with signs of his having been tortured and shot in the back of the head as he sat in his car which they tried to set fire to. Days earlier his open letter had made public his fear of what might happen to him and held Guerrero state government secretary general **Rubén Robles Catalán**, who allegedly was investigating corruption, responsible were anything to happen to him. Robles Catalán was killed in July, 2005.

The case of **Leodegario Aguilera Lucas** is more complicated. Three men who earlier had asked him to put them up pulled him out of his home in the early morning. It was May 22, 2004.

Several weeks later, the suspected culprits were arrested and badly burned remains that were said to be the journalist's were found. The detainees were not put on trial; the investigating magistrate ruled that the Guerrero State Attorney General's Office had not been able to produce proof that the skull and bones found were those of Aguilera.

The Guerrero authorities claim that the disappearance and death of the editor of *Mundo Político* was over problems concerning the land on which he had been constructing his house and a hotel for the past several years.

Officials from the Attorney General's Office carried out an unofficial review of the case and interrogated the detainees, who told them a drug trafficker had

paid them to abduct Aguilera, whom they then killed. The federal officials' theory is that Aguilera was extorting these people because he had found out they were supporting certain politicians and police chiefs.

But as far as Ernestina, Aguilera's sister, is concerned none of these versions is true and they merely seek to hide the truth. The reason for her brother's disappearance, she is certain, can be found in the alleged investigations he had been conducting into the properties and wealth of then governor **René Juárez Cisneros** or in his exposés of the drug cartels.

THE ECHOES OF THE BULLETS

Stealthy, yet insolent and rough, a new threat to the press that barely reveals itself is making its appearance in Guerrero.

This is, once again, the illicit drug trade. It is not that it has suddenly appeared in that state, but the violence is having an effect on daily life now and putting the safety of journalists in jeopardy.

In Guerrero you can trust the local and state police very little because many of the officers receive money in exchange for protection of drug trafficking organizations or simply resort to extortion to complement their low salaries.

The drug trafficking map divides the state in two. In the port of Acalpulco; the Golfo and Tijuana cartels operate; in Costa Grande it is the Sinaloa group, supposedly headed by **Joaquín Guzmán Loera**, a.k.a. "El Chapo." The latter is invading the territory of the former leading to persecutions and heartless murders. The war between the hitmen of one and the other groups, the Zetas and the Pelones, has begun to gain notice.

The statistics are revealing for a state that has a population of 3 million. From January to August 2005, a total of 440 violent deaths were recorded in Acapulco; 300 of those were executions that could be linked to the drug trade. In fights between gangs and against the authorities, five explosions were reported in which organized crime has used fragmentation grenades. In addition, 80 weapons were seized in the first half of 2005, most of them high caliber, including grenade launchers and bazookas.

But unlike Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Sonora and Baja California, Guerrero has not often attracted the attention of the national media despite the fact that the number of dead and wounded, weapons and battles is comparatively similar. Only the local papers have recorded incidents with any consistency, and that has brought its consequences.

NOW IT IS GETTING SERIOUS

It is still early and **Javier Trujillo** had planned to take advantage to do some interviews for his next news story before lunch.

His dark skin and moustache on his smiling face mark him as a man from

Guerrero. He knows, as few other journalists do, every nook and cranny of the state, its information and its sources. He has been watched by the authorities frequently as a result of the information he publishes and they have supposedly threatened him often, but only on a few occasions has he taken that seriously. That day in April 2005, however, he knew he could take no chances.

He went to the public prosecutor's offices to go over how investigations were going with his sources. He was especially interested in the case of two young men who had been executed in late March in Fortín Alvarez, in Acapulco.

A truck drew alongside his car and the people inside asked him to pull over. Such was his surprise, and the people were so amiable, that he did what they asked; besides, they were on a busy street in broad daylight, so he suspected nothing.

"We just want to tell you to leave the thing you are investigating alone," one of the men, whom he could not identify, said in a dry, cold voice. The look of the men and the way they behaved left him in no doubt that "this was getting serious."

He later learned that they had allegedly been sent by a drug trafficker allied to the Carrillo Fuentes brothers and **Beltrán Leyva** – a man the authorities characterized as very dangerous whom they nicknamed "El Barbie" (The Barbie) and identified as **Edgar Valdés Villareal**.

In his more than 15 years working as a reporter, Trujillo has written and revealed information on corruption, the illicit drug trade, guerrillas and massacres, so his nose for news is well trained and honed.

With all the experience he has one cannot be skeptical about his view of Guerrero now: "We haven't yet reached the point of other states where you stop publishing, but you have to tread carefully here."

IN ORDER TO SURVIVE

Iguala is an unpretentious town of some 124,000 inhabitants, but it is the third largest in the state. Six of its newspapers sell the most copies there, but only two of them pay their reporters a salary, the rest operate on a system popularly known as "financing by the reporter" or "unpaid stringers."

Using this form of work the newspaper avoids having to pay taxes. The system, explains **Efraín López**, a journalist in Iguala for more than 20 years, is very complicated and can even look like a form of corruption, but it really is a matter of survival. Reporters seek information that stands out and interests the newsrooms, they report it and they then have to convince their sources to pay them in order to get it published – usually $20 per story.

"They're told that the information is very good and it needs to be published, but we have to come up with the money, so that's why we ask you for it," López says as an example of how it works.

Once back in the newsroom they have to convince the news editor to publish the story. "It is a struggle every day," he says, "but it is the only way many colleagues

can do it, even though the money is never enough."

Those newspapers that do pay a salary, he adds, give their reporters $100 to $600 a month, depending on their experience and ability, plus minimun benefits.

The majority of reporters in Iguala has no training in journalism, they are agricultural engineers, physicians or teachers, because those are the schools available in the area. Those who do study journalism go to Chilpancingo and they usually are not interested in coming back because of the lack of opportunities.

Some reporters hold several jobs at the same time to avoid "financing the news". **Rodimiro Méndez Ríos**, for example, covers the police beat for *Diario 21*, turns in 12 news items a day, gives classes in medicine and social sciences, attends patients at his medical office and is a member of the Board of Directors of the Red Cross. As if that were not enough, he has a local news program transmitted on cable television, where he is cameraman, reporter, producer and anchor and receives no salary. He says he does it because he likes it.

Méndez, with straight, gray-streaked hair, is very formal and serious. He covers the police beat and acknowledges that he has decided not to report certain information for security reasons because he has received death threats in covering violent police incidents or those linked to drug trafficking. He prefers not to go into detail.

It is true, López says, that there are things that happen in Iguala linked to the drug trade that do not make it into the press. It is a question of fear, it is safe that way. "How could a reporter risk himself when not even his own newspaper backs him up?" he wonders.

Alejandro González, a reporter and photographer who originally was an agricultural engineer and later studied journalism, has had his camera smashed, been beaten and been called in to testify as a result of his work.

In 2001, a story was published on a double homicide. He was called up before a judge twice to testify on behalf of the accused and refused to do so. In defense, he had to submit a formal complaint to the state's Human Rights Commission.

LICENSE TO ASSAULT

The everyday struggle is not a thing of Atoyac or Iguala alone, it also happens in Chilpancingo, perhaps with a different face but the same shortcomings and limitations are present.

Poor working conditions are a negative factor, says journalist **Luz María Oronoa**. "They have to hold down three jobs at the same time, that's why there is no quality. It is a vicious circle, there are no professionals and no ethics because the rights of the worker are not respected. Some are even not paid a salary; they are given a credential to assault."

Pedro Arzeta García, secretary of the National Press Union, based in Chilpancingo, the state capital with 197,000 inhabitants, believes that journalists

face risk from the Army, political bosses and the government, because all of them try to stop them from reporting the news.

Journalist **Juan Angulo**, executive editor of *El Sur*, an Acapulco newspaper, confirms that there are extremely poor working conditions for journalists. "And to that you have to add the inadequate training that journalism students receive," he says. "It was only in 1999 that the School of Communication Sciences produced its first graduates."

El Sur is one of the most respected newspapers in the state (although it is not the one with the highest circulation, *Novedades* is, selling 15,000 copies a day) because of the news it publishes and because it requires its reporters not to accept money or any other benefit. It is one of the few that pays full social benefits and top salaries.

The risks in being a journalist, says Angulo, are closely linked to how strong the news outlet is. "The powers-that-be undervalue the work of journalists more than fear them," he declares. "Even though some news item may upset some big wheel, they can always call the editor or publisher."

REPORTERS SUMMONED

The risks for the press in Guerrero come from very clear sources – the powers-that-be, political bosses, organized crime and corruption.

The lack of solidarity and mistrust among journalists worsens the situation and gives the appearance that the threats or pressure are isolated and not very dangerous matters – like the number of summonses that both the state Public Prosecutor's Office and the Mexican Attorney General's Office have issued to reporters in the past five years. It is difficult to establish just how many there have been, but in the majority of cases the purpose has been to support the authorities in demanding investigations be called off or to put pressure on the reporters.

Maribel Gutiérrez was called in to testify about her investigative reports that appeared in early June 2002, in *El Sur*, concerning the death of social activist **Digna Ochoa**, a story that ran for four days and which raised doubts about the official version that the lawyers had committed suicide. But it also gave the names of the alleged murderers and the person who had allegedly paid for the crime, a powerful cattle rancher and politician in the Pentatlán Mountains in Guerrero, **Rogaciano Alba**.

In a show of force, Judicial Police officers turned up at the newspaper several days after the story was published claiming that it had failed to heed earlier summonses, which was not true. This time it was Mexico City authorities that wanted Maribel to reveal her sources and give them all the details.

In late June, Alba filed a formal complaint against Maribel through his lawyers. In that case she was never called to respond and for three years the case remained open. Publicly, the cattle rancher spoke of Maribel in aggressive terms, saying that she "was going to swallow her words."

"It's terrible that the case remains open," Gutiérrez says. "It's as if they are punishing the work of a journalist. At any moment they can call you in or arrest you."

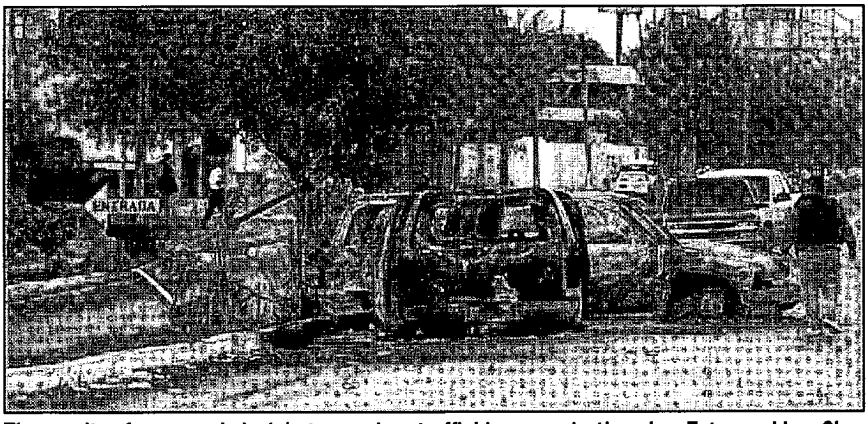
There are few reports of complaints of threats, harassment or even the murder of journalists in Guerrero. The state Human Rights Commission has a special program, titled "Attention to Journalists' Grievances" in which figures for the period 2000 to 2004 show an average of 13 complaints a year about abuses, coercion, summonses and damage to equipment. Of these complaints, 70% are shelved because the complainants fail to follow through and in most cases reach an agreement with the aggressors.

Violence in Guerrero continues to escalate, as does corruption; the ingredients are present for journalism to become an even more risky profession. ❑

Baja California's alleged drug trafficker Gilberto Higuera Guerrero (with his head covered) is taken away following his capture.

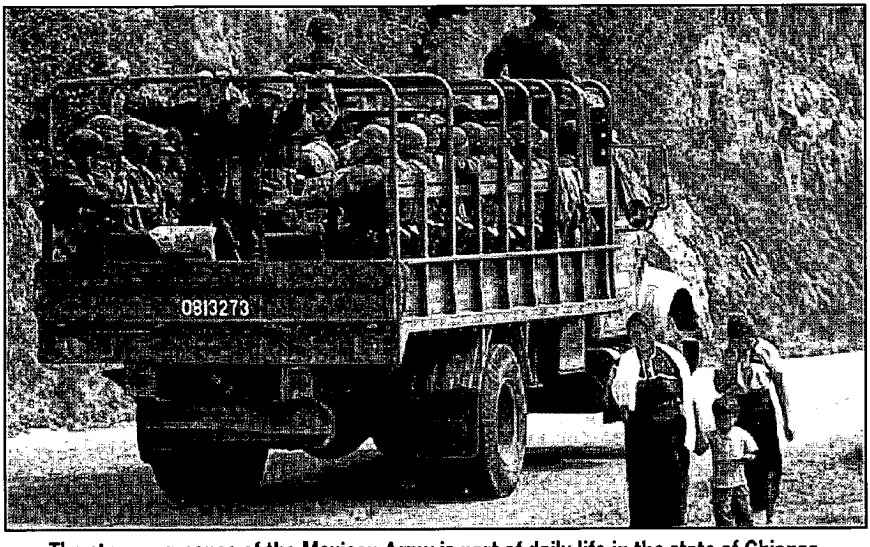
Employees at ***La Prensa*** in Tijuana pay homage at the coffin of journalist Benjamín Flores, pictured at left.

Martyrs from the weekly *Zeta* in Tijuana: At left, Héctor Félix Miranda, known as "Felix the Cat", murdered in 1988, and at right, publisher Francisco Ortiz Franco, killed in 2004. The editor, Jesús Blancornelas, escaped an attempt on his life.



The results of an armed clash between drug trafficking organizations Los Zetas and Los Chapos that operate in Reynosa, Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo and Ciudad Victoria.

Milenio **reporter Manuel de la Cruz (at left) denouncing aggression he suffered in Chiapas state at the hands of state police.** *(Foto René Araujo)*



The strong presence of the Mexican Army is part of daily life in the state of Chiapas.

Colombia

By Diana Calderón*

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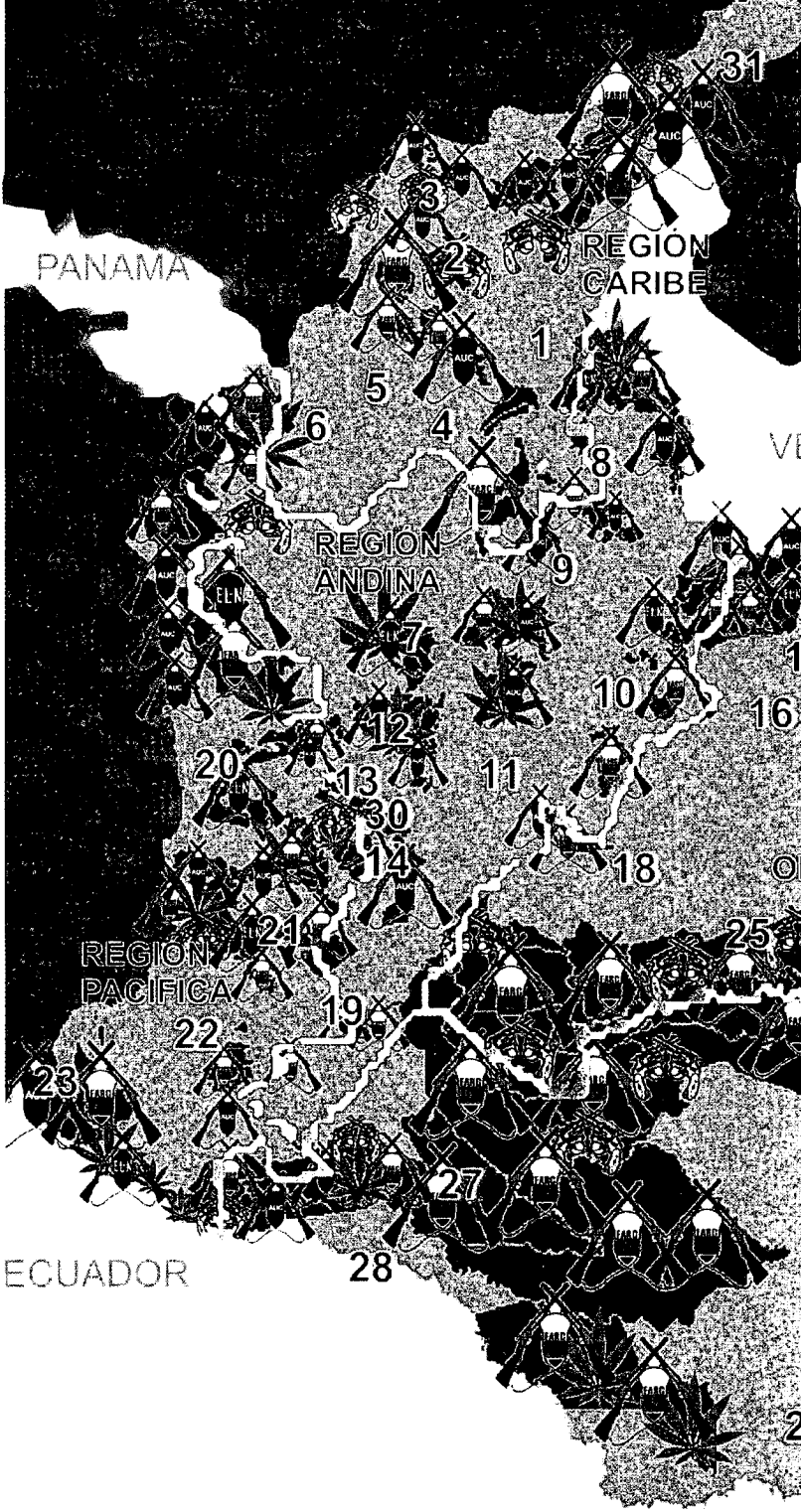
* **Diana Calderón** is a journalist trained in magazine writing and elections. She studied communications and journalism. She has more than 14 years of experience in investigating, special reports, and the management and editing of news and magazines. She was international staff writer for *El Tiempo* publishing company from 1987 to 1991 and managing editor of *Cromos* magazine from 1992 to 1994. She was director of the public television station, Televisión Señal Colombia. She was a radio reporter and commentator until 1997. She was news director for 24 Horas television station in Bogotá, Colombia. She was a host and in charge of investigations and special reports for the same station until 1999. She was moderator in the peace process between the FARC and Colombian Government until 2001. Since 2000, she has been the investigator of the IAPA's Rapid Response Unit in Colombia.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MAP OF COLOMBIA:

Organized crime

Illegal practices, drug trafficking

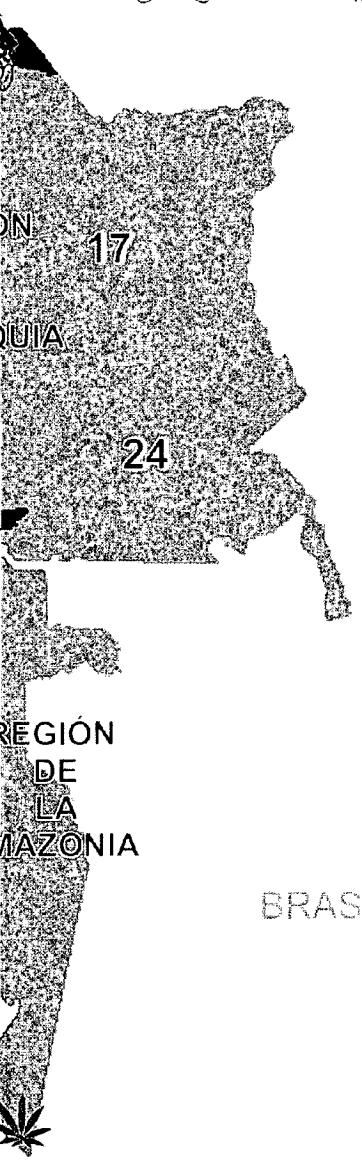
ELN guerrilla activities

FARC-EP guerrilla activities

AUC (paramilitary) activities

Danger Zone

Safe Zone



1 CESAR
2 MAGDALENA
3 ATLÁNTICO
4 BOLÍVAR
5 SUCRE
6 CÓRDOBA
7 ANTIOQUIA
8 NTE DE SANTANDER
9 SANTANDER
10 BOYACÁ
11 CUNDINAMARCA
12 CALDAS
13 RISARALDA
14 TOLIMA
15 ARAUCA
16 CASANARE
17 VICHADA
18 META
19 HUILA
20 CHOCO
21 VALLE
22 CAUCA
23 NARIÑO
24 GUAINIA
25 GUAVIARE
26 VAUPES
27 CAQUETA
28 PUTUMAYO
29 AMAZONAS
30 QUINDIO
31 GUAJIRA

Introduction

Colombia is made up of diverse regions with very different levels of development which, at times, show little interaction despite the fact that armed conflict and political-administrative corruption do not respect regional borders. That is why the biggest problem journalists face is covering local corruption, that is fed by that armed conflict and its relationship to drug trafficking.

The Colombian conflict is a long-standing one and one of the most complex in the world, with its components made up of rightwing paramilitaries, Communist, Castroite and Maoist guerrillas, the illicit drug trade and the tremendous degradation and violation of human rights. Its origins date back 40 years when, at the end of the violence between Liberals and Conservatives, radical Liberal elements took up arms and established bases in outlying rural areas. The movement evolved into Communism, in the form of the FARC guerrillas (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Front), while at the same time a Castroite-oriented guerrilla group, the ELN (National Liberation Army) emerged. The paramilitaries, or self-defense units, appeared in the 1980s with the support of large landowners and the army, or at the service of the drug lords, and expanded into a powerful clandestine organization of the extreme right that has engaged in the worst human rights violations. This is the AUC (United Self-Defense of Colombia).

The drug trade, which became concentrated in Colombia beginning in the 1990s, has provided huge financial resources to the armed groups that are involved in the networks in various ways and at varying levels. The impact of the mix of underground groups in vast ungoverned areas and a multi-million-dollar business has brought about a growing deterioration of the conflict; its political, economic and social roots bound to crime and human rights violations to which guerrillas and paramilitaries alike systematically resort.

The impact of the conflict has been very different in various parts of the country and the news media suffer it in different ways. There is a world of difference between the capital, Bogotá, where the conflict surfaces essentially through the media, and regions such as Arauca, where all the journalists have fled because of threats. Cities such as Medellín have witnessed the violence of the drug traffickers; in Cúcuta there has been both guerrilla and paramilitary violence with the recent resurgence of the drug trade and illicit business such as gasoline smuggling, and a number of news media have undergone bomb attacks and their journalists either murdered, threatened or forced into exile.

In provinces such as the jungle province of Putumayo, on the border with Ecuador, and in Arauca, on the Venezuelan border, journalists are caught in the crossfire between the FARC and the paramilitaries in their fight for territorial control.

On the Caribbean coast, in the province of Cesar and the Central Magdalena region, the media have to work under the control of the paramilitary groups which, even today as they negotiate with the government for their demobilization, exercise all kinds of pressures and threats to the local press, radio and television.

In the south of the country, in Caquetá and Meta, where the FARC are strongest, it is they who exercise all kinds of pressure on the local media.

The national media are at less risk than the local ones who must often carry out their everyday work in situations of open warfare. It is there, in those regions, where there are the most frequent violations of freedom of expression and where journalists run the greatest risks. In recent years the greatest number of violations of press freedom in terms of threats, pressure, intimidation, self-censorship and obstruction have occurred, according to the twice-yearly reports of the Inter American Press Association, in the provinces of Arauca, Santander, Cesar, North Santander and Huila.

For the associate editor of *El Tiempo* in Bogotá, **Alvaro Sierra**, the places of greatest danger for the press continue to be those provinces where the guerrillas and paramilitaries are battling; Arauca and Putumayo

"In places where only one armed player dominates, such as the Caribbean coast, Cesar or Central Magdalena, where the paramilitaries are in control," Sierra says, "journalists come under more pressure and their work is more limited; often they are completely gagged or subjected to the orders of the rebel movement of the day. For journalists working in the national newspapers' newsrooms the problems are different. In many places being able to move about depends on whether the armed groups allow it, as happens in numerous parts of the country where unless you have authorization from the FARC you cannot travel by river. Roadblocks are commonplace. But certainly the biggest dangers and worst pressures are suffered by the journalists working for local media. It is they who are in the eye of the hurricane and many have paid for their attempt to provide news coverage with their lives or been forced into exile. At the same time, lack of training, taking sides and excessive closeness to official or illegal news sources in the practice of journalism increase risks. The matter is, therefore, infinitely more complex than a simple matter of personal safety."

Corruption, in addition to conflict, has become one of the principal violators of freedom of expression. At the local level, according to the Corporation for Transparency in Colombia in its annual survey of government rectitude, 51% of government departments are at a very high level of risk of being corrupted.

Nevertheless, the situation is not the same for foreign journalists, for whom the biggest concern is being able to move around because of the risk of being detained in areas under the control of the FARC. Places in Colombia that represent a major risk to foreign correspondents are the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountain range in Magdalena province; Catatumbo in North Santander; the Urabá Antioqueño corridor in Antioquia; the entire province of Chocó; Nariño province, controlled by the paramilitaries along the coast and by the FARC along the river beds; San Lucas Mountains in Central Magdalena; Cañon de las Hermos in Tolima; Montes de María in Bolívar, the Perijá Mountains straddling Guajira and Cesar provinces; Tame, Saravena, Fortul, Cravo and Puerto Rondón in Arauca; and Caquetá and Putumayo provinces, places impossible to reach without prior permission from

the FARC. In Huila, the Teófilo Forero column of the FARC has ordered its men to detain any foreign journalist they come across.

The border regions also represent difficulties for any journalist, local or foreign, to move about – on the border with Venezuela, Monte Lara and Majayua in the Guajira, because of the presence of paramilitaries; Cubará province between North Santander and Aracua; Tibú, La Gabarra, Ocaña in North Santander, and also those municipalities that lie between Arauca and Arauquita.

In the Panama border region the risks are found in Juradó on the Pacific Ocean side, where the FARC rule, and in Cabo Tiburón, Zipasurro and Capurganá on the Atlantic side because of the presence of paramilitaries.

Journalists do not note any major difficulties on the Ecuador border, despite the presence of armed players in the municipalities of Ipiales, Cumbal and Guachucal, major poppy growing areas. But there are difficulties in the Ecuadorean province of Sucumbíos which has become a haven for paramilitaries, guerrillas and organized crime. The San Miguel international bridge is unprotected and anything can leave and enter freely – including arms and cocaine.

In Tabatinga and Benjamín Herrera, two townships in Brazil on the Amazonian border, are to be found small drug cartels along with the consequent dangers that their presence brings to that area.

All this leads to the conclusion that freedom of the press in Colombia is under a death threat and that any resistance, as a strategy for survival, is not sufficient. What are needed are prevention policies, guarantees for the free practice of journalism, protection and training. Also needed are financially strong news media in order to reinforce independence. But also needed are media that remain independent of the armed players to prevent the occurrance of violations that victimize journalists.

Murders of journalists were recorded in nearly all the Colombian provinces in the period 1993-2004. Of the 105 murders, 53 were in connection with the journalists' work, in 18 cases the motives have yet to be determined and the other 34 were for various reasons. Of those killed for doing their job, eight died in Cauca Valley; seven in Santander; four each in Aruaca, Bogotá, Huila and Magdalena; three in Tolima; two each in Quindío, Sucre César, Putumayo, Nariño and Northern Santander; and one each in Atlántico, Cauca, Bolívar, Caquetá, Caldas and Guajira.

It is important to take into account that when the government of President **Alvaro Uribe** carried out this survey it was undertaking a complex round of negotiations with the United Self-Defense of Colombia (AUC) paramilitaries, which are still ongoing. The country is in the midst of discussion on a legislative bill that is to determine the amount of truth, justice and reparations that will accompany the AUC's eventual demobilization (nearly 4,500 members have already laid down their arms) and, since this is being watched by the international community, the government is making all efforts to ensure that the process is carried out without impunity.

The extradition to the United States of a much-sought guerrilla, operating

under the alias of **Simón Trinidad**, has for now lessened the possibility of a humanitarian exchange of jailed FARC guerrillas for nearly 60 politicians and members of the military being held by the guerrillas. Mediation efforts to bring about such an exchange have been conducted, with their ups and downs, by the Roman Catholic Church. A major offensive launched by the government in the south of the country dubbed Patriot Plan confirms the fact that the main and virtually exclusive strategy of the government is to seek the military defeat of the FARC. Two attempts at reaching an agreement with the Castroite ELN guerrillas by the previous and current administrations have failed. Currently, a Mexican mediator is seeking to bring about conditions for government emissaries and the guerrillas' Central Command to sit down together and talk.

In general, the outlook for dialogue and negotiation with the leftist rebel groups is not very bright and it is most likely that the conflict, as it has escalated since the mid-1990s, will continue doing so, with all the consequent implications for the press in Colombia. ❑

I

Northern Region

Guajira, Magdalena, Atlántico,
Cesar, Bolívar, Córdoba and Sucre and the border
with Panama and Venezuela

What characterizes the practice of journalism on the Colombian Caribbean coast more than direct threats to journalists is self-censorship on certain topics concerning the paramilitaries, political-administrative corruption and the drug lords.

"It is also difficult to report on the operations that the Army carries out and what happens in Magdalena, César, the Guajira and Córdoba because of the increasing paramilitary presence there," says the *El Tiempo* correspondent on the Atlantic coast, **Rafael Salcedo**. "Difficult areas are the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountain range in Magdalena, the southern part of Bolívar and particularly the Montes de María area, which straddles Bolívar and Sucre. The La Mojana area in Sucre is also difficult because of its remoteness."

He adds, "The Colombian Caribbean region, on the coast, is one of the poorest in Colombia despite its enormous hydrocarbon wealth and great tourism potential based not only on its marvelous beaches but also its beautiful historic cities and landscapes that stretch from the shoreline to the temperate and cool heights of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountains."

Journalists in the region live in fear of their lives not only due to the lack of security that impunity engenders, but corruption has reached such a point that the coast has sadly become infamous, synonymous with all kinds of evils.

Poverty combined with the low salaries that are paid in almost all the local news media has led many journalists to negotiate the news in order to keep their jobs. There are cities where it is possible to find reporters that are on a governor's, mayor's or public institution's payroll. Distribution of the advertising "pie" in both the public and private sectors is done in gratitude to those who are "friends."

The coast has also ended up as a fortress for extreme rightwing paramilitary groups that make the situation ever more unsafe for the independent press and reinforce the self-censorship that prevails in the region. There are gunmen in the poor neighborhoods that kill for ludicrous sums, and everyone knows it.

Falling victim to this state of affairs in the northern region are 11 journalists murdered in reprisal for doing their job. Killed in the past 11 years were: **Francisco Castro Menco** (November 8, 1997) and **Rodolfo Julio Torres** (October 21, 1999) in Sucre; **Amparo Leonor Jiménez** (August 11, 1998) and **Guzmán Quintero Torres** (September 16, 1999) in César; **Freddy Elles Ahumada** (March 18, 1997) in Bolívar; **Carlos Lajud Catalán** (March 19, 1993) in Atlántico; **Hernando Rangel** (April 11, 1999), **Gustavo Ruiz Cantillo** (November 15, 2000), **Alvaro Alonso Escobar** (December 23, 2001) and **Jaime Alberto Madero** (September 20, 2004) in Magdalena; and **Jaime Rengifo Revero** (April 29, 2003) in Guajira.

The correspondent in Guajira for the newspaper *El Heraldo*, **Catherine Bolaños**, says the problem for journalists is mobility in the upper reaches of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountains, in the municipalities of San Juan, Distracción, Hato Nuevo and Villanueva, as well as in the Serranía de Perijá in the Barrancas municipality. "To go there is to go into the unknown," she declares. "There is not even any transportation. There is a story circulating that 38 people have been

killed in the mountains, but it is impossible to confirm that. You can't get there. Nor is there any official information. This is where the AUC and guerrillas are constantly fighting each other."

Another place that has begun to open up but which had been off-limits to journalists is Bahía Portete, where, in April 2004, paramilitaries massacred members of the indigenous Wayuu tribe. There are also risks on the Venezuelan border in northern Guajira because of the presence of paramilitaries.

"In the urban areas," Bolaños explains, "in the cities of Maicao and Riohacha, the risks are spawned by fights between rival organized crime gangs linked to urban guerrillas and paramilitaries." These gangs, which engage in smuggling liquor, gasoline and arms, were exposed by the director of the Journalists in Action program, **Jaime Rengefo Revero**, murdered on April 29, 2003.

DO NOT PASS

In Magdalena, the plight of the press is critical virtually throughout the province, especially if you want to cover the conflict between the guerrillas and paramilitaries. The southern part of the province, under their control along with the banks of the Magdalena River, are off-limits to journalists.

A local reporter says that with the arrival of the Army's Mountain Patrol in the Sierra Nevada de Marta range the FARC have moved to the El Mameí, Perico Aguao and Palomino areas, where journalists recently reported at least 40 people had been killed.

Self-censorship is on the increase in that area. Journalists refrain from reporting and so it is difficult to detect new threats. There is no longer any coverage in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountains because paramilitaries have taken control of the northern part in Aracataca and Fundación, while the guerrillas have moved into the upper reaches of Fundación.

A local journalist explains that while in the past there was a campaign led by drug traffickers to exterminate reporters, now "there are perverse and diabolical alliances between paramilitaries and corrupt politicians" – the latter being protected by the former. Overall, there is no freedom of the press today in Santa Marta and Madgalena provinces. Fear of reprisals, of threats, of death itself pervades the newsrooms and radio and television station studios and everywhere else involved in expression and communication.

"The corrupt political class, involving even the most senior officials that emerged under democracy, has used the paramilitaries not only to get elected to public office but also to eliminate political enemies, to silence the voices and still the pens of those that accuse them of depredation of public funds. There is no more room for controversies or corrections. All that remains is summary law by means of execution. But what's most aberrant is that it's the very authorities that in one way or another incite the armed groups to attack journalists and the press," says an informant who asked not to be named.

In January 2005, the governor of Magdalena, **Trinmo Luna Corre**, accompanied by police chief **Oscar Gamboa**, public prosecutor **Alfonso Giraldo Saavedra** and CTI director **Juan Carlos Pinzón**, held a working breakfast with reporters to share what they regarded as "good results" in the area of local security.

The shock was staggering when Colonel Gamboa, with the governor showing his support, railed against journalists, charging them with responsibility for the lack of security and the crime wave in Santa Marta. He apparently believed that such news should be hidden and other news of public interest be covered instead.

Hoy-Diario del Magdalena editorialized the following day, "Others are to Blame" and listed a number of reasons. This was sufficient cause for the newspaper to be boycotted by the police and led to a meeting of senior police officers that resulted in the exile of lawyer and journalist **Ulilo Acevedo Silva**, the newspaper's editor.

A large number of journalists' murders have been recorded in the past 11 years in Magdalena. These include those of **Hernando Rangel Moreno**, editor of the local papers *Sur* and *Magdalena 30 días* (April 11, 1999, after exposing rampant local corruption and inciting a strike against the then mayor, **Fidias Zeider Opsino**; **Gustavo Ruiz Cantillo** of Radio Galeón (November 15, 2000), for denouncing paramilitaries); **Alvaro Alonso Escobar,** owner and editor of the weekly *Región de Fundación* (December 23, 2001) after exposing corruption, unlawful tax collection and the mayor's excessive salary; and **Jaime Alberto Madero**, news vendor in the Santa Marta main square (September 20, 2004)murdered by paramilitaries for selling the issue of the newspaper *El Informador* in which the arrest of one of them was reported.

In Atlántico there is a false sense of peace, says **Juan Alejandro Tapias** from *El Heraldo*. He explains, "In some areas in the south of the province, such as Santa Lucía and Manatí, there are armed groups that have reached there through the Palermo corridor in Sitio Nuevo, a township in Magdalena province." But he warns that the threats to press freedom, at least those that he has been a victim of, have other authors. "I received a phone call telling me to watch out, to drop the issue of the Barranquilla market where a number of private watchdog groups known as the Paraquitos have begun to practice extortion," he says.

In Barranquilla, the capital of Atlántico province, in some southern districts on the outskirts of the city, such as La Chinita, La Luz, Las Nieves and El Ferry, the ability of reporters to move around is endangered by the presence of street gangs. "It's said that they kill anyone awake there after 11 o'clock at night," Tapias says.

Here the main threats to the press come from the political sector. Among the better known cases is that of **Carlos Lajud Catalán**, director of the ABC radio stations, murdered in Barranquilla on March 19, 1993 for exposing wrongdoing in the award of a contract for privatization of the telephone company.

Rafael Sarmiento Coley, political editor of *El Heraldo*, warns that working journalists face difficulties in certain municipalities in Atlántico province.

Giovanni Alvarez of the Provincia Stereo radio station in Sabanalarga had his radio station burned down for exposing corruption; there was an attempt to set fire to the home of **Manuel Pérez Fruto** in Santo Tomás and his equipment was stolen as a result of a complaint about the mayor published in the newspaper *La Libertad*. In Baranoa, journalists live in fear of threats, with paramilitaries ordering them not to publish anything about the Polo Democrático movement.

In César, journalists will never forget the murder of **Amparo Leonor Jiménez**, correspondent for television news programs "TV En Vivo" and "Q.A.P." and news editor of Redepaz, killed on September 16, 1999, after denouncing the eviction of 150 peasant families from a ranch allegedly owned by former congressman **Carlos Arturo Marulanda**, nor the slaying of **Guzmán Quintero Torres**, news editor of the newspaper *El Pilón* in Valledupar, who wrote about the excesses of members of the military in the villages of Patillal and Río Seco.

In Valledupar, journalists at *Vanguardia Liberal* are feeling the effects of the barriers set by members of the Armed Forces and threats from paramilitaries leveled against their colleague **Richard Leguízamo**, blamed for a news story on the death of indigenous leader **Fredy Arias** in the Atanques region.

Agustín Bustamante, a reporter for *Vanguardia Liberal* in Valledupar, says that the Atanques region, Patillal and Badillo in northern César province on the provincial border with Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, are hard places for the press to get to because of the presence there of the FARC, "although there is also pressure from the security forces."

DO NOT PUBLISH

The *El Pilón* news editor, **Ana María Ferrer**, says that for three or four years now news media in César have "opted for self-censorship." She adds, "When you saw there were no guarantees you had to resort to that. Many media outlets decided not to cover certain events and not to publish communiqués from the armed groups without mentioning their names, and not to go along with the war. In 2001, the 'paras' told us not to report any more deaths because otherwise there would be more deaths to come. *El Pilón* ran an editorial announcing its decision concerning the communiqués from the armed groups and warning we would not accept any more of their summonses."

In César, other areas of risk for journalists are the regions adjoining Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, such as Patillal, Atanques, Guatapurí, Chemesquemena, Villa Germania and La Mesa where both groups are present and have set up roadblocks to prevent journalists from entering.

In Bolívar province, the managing editor of the daily newspaper *El Universal*, **Germán Mendoza**, identifies as risky areas the southern part of the province, including Magangue, San Pablo, Simiti, Pinillo and Río Viejo, where the two armed groups are engaged in a dispute over gold mines in the hands of the AUC. You can only go there with the Armed Forces which amounts to a further risk,

not to mention the implications it holds for the independence of the press. In the northern area the dangers are found in El Salado in El Carmen de Bolívar.

Other risky topics to cover are politics and gambling. At local radio stations the problem is that salaries are not good enough to ensure independence. "Journalists work with an advertising quota to fill, which means they cross that line between journalism and sales," Mendoza says.

In Cartagena, there are places where it is difficult to move about because of the presence of street gangs and organized crime, to the point that not even the police will enter neighborhoods such as Nelson Mandela and El Pozón after 10 o'clock at night.

Mendoza says the best thing a journalist going to Cartagena can do is to contact the local news outlet, the Church and the Ombudsman.

Threats are generalized – an anonymous communiqué, a telephone call, a disputed use of the language. "They want to turn us into pubic relations vehicles," Mendoza declares. "As for news concerning public order matters, what we find is an inability to obtain and provide all the information because of the difficulty of moving around. Prudence behooves self-censorship."

A journalist from Bolívar province, who asked for her name to be withheld, told how in January 2003, a few days before the election of the mayor of Soplaviento, the news team from *El Universal*, made up of herself, a photographer and driver, faced a situation on their way to that municipality in northern Bolívar where they were going to obtain details of the electoral process.

"Operating in the area, according to the authorities, are the guerrillas (in the rural part) and the paramilitaries (in the urban part)," the reporter recalls. "In San Estanislao de Kostka, also known as Arenal, on the banks of the Dique Canal, the photographer and I told the driver to stay with the vehicle while we crossed the canal in a canoe to get to the town of Soplaviento on the other side. Two men went up to him and asked him what he was doing there, and asked a lot of questions, wanting to know if he was working for people who supposedly were going there to buy cattle."

"In Soplaviento we felt that several people were watching us closely all the time. When we got back to our car, we decided to take off immediately to Cartagena. Then two motorcyclists followed us for a mile or so, and we saw four men in civilian clothes, two on each side of the road. We thought they were going to stop us, but one of them waved to us and gave a sign for us to go on. It seems they recognized that we were journalists.

"We sensed that they were the authority there and although they never identified themselves as belonging to any group or as someone's bodyguard, from the unconfirmed stories we hear, we figured out that they were paramilitaries."

"Córdoba lives with them and we are no exception," says **William Saleg**, editor of the *Meridiano* newspapers in Córdoba and Sucre. He is referring to the paramilitaries. For Saleg, who acknowledges that he is not for journalistic neutrality or objectivity but for the security of the region, claims it's not the

paramilitaries that are the problem in his province. "Contrary to what people think," he says, "the risks for the press are posed by the politicians."

He adds that in Córdoba self-censorship is on the increase. "Here you have to be on the right or the left, take sides. Any journalist can come to Córdoba and move around freely. The problem is the questions you ask and if you try looking into the matter a little more deeply they'll tell you not to publish that, and if you do, you'll have to leave."

The interference in the newspaper by the paramilitaries, Saleg says, is subtle. "They'll tell us they don't agree with the way we write headlines. So, if they kill four people, it's better not to use the word massacre in the headline."

That position, clearly contrary to the objective of independence of the press, is shared by Gina Morelo, news editor of *Meridiano* de Córdoba. "There is self-censorship. That is a reality. The pressures are direct. He have had the experience of investigating cases of corruption, such as those involving a local mayor and a health center, that had nothing to do with the paramilitaries. Nonetheless, the reporters were scared off in their name." For Morelo the riskiest areas to cover are those in Alto Sinú.

In Córdoba over the past two years journalists from various media, particularly RCN radio, have disclosed that they were pressured by the paramilitaries during the negotiations with the Colombian government in Santa Fe de Ralito. Some were asked to change their reports before sending them to Bogotá.

In Sucre, Salleg says, the situation is different. "We take more risks, we support the Army and the authorities in the fight against the guerrillas. A reporter from *Meridiano* cannot identify himself as such to the guerrillas who know full well what the newspaper's editorial policy is."

The news editor of the Sucre edition of *Meridiano* in Sincelejo, **Elsa Peniche**, believes that the Morroa-Sincé area and the grasslands region of Corozal to San Juan de Butulia is complicated, both topographically and by the presence of the FARC. So is the Los Montesa de María region located between Bolívar province and Sincé, Chengue and Oveja in Sucre province, Peniche says. "It is a stigmatized area, because for years it was a conflict zone under the presence of the FARC. Now, because of the return of the security forces to that part of the country, it is much easier to move about and I am not aware of any colleague being threatened. There aren't even any more roadblocks."

During the past 11 years in Sucre two journalists were murdered – **Francisco Castro Menco** of Majagual radio and a spokesman for the peasants (November 8, 1997), after receiving threats from paramilitaries for defending the peasants and denouncing human rights violations by the AUC, and **Rodolfo Julio Torres** of Caracolí radio and El *Meridiano* newspaper (October 21, 1999), following his exposure of corruption in the local administration and his accusation of paramilitaries. The murderers left a note on his body saying, "For being a snitch, for helping the ELN guerrillas." ❑

II
Andean or Central Region

Northern Santander, Antioquia,
Boyacá, Cundinamarca, Tolima, Huila, Caldas,
Risaralda, Quindío and the border with Ecuador

Despite the demobilization of 1,425 paramilitaries in the Catumbo region of Northern Santander province, the state of public safety still presents serious risks for working journalists. With the departure of the "paras", FARC and ELN guerrillas that had been operating on the Venezuelan border are free now to return.

In this province there is an alliance between paramilitaries and drug traffickers, begun several years ago when they began to fund local political election campaigns. This pact is so obvious that the mayor of Cúcuta, **Ramiro Suárez Corzo**, is under arrest in connection with his links to the paramilitaries and public prosecutor **Ana María Flores** is a fugitive from justice (*El Tiempo* editorial of December 10, 2004).

The province has approximately 37,000 acres of coca under cultivation. Clandestine gasoline and arms smuggling operations abound on the Colombian-Venezuelan border. Auto theft and illegal construction are page one news for the newspaper *La Opinión*.

Angel Romero, news editor of *La Opinión* in Cúcuta, explains that in addition to the risks posed by the armed players and corruption, a more complicated component also exists – and that is the training of journalists. "There are ethical problems, they use adjectives, they present news without checking, they publish rumors."

Public officials and military and police chiefs do not accept criticism, nor do they like to be asked to provide certain information or to account for some specific matter. Rather, they want a press at the service of officialdom. "Some weeks ago there was an explosion," another journalist recalls. "We all knew that it was a bomb, but the police chief insisted that it was dynamite blast. Nothing further was said. The free practice of journalism is difficult and risky in this frontier zone where such disparate illegal armed actors come together in confrontation – guerrillas, paramilitaries, drug traffickers, smugglers, common criminals, arms dealers, etc. The alliance of certain political and government sectors with paramilitary groups is obvious. There is a high degree of official corruption."

Gasoline smuggling, for example, is controlled by the paramilitaries and, despite accusations by non-governmental entities, these paramilitaries control politics and the governments of at least 20 municipalities in Northern Santander. The number of cases of corruption among police, security and judicial agencies is alarming.

The threats and attacks – open or disguised – on a free press are constant. That is why the profession is practiced in fear. Many reporters prefer not to handle topics they regard as "hot and dangerous."

The ELN and EPL guerrillas were the first to arrive in this region, then those belonging to the FARC; since 1999 the paramilitaries are also present. Journalists have always been at the center of this war with no other weapons than their tape recorders, cameras or notebooks. Many recall the hardest times when the FARC had territorial control of the region. Even at home they received communiqués, or "war notes," with the warning that "the chief is sending this for you to publish."

THE THREATS

The war in El Catatumbo, a coca-growing region, has had repercussions in Cúcuta and its metropolitan area. There is a fight for control of the illicit crop and drug trafficking.

At *La Opinión* journalists constantly receive threats from different quarters over what they publish or what they do not publish not only from armed groups operating outside the law, but from politicians and public officials.

"Everyone knows there's a dangerous and very complicated system at work in the radio stations – public officials and politicians fund the programs of many hosts or pseudo-journalists who, with no control or oversight, devote their programs to insulting, slandering and attacking the persons or entities that their sponsors tell them to. In some of those radio programs it is not press professionals that take part but politicians, former candidates for mayor or other public office, former city council members, or current members of Congress. Many of the hosts have criminal records for auto theft, fraud, abuse of power and even homicide, " Romero says.

In Cúcuta many neighborhoods are dangerous places for reporters. Regarded as high-risk municipalities in Northern Santander are: Convención, El Tarra, San Calixto, Hacarí, Teorama, Tibú, Ocaña, El Carmen, Puerto Santander, and Villa del Rosario-Juan Frío.

Another journalist said that "as a result of the demobilization when 1,425 AUC combatants operating in that border region put down their arms, at least 300 returned to Cúcuta. Within a few days of the demobilization at least six of those demobilized had already been killed, among them four heads of the organization in Cúcuta, El Zulia, Villa del Rosario and Los Patios.

Their comrades blamed these violent deaths on guerrillas, but other sources claim it was a "settling of accounts" among the "paras" themselves. Several organizations and community leaders had drawn attention to the matter and expressed their fear that a vendetta or retaliation might ensue as a result of the demobilization and laying down of arms. In any event, this adds a new element for concern for the free practice of journalism in this convulsed border region.

Northern Santander province has witnessed in the past 11 years the murder of the editor and publisher of the newspaper *La Opinión*, **José Eustorgio Colmenares** on March 12, 1993, in Cúcuta, due to the accusations he made against the ELN, according to that group; of **Jesús Medina Parra** of Punto radio, who had received threats over his exposure of state corruption, on January 28, 1994 hitmen shot him six times as he was leaving his radio station; and of **Julio Hernando Palacios**, manager of Lemas radio and host of the radio magazine program "El Viento," killed on January 14, 2003.

Journalist **Jorge Corredor**, host of the program "El Pregón del Norte" on La Voz del Norte radio, suffered an attempt on his life. He managed to dodge the bullets, but they struck his 20-year-old step-daughter.

Tolima province was the homeland of **Elizabeth Obando**, distributor of the newspaper *El Nuevo Día* in Ibagué, murdered by FARC guerrillas on July 11, 2002, on the Ibagué to Roncesvalle highway. A guerrilla had warned her not to distribute the paper in town so no one would learn of allegations that the FARC were working on a de facto agrarian reform and recruiting minors to their ranks. She was gunned down in broad daylight after being taken off a bus.

In Tolima, freedom of the press has undergone a major decline in recent years. **Antonio Melo**, *El Nuevo Día*'s editor, says that while "on the part of the authorities there is no overt anti-journalist attitude, some officials named in allegations have used libel suits as a means of putting pressure on the press."

The risk to journalists in the case of Tolima is very clear. In the northern part of the province paramilitaries coming in from Magdalena planted the seeds of terror. Many journalists have had to leave, like **Luis Alberto Castaño**, who used to anchor a news program on Café 93.5 FM community radio. The station has remained on the air under a new director, **Freddy Rivera**, who says that "things are not easy."

In the southern part of the province journalists say it is very difficult to provide any coverage in the area bound by San Luis, Guamo and Natagaima, which is under the control of paramilitaries, and even harder in Cajamarca.

The overwhelming majority of the threats in the province are made in telephone calls and in flyers. To intimidate reporters the FARC sometimes works through their publication *Resistencia* and the AUC uses e-mails.

AUC threats have been leveled at the director of Café Stereo radio in Líbano, **Luis Alberto Castaño**, at the director of RCN radio in Honda, and **Pedro Cárdenas**, who was kidnapped and upon release fled to Uruguay.

Melo says there is no self-censorship at his paper, but they have decided not to go to certain places, such as Roncesvalles. Self-censorship is common, nonetheless, among other local papers and radios, all of whom suffered suspension of local government and business advertising. As in other parts of the country, such advertising is used to reward or punish media.

To confront this situation, the local news media has set aside its local rivalries and under the slogan "Unity Is Reviving Tolima" is taking on certain tasks as a group.

"There are no absolute guarantees," says Melo. "Journalists who come here and run risks should turn for support to their colleagues, the police and the ombudsmen."

In the past 11 years in Tolima, the murders were recorded of **Pablo Emilio Parra Castañeda**, manager of community radios in Planadas municipality, killed on June 27, 2001, by the FARC, which had accused him of being "twisted"; Arquímedes Arias, pioneer of community radio in the province with his Fresno radio stations (July 24, 2001), following his exposure of local government corruption; and the previously-mentioned **Elizabeth Obando**, killed on July 11, 2002, by the FARC.

In the view of *El Tiempo* correspondent **Luis Francisco Arias**, the coffee-growing region appears to be peaceful for the practice of journalism. There are no known threats against any newsman in the region comprised of the provinces of Caldas, Risaralda and Quindío, though in Manizales, on January 30, 2002, one of the most serious acts against the press in the modern history of Colombia took place, with the murder of the managing editor of *La Patria*, **Orlando Sierra Hernández**. It was considered to be an isolated incident, the result of an open clash between Sierra, through his column titled "Punto de Encuentro" (Meeting Point), and the political coalition in Caldas, which has subsequently been accused as the mastermind of his murder.

In this area there is no imminent danger for journalists. Still it is advisable to proceed with caution. In Risaralda, there is a major presence of guerrillas in the municipalities of Pueblo Rico, Mistrató and Quinchía. In fact, two reporters from *El Tiempo* in Bogotá were abducted by the FARC and held for three days in the rural area of Mistrató in August 2002, but they were released and no ransom demanded.

In the case of Caldas, the areas where guerrillas and paramilitaries pose risks are more extensive, but no instances of journalists being assaulted or threatened by these groups are known to have occurred. The editor of *La Patria*, **Nicolás Restrepo**, pinpoints the townships of Sabana and Penipuaga near the provincial border with Antioquia as areas of risk because of the presence there of coca plantations, paramilitaries and guerrillas.

Nor has the press noted difficulties in Quindío. Yet the emergence of new drug lords setting themselves up in that area is a new phenomenon that could lead to journalists' becoming the objects of intimidation. For now the sensivity of the issues makes reporters avoid the topic and they don't go in depth in their investigative reporting; to do so could put their lives at risk.

THE INVESTMENTS

Greater intimidation comes, perhaps, from organized crime in league with drug traffickers. Pereira has seen the arrival of a large number of drug traffickers fleeing persecution in the north where they have invested heavily in land and infiltrated many businesses (as a front) as well as local politics.

In Risaralda, besides the drug trade – which according to the news editor of *El Otún*, **Marta Lucia Monsalve**, would seem to be experiencing a new boom – the real threat to journalists comes from how those involved in the conflict and the authorities want to use them. "Often the inaccuracy of the official version, caused by their desire to show results, means we receive complaints from those affected by the information," she says.

The same thing happens in Armenia, made worse by the fact that most of the coffee-growing lands are being bought up by agents of the drug traffickers.

Two journalists have been murdered in Quindío presumably because of their

criticism of former congressman **Carlos Alberto Oviedo Alfaro**. They were **Jairo Elías Márquez**, editor of the critical magazine *El Marqués* (on February 10, 1997) and **Ernesto Acero Cadena**, a reporter for local radio and the newspaper *El Informador del Quindío* (December 12, 1995).

The province of Santander, like many others, suffers the occupation of lands by armed groups and their influence in the local politics and economy. It is clear that political decisions are guided by the paramilitary command in places such as Landázuri and Tibú. In the view of **Sebastián Hiller**, editor of *Vanguardia Liberal*, the complicated situation in the north around Pailitas its due to the presence there of EPL bandits, in Bucaramanga because of political corruption and in Puerto de Barrancabermeja.

Journalist **Helman Villamizar** is more forceful: "In the Soto Norte area, especially in the municipalities of Tona, California, Vetas, Saratá, Matanza, El Playón and Río Negro, the situation is very tricky with the ongoing presence of the FARC and the arrival of the AUC. Although the Colombian Army carried out its Operation Condor against the Arturo Ruiz column in early 2000 – one of the biggest military operations yet – I still don't dare go up there," he declares.

In the south of Santander the most affected municipalities are Vélez, Sucre and Barbosa on the provincial border with Boyacá, where the drug lords have managed to silence journalists.

"You learn to measure the impact information will have. Now I prefer doing human-interest stories," says Villamizar.

Nancy Rodríguez, *Vanguardia Liberal*'s news editor, says there are hidden pressures. "It's not threats as such. It's pressures, especially those that come from official sources," she explains.

Attempts to intimidate journalists are on the increase in the port city of Barrancabermeja. A classic example was what happened to *Vanguardia Liberal* reporter **Beatriz Elena Mantilla**, declared persona *non grata* at the Nueva Granada battalion by its commander, Colonel **Ricardo Bernal**. He warned her "I'm going to see to it that the state security agencies know what kind of person you are." Bernal was taking issue with the publication of a story on the accidental death of a soldier on the day that Colombia's President **Alvaro Uribe** was visiting the area.

But attempts to intimidate do not come only from the Armed Forces in this oil port city where guerrillas have been operating for the past 30 years and the paramilitaries for the past five. Conditions for journalists are similar to those in other regions – difficulties in moving around, pressure to tone down their reports, and death threats.

The IAPA in recent reports has denounced threats by paramilitaries to **Angela Muñoz**, publisher of the weekly *El Vocero*, and **Jeanneth Ojeda**, publisher of the weekly *La Noticia*. In January 2004, television news anchor **Inés Peña** was kidnapped, threatened and tortured after reporting that the paramilitaries were recruiting minors in the port city.

Santander has one of the highest incidences of journalists murdered in the past 11 years: **Gildardo Ariza Olarte** of the Ondas del Carare radio station, killed on April 19, 1995, in the municipality of Vélez by the FARC after exposing the extortion of local peasants; **Luis Alberto Rincón** of local television, killed on November 28, 1999, when paramilitaries sought to recover a film taken at a party; **Fabio Leonardo Restrepo** and **John Jairo Restrepo** host and cameraman for a local television station slain on February 6, 2000, in Girón along with an EPL leader while covering a clash with militia; **Mario Prada Díaz**, editor of the weekly *Horizonte Sabanero* killed on July 12, 2002 in the rural area of Sabana de Torres for having denounced misuse of public funds by the local government; and **José Emeterio Rivas**, host of the anti-corruption program "Fuerzas Vivas" aired by Calor Stereo radio, killed on April 7, 2003. There have also been threats against **Pedro Javier Galvis** of the newspaper *La Noticia* and **Diego Waldron** y **Garibaldi López** of Calor Stereo radio.

MINED ZONES

Just mentioning Antioquia is enough to recall the violence propagated by the drug cartels in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Yet, journalists there say they have no real problems in doing their job. **Clara Vélez** from the newspaper *El Colombiano* insists that the problem in moving around in Antioquia is the minefields, "particularly in the eastern part of the province, in Veredas de San Francisco, San Luis, San Carlos, Cocorná and Argelia, where a few months ago a landmine exploded killing several soldiers. In these places, if you stop to take a drink at a house you run the risk that it will blow up. The armed groups have spread, invaded townships and laid mines. Nobody will take you there – drivers tell you not for all the money in the world – because going there is only a question of who you want to choose to shoot you," Clara says.

Another "off-limits" place is the village of Paz de San José de Apartado in the Urabá region of Antioquia. "You have to ask for an appointment two weeks in advance and it's granted for two or three months later," says another journalist. "The Freedom Juridical Corporation and the International Peace Brigades are there, but it is the FARC that is in charge. San Pedro de Urabá is still a corridor for the FARC and in the Atrato Medio region many camps have been set up on the river banks. From time to time you hear a skirmish or a shot in the air, reminding you that you're not alone in this world."

In western Antioquia danger is obvious in the municipality of Dabeiba, where the news photographer for the newspaper *Urabá Hoy*, **Germán Echeverri**, was kidnapped by the FARC in January 2005.

The provincial capital of Medellín, presents another picture. Despite the latest official reports saying there has been a notable decrease in crime the truth is something else. "They emptied the cartridge of a revolver into a woman's head and the incident was reported on the police report as a traffic death. It appears they

don't want to report murders," a radio reporter declared.

On November 25, 2003, 850 members from criminal gangs in the city under the umbrella of the paramilitary Cacique Nutibara Bloc were demobilized, but there are still too many gangs operating.

Clara Vélez advises any journalist arriving in Antioquia to contact the local media for information and while in the city avoid going to the districts of Santo Domingo Sabio, Santa Cruz and San Cristóbal.

Adriana Vega, regional editor of *El Tiempo* in Antioquia, says the most dangerous places for journalists to go are the highways in the eastern part of the province, the road to Chocó, the road linking Medellín and Urabá, the roads to the north of Urabá and to the north of Antioquia and the roads in the southwest. In Turbo, it is the districts of El Dos and Curralao that represent some risk.

The majority of murders of journalists in this province occurred in the 1980s when drug cartel operations were at their height. In the period investigated by the IAPA's Rapid Response Unit only the murder of **María Elena Salinas** on March 5, 2000, emerged. A journalist and professor at the University of Medellín Journalism School, she disappeared and the Army later reported she was a guerrilla who had been killed in combat between the ELN and the Army in San Carlos.

In Antioquia journalist **Luis Eduardo Gómez** from the magazine *Urabá* was threatened by officials in the municipality of Arboletes.

According to **Andrés Monpotes**, *El Tiempo* correspondent in Nariño, the Pacific coast is under paramilitary control and the south is the area frequented by the guerrillas. Journalists steer clear of Lower Putamayo, where virtually every day the FARC blows up the trans-Andean oil pipeline.

In Nariño, paramilitaries have threatened **Wilson Viracachá** from the Caracol television network; **Jorge Antonio Gallego**, a sports reporter, for his claim that sports funds were mishandled and **Francisco Terán**, news director of Todelar Radio in Pasto. The Caracol correspondent and his cameraman were kidnapped on the Putumayo-Nariño provincial border in December 2004.

Nariño has become one of the most dangerous places to work as a journalist due to the fact that almost the entire province is controlled by the paramilitaries on the coast and by the FARC on the riverbanks.

For the reporter that covers the municipal beat for Diario del Sur, **Rodolfo Pantoja**, "the risks are in the Pacific coast area, in Tumaco, Barbacoas, Roberto Payan and Tola, and you go there taking a lot of security measures. You have to go prepared."

On the border with Ecuador journalists say that despite the presence of armed groups in the poppy-growing municipalities of Ipiales, Cumbal and Guachucal journalists can work normally.

Pantoja says that in Nariño "press freedom began to come under serious threat five years ago, when seven journalists were forced to leave the area and even the country, some of them unable to return under threats from the AUC. Among them were **Germán Arcos**, **Oscar Torres** and **Cristina Castro**. Four years ago the

ELN kidnapped Caracol television correspondent **Wilson Viracachá**. Since then, things have returned to normal. What worries me is that we are afraid to touch anything to do with public safety or speak of the armed groups. There is a kind of self-censorship. The threats have not reappeared, or are not reported out of fear of reprisals. Everybody talks but no one dares to write about these things."

The following journalists were murdered in Nariño: **Alejandro Barbosa**, editor of the newspaper *El Caleño* killed on October 24, 1997, by drug traffickers, according to the press in Pasto; and **Flavio Bedoya Tovar**, correspondent of the Communist weekly *Voz*, for having interviewed a guerrilla chieftain and complaining of the incompetence of police and local government April 27, 2001, in Tumaco.

En Huila, attacks on the press have been frequent in the past two years. Guerrillas blew up the studios of Timaná Stereo radio; **Diógenes Cadena**, legal affairs reporter from Huila Stereo radio, had to leave the area after receiving threats following the murder of journalist **Guillermo Bravo**; **Carlos Mora Collazos**, publisher of the newspaper *La Nación*, filed a formal complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office that he had been threatened by a witness in the case of the murder of journalist **Nelson Carvajal**. Also receieving threats were **Norberto Antonio Castaño**, from a local radio station, whom paramilitaries accused of having links to the guerrillas, and **Germán Hernández**, from *Diario del Huila*, allegedly intimidated by the commander of the Ninth Brigade.

Hernández tells that working as a journalist in Huila you come up against two things – the Armed Forces and media finances. "The Army seeks to manipulate information. They accuse you of being on one side or the other... They pay off local TV and radio journalists with advertising placement, indebting them to those who pay for the ads, mostly government agencies and political campaigners. From guerrilla groups there is manipulation, but no direct intimidation. In general, they behave well. Except with foreign journalists, especially if they are Americans; there are clear orders to detain them."

Melquicedes Torres, current news editor of Súper radio in Bogotá, has worked as a correspondent in Huila for a number of media. He says "there are various threats to press freedom there. First, the media's financial dependence on official sources and the private sector. Second, the pressure the armed gangs, and even the public security forces exercise through veiled threats, along with the Army's active use of pressure, keep journalists away from certain areas. Finally, the journalists' lack of training."

Murdered in Huila were: teacher and Sur de Pitalito radio reporter **Nelson Carvajal**, killed on April 16, 1998, for his allegations about builder **Fernando Bermúdez**, among others, involving irregularities in the construction of affordable housing and what was said to be his links to arms and narcotics smuggling in the area; **Pablo Medina Motta**, cameraman for local television station Telegarzón slain on December 3, 1999, as he was riding on a motorcycle of the Sijín – National Judicial Police Intelligence Investigative Unit – when the village came

under attack by the FARC; **Gimbler Perdomo**, news director of Panorámica radio killed on December 1, 2002, in Gigante for his exposure of corruption; and **Guillermo Bravo Vega** from the local Channel 2 TV in Neiva murdered on April 28, 2003, for exposing corruption in the Huila liquor plant.

Boyacá is not immune to the risks for journalists. **Esperanza Páez**, news editor of the weekly *Boyacá 7 días*, arrived there in September 2004 and discovered there are places in the province where you cannot easily go without permission from the guerrillas. Those places are: Belén, Paz de Río, Socha, Chita, Güican, Panqueba, Chiscas, Espino, Labranza Grande, Soatá, La Uvita and Boavita in the northern and northeastern part of the province. A region bordering Santander province, comprising Cobarachía, Sipacoeque and San Mateo also represents dangers for journalists. Of medium risk due to the presence of the FARC and some ELN units are the Valderrama region, where the munipalities of Trasco and Betetiva are located, and the Curabá region on the Northern Santander provincial border, Arauca and the Venezuelan border where members of the indigenous U'WA tribe live and where some American researchers were murdered.

José Eliceo Vela, a reporter for *Boyacá 7 días*, says the Lengupéa region in the east, on the Casanare provincial border, is another of the areas where it is difficult for journalists to move about due to the fact that it is under the control of the paramilitaries. He is referring to the municipalities of Campo Hermoso, Páez, San Eduardo, Berbeo and Zetaquira. In southern Boyacá, on the edge of the Eastern Plains (Meta and Casanare) the challenges are found in the Neira region – municipalities of San Luis de Galeno and Santa Teresa – because of the presence of a majority of paramilitaries and their territorial conflicts with the ELN. It is a coca-growing region with processing laboratories. It is both a production area and a distribution route.

Another perilous place is the lower western region where emeralds are found and where the local bosses fear that journalists will come in and expose the constant sexual abuse of minors or the illicit emerald trade linked to arms smuggling and control of coca production. This region is not classified as an area of armed actors despite the presence of paramilitary units there. "If I go there I have go in camouflage," a local reporter said. ❑

III
Pacific Coast Region

Valle del Cauca, Cauca and Choco,
and the border with Panama

The province of Valle del Cauca is one of the most difficult places for journalists to practice their profession. In the south, in the port city of Buenaventura, common crime, drug trafficking and guerrillas are prominent. The links of drug dealers with common criminals have affected local *El País* correspondent, **Adonai Cárdenas**, who has received threatening phone calls since early April 2003. Cárdenas was approached again in December that year while traveling on a bus and warned, "Stop reporting on things that harm Buenaventura. They haven't left here yet." It was a clear reference to the paramilitaries then in the midst of demobilization.

The situation in Buenaventura is characterized by the urban conflict between FARC militia and the paramilitaries, the drug traffickers and pressures exerted by politicians who send messages to journalists about who they should not report on in order to avoid risks. The areas off limits to the press are those on what is known as the old road to the sea – Sabaleta, Aguas Clara and Anchicallá – and in the maritime area of Reposo and Río Maya.

In Buenaventura 70% of violent deaths are attributed to drug traffickers, the AUC and guerrillas. The drug trade has made considerable inroads into the political life of the port city and its institutions.

Journalists there have stopped going to such danger zones as Río Raposo, the old road to the sea, Bajo Calima and San Isidro and are scared to enter some neighborhoods, like Comuna 12 or Bajamar.

The people along the old coast road to Buenaventura live in extreme poverty and the guerrillas have turned them into informants. Roadblocks and burning vehicles and cargo are common sights along the road, that is the major corridor for Pacific trade.

"If you see you can't get through, turn back," is the advice an editor of *El País* gives his reporters – "always try to find out from the peasants there if it's safe to move on."

In the center of the province, particularly the mountainous Tulúa and Buga region, guerrillas and paramilitaries abound. Although demobilization of the paramilitary Self-Defenses Bloc of Calima is currently underway in Galicia (Bugalargrande), with the concentration there of former combatants it has for years been under paramilitary control.

In Tulúa, journalist **Javier Jaramillo** was informed on April 13, 2004, by peace activist **Fabio Cardoso** and a number of radio stations that the FARC was annoyed at a report of his published in *El País* on the selective killing of communal leaders and milk truckers in Tulúa's mountainous region.

Jaramillo contacted the "Media for Peace" organization, but then decided not to make a formal complaint about his case. Like many journalists, he believes that only complicates the matter and, anyway, risk evaluation by the Interior Ministry takes a very long time.

Jaramillo explains that the situation in the center of Valle del Cauca province became more complex in 1999 when the AUC arrived in the township of Moralia,

in the central mountain range. "The residents there were celebrating the day of the Virgin of Carmen when they arrived in two trucks, got out, surrounded the town square, entered the church and yanked out two members and killed them," he recalls and adds that the only way out of the situation in most cases is to practice self-censorship and avoid covering homicides in vendettas. "We present just the bare facts, no details, saying that the motives are unknown, although we all know what they are," he adds.

In the north the situation is marked by a growing drug trade in a number of areas. "You walk a thin line that threatens to break every day. Having sources is essential to being able to report, but that creates ties," said a reporter who had to apply self-censorship, with the support of his newspaper's executives.

WITHOUT A HOME BASE

In Roldanillo it is impossible not to notice the war to the death between gangs calling themselves the Machos and the Rastrojos over control of cocaine production and processing labs. It is a no-holds-barred fight between alleged drug lords **Diego Montoya** and **Wilmer Varela**, a.k.a. "Jabón" (Soap). In Cartago, the problem is the mafia-politicians combination.

There are two areas literally off limits – El Cañon de Garrapata, in El Dobio region, a haven for crime bosses which is impossible to enter, and the area near the Chocó provincial border in San José del Palmar controled by paramilitaries. There is no need for direct threats here. "They call on you to collaborate and you understand that's an order." The best advice for any journalist is to act like one and not try to get information under cover.

El Tiempo correspondent **Andrés Monpotes** describes the situation in Valle del Cauca this way: "There are paramilitaries in the rural area of Buenaventura, adjacent to Farallones de Cali. A FARC unit is near by and there have been clashes between the two groups, who both like to operate in that corridor.

Journalists murdered in the past decade in various towns in Valle del Cauca include **Abelardo Marín Pinzón**, editor and photographer of Telepacífico television killed on May 27, 1994, for taking pictures of a drug trafficker; **Gerardo Bedoya** slain on March 20, 1997, for his columns in *El País* against the drug trade and its infiltration of national politics; **Dider Arisatizabal** of Cadena Todelar radio killed on May 20, 1997 because he angered the guerrillas by advising the national police radio in Cali; **Bernabé Cortés** of local news station CVN murdered on May 19, 1998 after receiving threats from the Cali Cartel and the ELN; **Marco Antonio Ayala**, news photographer with *El Caleño* killed on January 23, 2003 by organized crime to prevent publication of photos at the bullring of a woman who had visited him at the paper demanding that he hand over the negatives; **Héctor Sandoval** shot to death on April 12, 2003, from a helicopter pursuing a FARC detachment that had abducted several local congressmen; **William Soto Cheng** of local television news channel Telemar killed on December 27, 2003, in

Buenaventura for having exposed electoral fraud said to involve the police.

The province of Chocó has become another dangerous place to work as a journalist, says Caracol radio correspondent **Jairo Antonio Rivas Chalá**. "The situation of extreme poverty, the funding of the media through official advertising and conflict have shackled press freedom," he declares, explaining that the most difficult areas are Medio Atrato, comprising Río Sucio and Bojayá, where FARC and ELN guerrillas and paramilitaries operate. "Also the San Juan area, with the municipalities of Condoto, Tadó, Sití and Ismina. The most dangerous road is the one that goes the 47 miles from Quibdo to Itsmina and where roadblocks have been set up and buses burned. It was there, in December 2004, that journalist **Raúl Balladares** from Brisas de San Juan radio was kidnapped by the ELN."

The plight of journalists is heightened by the impossibility of moving about by land. To reach townships in Chocó you have to go by the Atrato, Andágueda and San Juan rivers, which are war zones.

Adriana Vega, regional editor of *El Tiempo* in the province of Antioquia, from where Chocó province is covered, says, "Although our reporters have not had major problems in recent years, yes, you do have to be careful. For example, if we are going to travel by road we never go after 5:00 p.m., the same for going by river."

Leonardo Montoya Garcés, a highly respected journalist in the area where he works as correspondent of the television news network CM&, produces film coverage for the RCN-TV news programs and anchors the "El Martillo" newscast. He was threatened by public officials angry about images broadcast by RCN. They showed a neighborhood of luxury homes where officials live, exhibiting the contrast between the poverty of the city in a campaign to build an aqueduct. "The director of the hospital and the city commissioner whose homes were shown called me, very angry, and threatened me," Montoya said, adding that "news reporting in this province is subject to the will of the local political bosses who own the local radio stations and print media."

"The influence of the drug trade on the provincial government and the power of those that govern with their control of public funds, added to the presence of FARC, ELN and paramilitary insurgents make it very difficult to work as a journalist," Montoya adds.

In Cauca, the news editor of the daily *El Liberal*, **Ariadne Villota Ospina**, believes that the presence of guerrillas makes it unsafe in the municipalities of Sierra, Vega, Bolívar, Almaguer and San Sebastián. It is a jungle area where journalists are not usually bothered, but may be stopped and asked who they are.

"In the Guambiano indigenous areas there is no risk, but it is important if you are going there to let it be known via the Indigenous Regional Council or the local governor," Villota says.

Southern Cauca is another region where one must be careful because of the presence of FARC there. In July 2004 there was a battle between 200 FARC guerrillas and 36 soldiers of the Putumayo jungle brigade. The outcome was 13 soldiers killed.

Not only are the armed groups a risk in Cauca. A great percentage of the pressure

and threats comes from the politicians. Two reporters from the CNC were threatened in October 2004 after denouncing fraud in political campaigns."Politicians exert pressure so that certain information does not get published and they do so directly on the owners of the media," says one journalist.

The *El País* correspondent in Popayán, **Silvio Sierra**, was warned of a plan to kill him over his report on street gangs and common criminals in the province. It is not known whether the FARC was behind the threat.

Murdered in Cauca was **Manuel José Martínez** from Súper de Popayán radio, killed on September 22, 1993 for his repeated accusations. ❑

IV
The Orinoco Region

Arauca, Casanare, Meta and Vichada
and the Venezuelan border region

According to a National Police report (*El Tiempo*, December 20, 2004) the presence of armed groups, the development of border economies, impunity and the impact of the drug trade make Arauca the region where the largest number of homicides are committed: 158 for every 100,000 inhabitants. The number of murders of community leaders and death threats by paramilitaries has also increased.

In Arauca, the following journalists were murdered: **Iván Darío Pelayo**, director the Llanoamérica radio station in Arauca, killed in the port city of Rondón on August 17, 1995, by an ELN unit that accused him on having contact with the paramilitaries; **Alfredo Antonio Matiz**, founder of the Voz de Sinaruco radio station, slain on January 5, 1996 by guerrillas; **Efraín Varela**, director of Meridiano 70 radio station, killed on June 28, 2002 for exposing Army and paramilitary abuses in the area; and **Luis Eduardo Alfonso** of the same radio station and correspondent of *El Tiempo*, murdered on March 18, 2003 by paramilitaries.

Arauca's press has been hit hard in recent years. **Jorge Meléndez**, a reporter for *El Tiempo*, and photographer **Danilo Sarmiento** were held at a military post, and the RCN-TV news team of **Ramón Eduardo Martínez**, **Duarley Guerrero** and **Carlos Julio García**, who had been kidnapped by FARC guerrillas, was forced into exile. Following the murder of **Efraín Varela** the threats increased and 16 journalists fled the region.

Carmen Rosa Pabón, a reporter with La Voz de Sinaruco radio, and one of 16 who left Arauca in March 2003, said, "Some of us returned, riding in special vehicles supplied by the police and security forces. We've been working again, at least as much as the limitations of public safety in the area and on the Venezuelan border permit. We live surrounded by three armed groups, common criminals and corruption."

The most serious cases occur on the Venezuelan border, in the municipalities of Arauca, Arauquita and Saravena.

Fortul and Tame, in the south of the province, registered the highest number of deaths in the past three years. In December 2004, in the municipality of Tame's San Salvador, 16 were killed in retaliation for local residents allowing paramilitaries to operate there.

"Rumors come and rumors go," Pabón says. "Everything scares you in an environment so full of conflict. We use the communications network FLIP (The Foundation for Press Freedom) gave us to report everything: every time we're followed, every comment. We exist in a strange environment. I'm still scared, my family is scared. When the massacre happened in San Salvador I just prayed to God for enough wisdom to be able to report what had happened; to write, for example, that 2-year-old children were shot in the head. Self-censorship is by far the best means of survival."

In Meta, says **Jorge Cárdenas Fonseca**, news editor of *Llano 7 Días*, "the whole province is in crisis because it's controlled by the FARC guerrillas and three paramilitary groups that, in one way or another, influence how you report. They

control your movements and whether you can talk to people; they sometimes have a hostile attitude."

In 2003, in a rural part of the municipality of Mapiripán, an *El Tiempo* news team of news photographer **John Wilson Vizcaíno** and reporter **Yineth Bedoya** was held for three days by a guerrilla chief, apparently in retaliation for information they had reported.

On December 10, 2004, a team from *Llano 7 Días* was held briefly at the police station in Jardín de Peñas in Mesetas municipality and had its equipment confiscated, including a vehicle, cameras, cellphones and tape recorders.

In this part of the Orinoco region it is difficult to enter areas where these groups operate. In Meta province the situation for reporters has deteriorated greatly. Reporter **José Iván Aguilar** from Súper radio and Villavicencio correspondent of Noticias Uno radio, suffered an attempt on his life after receiving threats from members of the VII Brigade. He had criticized the mayor over irregularities in the construction of a transportation terminal. Also threatened was the director of Eco Llanero radio, **José Dimos Rico**, for reading government and Brigade communiqués. ❑

V

The Amazon Region

Caquetá, Guaviare, Vaupez, Amazonas, Guanía and Putumayo; the borders with Ecuador and Brazil

To travel in the Amazon jungle is to go into the world's largest ecological preserve with the most diverse species of flora and fauna. This region of heavy rains is regarded as "the lungs of the world."

The Putumayo and Caquetá rivers empty into the Amazon River's 6 million cubic feet of water per second flow, its more than 4,000 miles and its nearly 6,000 islands. Commerce is conducted across these waterways and their numerous tributaries which provide the means of communication among the peoples of the jungle region.

Journalists in Amazonas province all agree that the only problem they face is on the Putumayo provincial border, in the area known as Chorrera in the east, because that's where the FARC has settled to expand coca cultivation.

"They take the settlers displaced by crop-fumigation in Putumayo and pay them to plant there. Likewise, in the jungle regions of southwest Amazonas province the FARC is said to have mobilized a group of alleged kidnap victims, among them former presidential candidate **Ingrid Betancur**," said a local journalist.

In Tabatinga and Benjamín Herrera, two villages on the Brazilian side of the border, there are small drug trafficking cartels.

Putumayo province is another example of a heavily confrontational region. A jungle area located on the Ecuadorean border and a center of coca cultivation, it has for years been under the total control of the guerrillas.

Germán Arenas, Caracol radio correspondent in Mocoa, is one of the few journalists to work in Putumayo. He says that "the armed actors, the paramilitaries and FARC, don't bother journalists and that's why I haven't been told what to do. Relations with the police and the Army are good. There is a good flow of communications, but there are also the natural pressures."

He adds, "To work as a journalist you need 2 million pesos (around $8,000) to pay for a spot on the radio and air the news. The only sources that can afford such programs are the local municipalities. Depending on political bias, they either give to the journalist or they take way from him. Criticism of the local government means advertising gets cut off."

There are places like central and lower Putumayo, the municipality of Puerto Guzmán, with FARC influence; Villa Garzón has both AUC and FARC influence; Puerto Caicedo: AUC influence; Puerto Asís: the influence of both; Orito: AUC influence; La Hormiga: controlled by the guerrillas and paramilitaries; and La Dorada: also influenced by both and where reporters wear a flak jacket and carry I.D., because you have to be ready to identify yourself to members of these organizations. In the municipalities of lower Putumayo you can see the dominance of the AUC in local government leadership, while in the rural areas the guerrillas rule.

At times the greatest threats come from security forces openly working with the paramilitaries. In 2004, the Caracol newsman reported that an Army sergeant by the name of Sierra, nicknamed Boquinche, allegedly met with members of an Arizona village to introduce to them four people who, although dressed in civilian clothes,

bore arms and had all the airs of the military. The sergeant allegedly introduced them as cousins and members of the AUC who would work "shoulder-to-shoulder" with them. Anyone who did not like the idea had better leave, "taking care not to report the situation, because punishment would follow." Arenas recalled that the commander of the 27th Jungle Brigade at the time, **Hernán Perico**, asked him not to publish anything until the sergeant was dealt with. "But I received other pressure," he added.

In the Ecuadorean border province of Sucubíos bi-national talks are under way to analyze the lack of security which has chacterized it ever since the region became a haven for paramilitaries, guerrillas and organized crime. The San Miguel International Bridge is unprotected and, therefore, free passage for everything to be brought in or taken out: arms and cocaine.

"It is quite normal for someone arriving in Putumayo to be held until where he comes from and why he is there is investigated," Arenas says. "In many cases such people have been taken away and later turn up dead. But that hasn't happened to journalists."

In Putumayo, in 2003, the following journalists were murdered: **Juan Carlos Benavides**, news director of Manantial Stereo radio killed on August 22 in Puerto Caicedo while on his way to cover a townhall meeting with President Uribe; and **José Nel Muñoz**, with a local Caracol radio affiliate killed in Puerto Asís.

The correspondent of Caracol TV in Puerto Asís, **Carlos Mauro Rosero**, explained that "here we have no problems of mobility, but ever since Muñoz's murder, no one has produced an independent news program again. The media work at the bid of the governor for fear of losing their advertising revenue and because they are practicing self-censorship in cases involving the armed conflict.

In Caquetá, it can be confirmed that **José Duviel Vásquez** was murdered because of his profession on July 6, 2001. The reporter for Voz de la Selva radio disclosed the existence of a tape recording in which the mayor of Florencia, **Lucrecia Murcia**, was allegedly handing money over to some city commissioners. Vásquez also received threats from paramilitaries. The motives behing the murders of two other executives of the same radio station, killed one year earlier – **Alfredo Abad** and **Guillermo León Agudelo** – have yet to be determined.

Carlos Meyer, RCN-Radio correspondent in Florencia, recalls that in 2004 the situation was very tense for journalists. "There you are doing your job, in the middle of it all, not knowing who's shooting at you, if it's the drug traffickers, guerrillas, paramilitaries, common criminals, the government agencies themselves or public officials, especially if you maintain an independent stance," he declared.

"The last threat I received was in July 2004," Meyer recalled. "I was living in a neighborhood a long way from downtown and around 4 o'clock in the morning I went outside the house to start up my motorcycle when I found a piece of paper leaning against the wall at the front of the house. It was an explicit threat from the FARC: I had 24 hours to leave the city or else they would go after my family and the radio station. I hid inside the house with my wife and an hour later called my

immediate boss, who told me not to move from home. In Bogotá they told me to file a formal complaint with the local authorities, as they believed the warning had not come from the FARC." Meyer was never able to confirm who had issued the threat.

He says that in Caquetá those kinds of threats also come from politicians who are blamed for the murder of three journalists in recent years. RCN-Radio has recommended that its correspondents not go beyond city limits for safety reasons. The biggest fear is that they might be kidnapped.

Under the presence of the AUC and the FARC it is considered risky for journalists to go to municipalities in Caquetá.

In Guaviare province the situation is very similar to that in Meta. The rural areas are under the control of the guerrillas, while in the urban areas of San José del Guaviare, Calamar and El Retorno it is the paramilitaries who are in control. ❑

Mario Prada Diaz | Colombian journalist

Diaz was the editor of the weekly Horizonte Sabanero. In his last editorial, he alleged mishandling of public funds in the Sabana Torres municipality, in Santander province, Colombia, where he was murdered on July 12, 2002. One year after his death, the Public Prosecutor's Office called off the investigation into the case, saying that it was not possible to identify the culprits.

Act now!

If you are outraged by this unpunished crime, demand action. Go to our website www.impunidad.com and sign a letter that we will send to Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Vélez, asking him to take action so that the investigation and legal process in the case will be reactivated and the guilty be brought to justice. Or, if you prefer, write to us at:

Inter American Press Association
1801 SW 3rd Avenue
Miami, FL 33129
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MHPR027

Martín La Rotta, Colombian radio journalist

Murdered

On February 7, 2004, hitmen shot and killed the director of the radio station La Palma Stereo in San Alberto, Cesar province, Colombia, after he refused to continue paying extortion money each month to paramilitaries operating in the area. The murder continues to go unpunished, with no arrests made and the investigation stalled.

ACT NOW!

www.impunidad.com

If you are outraged by this unpunished murder, demand action. Go to our website www.impunidad.com and add your signature to a letter we will send to Colombia's President Alvaro Uribe Vélez asking him to pursue this case so that the guilty may be brought to justice. Or, if you prefer, write to us at:

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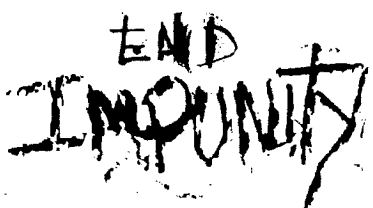

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Brazil

By Clarinha Glock

Clarinha Glock is a freelance journalist in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Her investigations focus on the issues of indigenous communities, infancy, human rights, and the environment. She studied graphics and audiovisual journalism. She is a member of the Brazilian Association of Investigative Reporting and is a volunteer at the Free Agency for Information, Citizenry, and Education (ALICE, for its Portuguese acronym) on a newspaper's project for the "Roofless" movement titled Boca de Rua. Since 2000, she has been the investigator of the IAPA's Rapid Response Unit in Brazil.


Venezuela
Colombia
RR
Cucuí
São Gabriel
da Cachoeira
Manaus
Tabatinga
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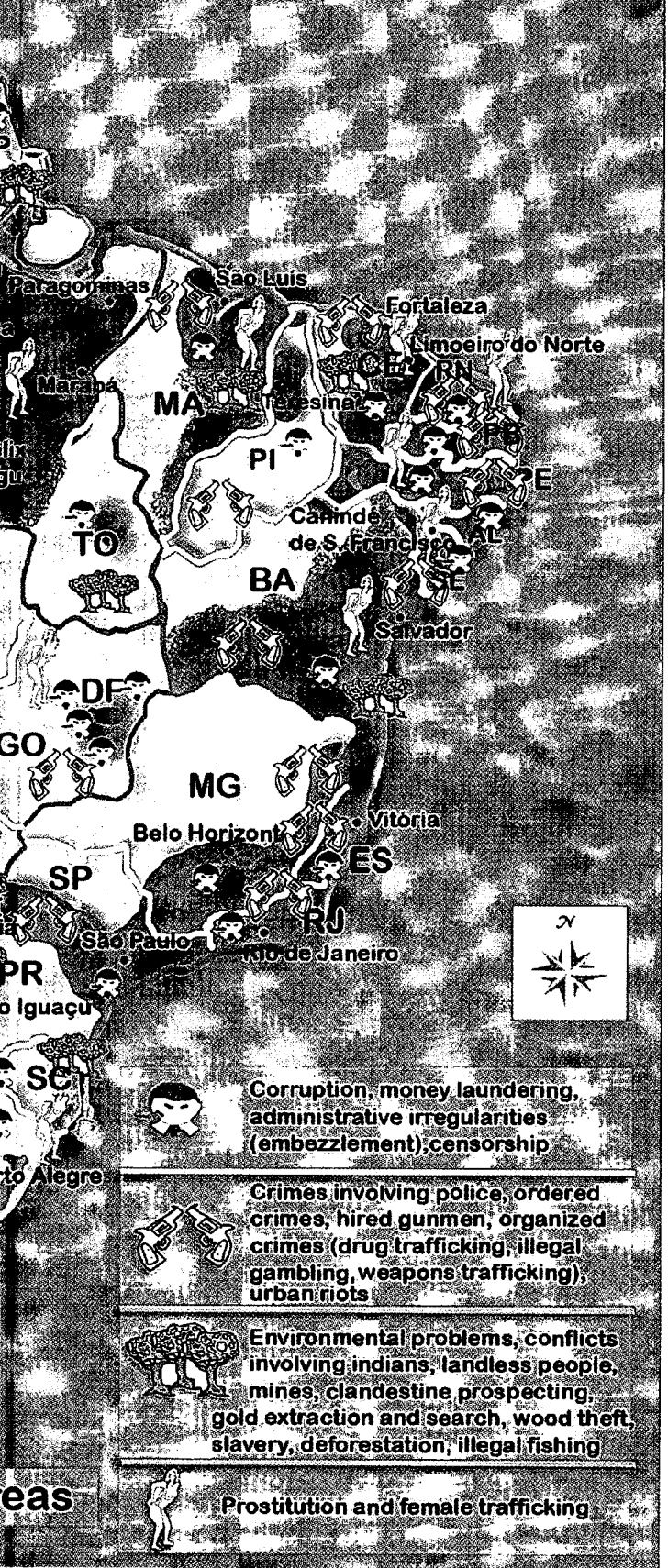
MT
Peru
Cuiabá
Cáceres
Rondonópo
Bolívia
Corumbá
MS
Campo
Paraguay
Argentina
Uruguay
North Region
AM - Amazonas
PA - Pará
RO - Rondônia
RR - Roraima
AC - Acre
AP - Amapá
TO - Tocantins
Northeast Region
BA - Bahia
CE - Ceará
PI - Piauí
PE - Pernambuco
SE - Sergipe
MA - Maranhão
RN - Rio Grande
do Norte
PB - Paraíba
AL - Alagoas
Center-West Region
DF - Distrito Federal
GO - Goiás
MT - Mato Grosso
MS - Mato Grosso
do Sul
Southeast Region
RJ - Rio de Janeiro
SP - São Paulo
MG - Minas Gerais
ES - Espírito Santo
South Region
PR - Paraná
SC - Santa Catarina
RS - Rio Grande do Sul


São Luis
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Vitória
Salvador
São Paulo
Rio de Janeiro
Corruption, money laundering, administrative irregularities (embezzlement), censorship
Crimes involving police, ordered crimes, hired gunmen, organized crimes (drug trafficking, illegal gambling, weapons trafficking), urban riots
Environmental problems, conflicts involving indians, landless people, mines, clandestine prospecting, gold extraction and search, wood theft, slavery, deforestation, illegal fishing
Prostitution and female trafficking

Introduction

Journalists in Brazil face a problem that is difficult to overcome – how to investigate and expose links between public officials and organized crime when the justice system itself does not know how to combat it?

The difficulty in this battle, according to Federal Police chief **Getulio Becerra**, is that organized crime is not classified under the penal code. It is an unlawful organization that seeks control of an area, financial gain and has the potential of waging war. It acts like an organization (which differentiates it from street gangs), it has a long reach and it brings about enormous social upheaval. It is characterized by business-like planning, with a compartmentalized chain of command, it demonstrates stability, has codes of honor and control of territories. Examples of its criminal activities are kidnappings, theft of cargo, drug trafficking, smuggling and white slavery among others. It operates on the basis of forging alliances, intimidation and political influence.

That is why the border region – especially the land border area – provides an excellent opportunity for these criminals. **Rudi Rigo Bürkle**, head of Criminal Investigation and the Organized Crime Special Unit in the Public Prosecutor's Office in Iguazú Falls, Paraná, explains that the border sees the greatest traffic in narcotics, arms and contraband in all of Brazil. To maintain this structure, organized crime engages in corruption of public security agents, which leads to violence. Any attack on the economic power of these groups brings retaliations that include even killings. "Journalists are just as exposed to the risks as any police officer combating crime," Bürkle declares. There are high stakes at play.

Finances are the Achilles heel of the criminal organizations. Brazilian Attorney General **Pedro Taques** says that combating such illegal organizations cannot be carried out only by repression. Like any official institution, they have their hierarchies, division of labor, sub-contracting, and the participation of police officers and judges, and there is no specific penal category that defines that type of criminal conduct. The Federal Public Prosecutor's Office is studying the possibility of taking on the criminal organizations by going after their money-laundering activities.

The Federal Public Prosecutor's Office is not interested in the little trafficker, but rather the "third level" criminals – people well situated in society who commit fraud in public contracts and who avoid paying taxes.

This leads **Amaury Ribeiro Junior**, a reporter for *O Estado de Minas* and *Correio Braziliense*, to conclude that "a journalist that wants to know today about organized crime has to understand all about stock exchanges and money laundering." In, agreement, **Marcelo Beraba**, the ombudsman of *Folha de S. Paulo,* believes that reporters need to learn about topics they may regard as boring, for example the economic-financial system and law. Besides learning about the ins and outs of these topics journalists need to be alert to choosing reliable sources.

Another challenge is political, it involves confronting "bossism" – the power or influence that a political leader exerts in the administrative and social life of a city that is still found in many states. The bosses take turns with one another. Until recently in Bahia, Amazonas and Pará – just to mention a few – it was not possible

to criticize prominent politicians without suffering retaliation.

Also noteworthy are the marked differences in the practice of journalism between central Brazil and the interior.

Celso Bejarano, a former reporter for *Folha do Estado* in Cuiabá, Mato Grosso, believes that "the national media should pay more attention to the stories coming out of the interior of Brazil; that way they would help not only the community but also the local journalists. Often a reporter publishes a news story in a local paper and the story dies there, leaving journalists in the region vulnerable. The newspapers in the central part of the country should ask themselves, 'what is news?'"

Another example is raised by **Hudson Luiz Corréa**, correspondent of *Folha de S.Paulo* in Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul. As he sees it, "the big risk is that the story never gets published, not just because of censorship but because the editors don't have the vision to see what the news item represents; they give priority to São Paulo unless it's a report about something on the border, such as drug trafficking. The reporter working for the local press does an excellent job: he investigates, he puts his reputation on the line, he exposes himself to danger, but since his story is not published, the people he interviewed believe that he did it for extortion".

Candido Figueiredo, a reporter with the Paraguayan daily *ABC Color* in Pedro Juan Caballero, on the Brazil-Paraguay border, said, "It is very important to have contact with reporters in Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo, because what is happening there – smugglers being hunted down and arrested – ends up having repercussions on the border region. We often have news of interest to reporters in the big cities that could help them in their investigations."

Efrem Ribeiro Souza, *Diario Meia Norte* and *O Globo* correspondent in Teresina, Piauí, declared, "It is a dangerous situation, because if I take a photo of someone in jail and it is published, when he is released it's very likely he will find me on the street and threaten me. That's already happened, but I've never stopped publishing anything. Perhaps I'm a little naive that way."

Demitri Túlio, a special reporter for *O Povo* in Fortaleza, Ceará, says, "There is a huge prejudice in central Brazil against the press in the northeast. There are regions where those who control the news media are the politicians, such as in Alagoas and Piauí. Not only that, but there are radio people who disrupt the work of the serious press. They take money to speak well of the mayor. There is a promiscuous relationship with those in power. We know not to touch certain topics, that there is a code of silence."

Letícia Belém, a reporter with *A Tarde* in Salvador, Bahia, declares, "Reporters working in the interior are left very much to their own devices, they cannot count on their company protecting them. Everyone knows where they live, everyone knows them, and so it's more difficult to do an independent job of reporting."

Marcelo Beraba, the *Folha de S. Paulo* ombudsman, in his column titled "The Brazil That Does Not Know Brazil" once declared, "The big newspapers such as *Folha*, *O Estado de S. Paulo* and *O Globo*, for financial or editorial reasons that I am not aware of, have no journalistic structure in the Amazon region. That region is

made up of nine states and accounts for 60% of the national territory. In 2000, it had almost 21 million inhabitants, many more than in the São Paulo metropolitan area. To cover the area, *Folha* today has only one journalist based in Manaus. Although it has a correspondent in Beijing, it has no one in Belém, the state capital of Pará. The situation there with other big national dailies is the same or worse. The absence of reporters means that newspapers are providing poor coverage of what happens in the region, such as drug trafficking on the borders, lumber smuggling, deforestation, conflicts in indigenous areas, fraud in state and municipal governments, etc."

PRESSURES AND THREATS

"I stopped publishing a lot of stories for political reasons," says a reporter in Iguazú Falls, Paraná, who asked to remain anonymous. "A colleague was fired from a radio station under pressure from a city commissioner who owned shares in the station. The mentality of the politicians needs to be changed. The journalist is only doing his job – reporting the facts just as they happen."

In the view of **Rubens Valente**, a reporter with *Folha de S. Paulo*, there is censorship in Brazil and "therefore it's paradoxical to say there is freedom of the press when what there is is great financial and political pressure. There's complicity between newspapers and politicians, even when the politician does not own or finance the news outlet. The community has no way of knowing how much the government pays media under the so-called "second books" accounting system with fictitious entries. Advertising placement is conditional and if a journalist investigates and writes something against those politicians he is fired and he'll never get a good job elsewhere. That's how it is in Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Rondônia, Paraná, Bahia and Amazonas. That's why I came to São Paulo, where at least we have relative freedom."

Ricardo Rodríguez da Rocha, political editor of *A Tribuna* in Maceió and correspondent of *O Estado de S. Paulo* in Alagoas, says, "The agro-businesses rule in this state; the main crop is sugar cane that is cultivated in an environment of semi-slavery. But you can't denounce this. Where would you go? There's a pact here – you don't talk about me in your paper and I won't talk about you."

He adds, "If there are not many cases of threats it's because the very power structure of the news media is closely tied to political power. Censorship inhibits reporting against the powers-that-be."

The risk factor increases in conjunction with other circumstances that are commonly found in some regions of Brazil. The following list is derived from what journalists who were interviewed had to say:

1. Sensationalist programs: their hosts receive threats because they attack criminals of little note or politicians, often humiliating them and intruding into their private lives.

2. The radio station or reporter taking a political stance or being linked to a political party and criticizing its opponents. **Mário Quevedo Neto** of *Correio de Villena* and *Folha de Villena* in Rondônia, says, " There are three newspapers here. All belong to

politicians, which makes it difficult to obtain space to publish news. The only way to work is as a freelancer and hold down another job."

3. A television anchor or reporter with links to the police or having worked as a police officer before becoming a journalist, or one using a more aggressive tone. Reporter **Carlos Camargo** hosts the police program "Hot Weather" broadcast by TV Taborá and another one on Paiqueré radio in Londrina, Paraná. It is a news program with items about what the police are investigating. He often receives death threats but as a former Military Police officer believes that "some threats can't be taken seriously, such as those made by petty thieves, people with no guts. But you have to watch out."

4. A reporter improves and risks being caught. At TV Frontera (a satellite station of the Rede Globo network) in Presidente Prudente, in the interior of São Paulo, reporters wanted to show that they could do an investigative report. They hid a mini camera in a specially adapted bag. "Anyone working in remote parts of the country has to be creative in order to be successful in investigative reporting, although you often expose yourself to too much risk," one of the reporters admitted.

5. The news company or its journalists receive money from governments, politicians, businessmen or entities not to carry certain news items or disclose certain information.

6. A large company without correspondents in every state capital that uses freelancers. That makes doing investigative reporting difficult as these stringers have other full time jobs. In very extensive areas reporters resort to the telephone because of the difficulty of traveling. Coverage is superficial and areas are left uncovered. On top of that, the stringer has no contract and so he is left unprotected. **Ulises José de Souza**, editor of the newspaper *Oeste Notícias* in Presidente Prudente, São Paulo state, says, "The big press pulled out all its correspondents without taking into account that anything that happens in this city has repercussions in the rest of the country. The free-lancer they use is no expert, a fresh university graduate, so they end up buying inaccurate information which can create problems. There is no investigation nor any desire to enter into conflict."

7. A reporter making a denunciation and running certain risks in order to flesh out the news item, but the federal and state governments and Federal Police not bothering to investigate and punish the guilty.

8. Brazilian journalists not having a law providing for access to public records to be able to obtain data to back up a news story. News companies, such as *Folha de S. Paulo*, could take certain official agencies to court that refuse to hand over information for a news report.

9. Family and eye-witnesses refusing to testify in murders carried out by contract hitmen because witness protection programs are inadequate.

10. Newspapers being launched in many small towns to support a political party or a candidate to public office. "Sometimes those papers appear only during the election campaign," says **Waldir Pereira Silva**, founding partner, editor, news editor and manager of *A Noticia* in Paraupebas, Pará.

11. Reporters engaging in extortion. If they are not paid, they invent and publish things that those being extorted do not want revealed. The executive editor of *Diário da Amazônia* in Porto Velho, Rondônia, says in this regard that he had to fire his correspondent in Ouro Preto do Oeste because he had heard a congressman ask about him, "Is he any good, because I'm not going to pay him, I have only 100 reais (about $33)."

12. Reporters and editors are accomplices or take money in favor of the accused. When a reporter suggests a storyline they try to demoralize him, downplaying the report he is offering in order to protect their allies.

13. Newspapers not training their journalists how to work in dangerous situations. In practice, they do the same as in a careless construction of a building – they demand good sense but their workers do not wear hard hats. A reporter that does not want to place himself at risk and gets scooped on a news story will lose his job. The newspaper does not want to hear anything about risks and since the labor market is tight the journalist has no choice but to do what he is told, no matter how dangerous it is.

14. Journalists getting involved in politics and using the news media to this end. Many seek to promote themselves by seeking public office. This is most common among radio and television news anchors in cities in the interior and in the northwest, like **Alves Correia** in Arapiraca, Alagoas, a radio program host with political aspirations. He believes that through the radio he combats a lack of sensitivity and serves the community and will serve even better if elected to Congress. Radio and television anchor **Cicero Almeida** was elected mayor of Maceió, Alagoas. Retired police sergeant **Raimundo Lobato de Vilhema** hosts a popular radio program in Paragominas, Pará, called "Patrolling the City." He has been arrested several times by his former colleagues in retaliation for his accusations. He has even received death threats. "I always say on air that I will go on talking, they won't silence me," he declares. He ran for city commissioner but was not elected.

15. People no longer trusting journalists and not wanting to give them any more information, instead making the job more difficult and issuing threats. In this regard, the former police beat reporter of the daily *Estado de Minas* in Belo Horizonte, **Newton Cunha**, believes this is "the fault of the so-called 'police-friendly journalists' who never go into a slum district alone. Ten years ago we had free access. Today there is a lack of security and fear of going in there."

PERSONAL DRAMAS

The stories are the same all over and point to a common problem throughout Brazil – police corruption as a risk factor. In Iguazú Falls, Paraná; in São Paulo, São Paulo; in Manaus, Amazonas; in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais; in Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janero; all over what you hear most often is that "the biggest fear is not of the outlaws but of the crooked cops."

Felipe Zilli, crime reporter of *Diário da Tarde* in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais,

declares that "the level of impunity is a disgrace. No one can understand why there are police officers still working despite their having been convicted of using torture."

When a job of investigative reporting and denunciation results in the accused being sent to prison, it is hailed as a victory for those who put themselves at risk to get the story. At the same time, there are police officers who are tempted to use informants to tip off the press that someone has been arrested, even though he is a scapegoat and not the main suspect. Catholic priest **Paulo Tadeo Berause** of the Justice and Peace Committee of the Archdiocese of Port Velho, Rondônia, says that until 2004 there was only one arrest in the investigation into the murder of television anchor **José Carlos Mesquita**, killed in 1998 in the city of Ouro Preto de Oeste – and that person was not the one behind the murder.

Many threatened reporters tell of how stress and the psychological pressure over threats have affected their daily lives. They suffer when colleagues keep their distance out of fear of being seen with them, or when their family members are also affected.

Josmar Jozino, a reporter with *Jornal da Tarde* in São Paulo, says, "I had to get a bodyguard because the newspaper's drivers were afraid to go with me."

Arnaldo Ferreira, correspondent in Riacho Doce, Alagoas, of *O Globo* and *TV Bandeirantes*, and a professor at the Alagoas Federal University, told how he had to stop covering the Legislative Assembly when he began to receive threats from congressmen he had accused of mishandling public funds. "No one feels comfortable knowing that you can't frequent a public place or go out on the street with your children," he declared.

Saulo Borges, a reporter with *Diário da Amazônia*, was even more indignant than he was scared when he was pursued for four months and "I was even afraid to go to sleep. I only did when I was too tired to stay awake. My family was scared." He was reassigned as the newspaper's editorial page editor where he worked entirely inside the newsroom.

"The tension is high when you live under threat," says **Celso Bejarano**, who was threatened when he was working as a reporter for *Folha do Estado* in Cuiabá, Mato Grosso state.

"I received a phone call in the early hours one morning saying that I should watch out, a group that I had exposed would be out for vengeance. I called in the police to try and find out where the call had come from, but they got nowhere," Bejarano recalled. "I began to take precautions.They stationed a police car in front of the newspaper and every time I went out I had a bodyguard. I was afraid of hitmen that rode around on motorcycles. I shuddered every time I heard a motor bike slowing down. One night, as I was leaving the paper after doing a story on organized crime I heard a motorcycle slowing down. Out of fright I nearly ended up under my car and the colleague that was with me was in shock. We are only safe inside the newsroom; in the street we're nothing."

A similar fear is felt by **Carlos Moraes**, news photographer for *O Dia* in Rio de Janeiro who received threats after photographing police officers killing two men in

Rio's Providencia hillside neighborhood. He says that afterwards he and his wife were extremely nervous and scared. "I didn't answer the phone. I couldn't sleep. We changed our entire routine. I stated at home, paralyzed. I didn't want to watch television or hear the news. My mother became ill. I became aggressive. I changed my job at the paper and went back to work one Sunday on election coverage. I traveled. I'm now somewhat calmer. God is my security. I have one eye on the priest and the other on the Mass."

A published report by **Marconi de Souza**, a special reporter for *A Tarde*, denounced three corrupt police officers who in the end were exonerated of blame. De Souza admits that he is still afraid of being killed.

A number of reporters have chosen to leave the city or have chosen the assistance of police and witness protection programs after being threatened. That is the case of **Claudia Bastos**, who was a *TV Globo* reporter in Pará when an attempt was made on her life.

"For two years I investigated and produced a report for the Rede Globo network about an arms shipment that was going to Suriname via Pará," she recalls. "The arms were stored at Military Police headquarters, with the consent of the police commander, and they were going to be exchanged with a drug trafficking cartel for cocaine. The story included, only in audio, a statement by a witness who was later called to testify before the Parliamentary Drug Trafficking Commission of Inquiry. Before the report was broadcast I went to see the witness who was to be transferred to Brasília, to protect him. But unidentified persons had just been to his home, located in the middle of the jungle, and smashed up everything. It was 11:30 p.m. Three cars surrounded mine, trying to stop me. I maneuvered and escaped while trying to call the broadcast station on my cellphone. The people following me began to open fire. I finally managed to get through and asked the station to call the Federal Police.

"I arrived at the police precinct vomiting from fear. I spent the night at a hotel, using false identification which I also used to get on an airplane. I felt like a criminal. Drug traffickers don't stop at anything, they kill journalists, with no problem at all.

"In the space of one year I had to move four times. I was very scared. When I went out on the street I knew I could die at any moment. On the bus I always sat in the back row. When waiting for a train I always stayed well behind the yellow line, scared stiff that someone would push me in front of the train.

"I remained under the Witness Protection Program for five months, but it was too much to continue. They offer a new identity, a new job, a minimal salary, barely enough to be able to live in one room. If I'd had children I would have gone mad. Not even my parents knew where I was .You have no life in that program. Do you know what it means to take tranquilizers and still not be able to get to sleep? I was afraid they would kill me in my sleep. Your only thought is to stay alive. I had to cut and dye my hair. I cried a lot, and the money was running out. I had trust in the power of the press – but the price is too high." ❑

I
The Northern Region

Roraima, Amapá, Acre,
Amazonas, Rondônia, Pará and Tocantins

RISK FACTORS

> Death squads. Of the 52 accused by the Federal Legislature's Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI), members of more than 30 remain free. Local newspapers only began to publish the names of those involved after the CPI's findings were announced. The main cause of fear in the region was Federal Deputy **Hildebrando Pascoal**, former commander of the Military Police in Acre. He was accused of allegedly heading a death squad and being a drug lord. There is still fear that the group may reorganize, despite Pascoal's being in jail on charges of committing a number of crimes.

> The "jogo de bicho" or illegal numbers game and the slot machines operate openly, but the authorities and businessmen (including those in the media) are so involved with organized crime that it is difficult for journalists to denounce this type of unlawful activity. Sometimes television station owners are also involved in or own logging companies and have no interest in certain reports on deforestation coming out. In order for reporters to survive in the region they have to pretend they know nothing.

> Political corruption, vote-buying.

> Slave labor.

> Drug trafficking.

> Crimes in which police are involved.

> Environmental issues, such as pollution caused by meat processing plants (southern Pará), illegal logging, deforestation.

> Urban issues – disputes among taxi drivers, transportation company owners (Rondônia).

> Killings in the Urso Branco penitentiary (Rondônia).

> Conflicts with landless peasants.

> Conflicts between indigenous tribes and those interested in exploiting gold and diamond mines (Rondônia and Roraima).

> Gold and diamond mines in indigenous areas being exploited by politicians and businessmen.

> Land grabs through the use of false title deeds.

> Contract killers.

> Prostitution and the white slave trade, seduction and exploitation of teenagers and children (Roraima, Manaus, Acre). Some clients of child sex exploitation rings are politicians, ranchers and businessmen, and that is why it is difficult to do exposés.

> Censorship, restrictions on obtaining information, financial pressure on newspapers, legal prosecution (Acre).

> On the Bolivian border: accusations of auto theft, drugs, child prostitution, murders.

> The mine in Serra Pelada, Pará state. The gold fever there lasted from 1983 to 1988. Where once there were gold and diamond mines now there is a lake and you need cameras to be able to find and extract anything of value. Many miners have suffered mercury contamination. The majority of the old miners today work on ranches and there are still a few that pan for gold. To get to Serra Pelada you take a dirt road about 20 miles long, but because of the poor conditions it takes more than an hour. There is a battle over ownership of the gold that remains.

MAIN PROBLEMS

> Obtaining information about the illicit drug trade. To obtain it you have to have sources among the drug dealers and people living on the border, such as missionaries and Federal Police.

> Relationships with sources are always tenuous and fragile.

> In the border towns, drug smuggling also influences local elections making access to sources difficult. Drug trafficking funds political campaigns. That is why it is important to carefully confirm the accuracy of information. Sometimes it may not be true and the reporter believes it to be an "exclusive."

DISEASES

> The risk of contracting malaria or yellow fever. You need to keep vaccinations up to date (for yellow fever – there is none yet for malaria).

DISTANCES

The state of Amazônia is divided by rivers. Manaus is in the center. On the border with Colombia is the town of Tabatinga in the Upper Solimões region. On the border with Colombia and Venezuela is São Gabriel da Cachoeira in the Upper Rio Negro region. There is a large flow of drugs in these areas. The Federal Police have barracks there. In 2004, in Manaus alone, five major operations were mounted to break up criminal gangs.

From Manaus to the border at Tabatinga it is 620 miles. That means six days by boat or 2 1/2 hours by airplane. To reach the town of Barcelos, which is closer – 280 miles from the state capital – you have to go by boat, which takes a whole day, or by plane for the equivalent of $200.

São Gabriel de Cachoeira is 620 miles from Manaus. The journey by motorboat takes nearly a week. That is why reporters gather a lot of information by telephone rather than travel to the location.

São Félix do Xingu, in Pará state, where there is illegal mahogany logging, is 875 miles from Belém, the state capital, by road. By plane chartered in Belém

it takes three hours to get there and costs the equivalent of $3,000 roundtrip. By car it takes two days.

In Pará and Amazonas roads are bad, almost impassable depending on the time of year. The rainy season is the worst, with delays a certainty. The more potholes a road has, the greater the danger of highway bandits. The recommendation is to not travel at night.

Bandits have easy access to the inland border regions, which are sparsely controlled.

SPECIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

> Obtain vaccinations (yellow fever).

> Beware of the heat.

> Learn about the time zones, so as not to miss deadlines. In summer, the region is three hours behind Brasília.

> To go into an indigenous area you need to have the authorization of the National Indian Foundation (Funai). The indigenous people pay attention to permits issued by Funai.

> Due to police corruption it is important to be careful about news sources.

> Local reporters are very much exposed, so they need outside support.

> It is a good idea for a reporter from another state going to do a report in this area to first consult local colleagues, who are very familiar with the risks posed in the region.

SPECIFIC SITUATIONS

1.-Authorization to work

The situation is so difficult that some journalists in the end prefer not to do the report. But if they do it, they must seek so-called "permission."

The director of a television station in Paragominas, Pará, who produces cultural reports declares that "police officers are involved in the drug trade." He tells of his personal experience, where an exposé by the media reached the Civil Police superintendent but nothing happened. "In the end, I did not run the story because the police chief promised to carry out a major operation to arrest the drug traffickers. It never happened," he said. "Why should I put my life at stake? What motivates me is the Christian principle to do my part."

2.-Attempted bribery

Antônio Paixão is news coordinator at *TV Liberal* (a *TV Globo* affiliate) in Paragominas, Pará, and owner of an advertising production company. He did a televised report with the Federal Police showing the slavery-like working conditions on a pepper plantation. When he went back to shoot a few more images, the ranch manager and some businessmen offered him $5,000 not to show the documentary. "When I refused, they said to watch out for my car, which carried the *TV Liberal*'s

logo. I just told them that they should ask *TV Globo* for the videotape. That was so they would not complicate my life, since I live in the area."

3.-Intimidation

Jonas Campos, a reporter with *TV Liberal in Belém*, Pará, says that "there is a lot of intimidation. They say all the time, 'I know the owner of your company' and so they think they can get away with the story not being aired."

4.-Defamation campaigns

There are attempts to discredit the journalist, as happened in the case of **Jonas Campos**, a reporter with *TV Liberal in Belém*, Pará, where a number of local newspaper columnists have accused him of writing only negative reports about the state.

TESTIMONIALS

Reporter **Jonas Campos** recalls that he was preparing a report on mishandled funds at Federal Traffic Police headquarters in Belém, Pará, but suspected his source was not reliable so he sent his material to the editor to double-check. The following day his cellphone rang.

"Jonas Campos?"

"Yes, this is he."

"You're going to die, scumbag. If your next report comes out, you're going to die."

The call supposedly came from a public telephone located outside the Federal Traffic Police offices. "My hair stood on end," Campos says. "The report did not come out because it was based only on rumors. I called my wife, and warned her to watch out."

Lúcio Flávio de Faria Pinto, a sociologist and editor of *Jornal Pessoal* in Belém, Pará, has denounced press monopoly, land grabs, illegal logging and the connivance of the courts in all this:

"Since 1992, I have been taken to court 15 times. Why are they taking me to court instead of ordering me killed? Because that would have a very serious impact. I'm a nuisance. I annoy reporters-for-pay and consultants. Bad reporters feel the effects. Once I was offered a bribe, but I'm safe if I stay clean. If I took money and changed my way of doing things, then that person would feel he had a right to kill me."

Antônio Paixão, news coordinator at *TV Liberal* (a *TV Globo* affiliate) and owner of an advertising production company in Paragominas, Pará:"I once did a report showing police handling false documents. Of the three officers involved, one was arrested. His brother came to my home with the other two officers to ask for an explanation. Six months later, I learned from a police officer that they were going to shoot up my house. As a precaution I mentioned that my home and television station have cameras that record everything. Anyone who did anything would be identified. I saved my skin."

Alberto César Araújo, a news photographer for *Diário do Amazonas* and *Folhapress* in Manaus, Amazonas state: "The obstacles in the north of Brazil are extensive, ranging from reaching the scene of events to issues of a lack of professional respect and ethics on the part of local news media. They are always linked to a political group or favor an advertiser's interests over those of journalism. Police in Amazonas seem to be totally unaware of the principle of freedom of the press and they make our work difficult. They have beaten me several times, once by a captain inside a police precinct. Others have tried to stop me from working."

Carlos Mendes, correspondent of *O Estado de S. Paulo* and a special reporter for *O Liberal* in Belém, Pará state: "To file a formal complaint about illegal mahogany logging I used to show my journalist I.D. I don't do that anymore. I arrive in a city as if I were just anybody. Bar owners warn me when anyone comes asking strange questions. To put possible enemies off my trail when I do an exposé in the region I first give a dossier to the investigative agencies and journalist organizations saying who the suspect would be if something were to happen to me."

Chagas Filho, reporter and editor of *Opinão* and stringer for *Diário do Pará* in Marabá in southern Pará state: "Once a thief was caught stealing near the *Opinão* newspaper offices. I took photographs and wrote a story about it. Someone didn't like it and hit me in the face with a helmet. I filed a formal complaint at the local police precinct, but nothing happened. I later learned that the police chief had family ties to the thief.

Sandra Miranda de Oliveira Silva, executive editor of the weekly *Primeira Página* in Palmas, Tocantins state: "The government has filed 22 libel suits (civil and criminal) against the newspaper in recent months, the majority of them for my reports, critical of the governor's conduct. Another pro-government newspaper commented that if these were old times the case would be solved with a beating. They have even taken legal action over a letter that described how the governor had been taken ill during a public forum. They have also sued me over an opinion piece on a local businessman considered to be the biggest loan shark in the state who was living in the government palace. I did not name names. This gentleman sent me a message via my brother, who also works at the paper: 'Tell her that if I fall, I'll take people with me' and held up his hand as if he were firing a revolver."

Kátia Brasil, correspondent of *Folha de S. Paulo* in Manaus, Amazonas: "In 2002 I went to the city of San Felipe in Colombia together with photographer **Patrícia Santos** from São Paulo. There was a FARC guerrilla base there. The story required a good deal of caution on our part and it took us a month to plan how to go there and make it back safely. We wanted to investigate the detour of food to the FARC. We identified ourselves as university professors fearing that as journalists they might kidnap us. I wanted to expose how poorly guarded the borders were. Before leaving we informed the Federal Police of our trip. Our

newspaper's executives authorized the story only after we contacted the police.

We left in a boat along with miners, soldiers and animals. There are guerrillas all along the Colombian border fighting the Colombian Army and a lot of people are dying.

"Brazilians go to San Felipe to sell things, others to work in the mines. The FARC and traders use gold as currency, thanks to the mines. The boat was carrying cargo, and the captain already knew the guerrillas who he introduced to us as his family members. They took command of the boat while we were anchored there."

The following morning, a 15-year-old female guerrilla came to the boat and we gave her lipstick and a CD player. I went around the town with them, I went to the school, I talked to the teachers there, all civilian members of the guerrilla movement. We were watched very closely. I wrote my notes at night when everyone was asleep and hid my notebook under the mattress. Patrícia, the photographer, hid her rolls of film in a hole in the bedside table.

We did everything possible not to show our I.Ds. and to avoid being searched. That's why we did not move from there or go on the Internet or go to the hospital even though I didn't feel well.

It was a relief when we started home. San Felipe is a town full of fear, with death on the doorstep. If they had found out about our contact with the police, they would have killed us. The boat captain that took us ended up arrested for drug trafficking. We really ran every risk." ❑

II
The Northeast Region

Maranhão, Ceará, Piauí,
Bahia, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Alagoas,
Pernambuco and Sergipe

RISK FACTORS

>"Jogo do bicho" (numbers game). A local newspaper did a series of reports linking this illegal gambling to politicians in Pernambuco. The series, which was written after two weeks of investigations, was not published. The numbers game is played openly on the street and the story contained statements by "runners" naming politicians who took money from them. Despite the fact that they gave taped statements, the interviewers later tried to deny them. The federal congressmen involved were interviewed and they applied pressure so the series would not be published.

> Accusations of politicians' involvment in organized crime.

> Accusation of misuse of public funds.

> "Bossism." Landowners and politicians who wield a great deal of power in the political, economic and social lives of small towns.

> During election campaigns the climate of tension is heightened and attacks are more frequent.

BAHIA

Area of greatest risk: the far south.

Risk factors:

> Environmental issues – deforestation (Atlantic coast forests), lack of enforcement, falsified freight receipts, desecration of national parks, environmental disasters that involve large corporations.

> Until recently, denouncing anyone belonging to the Antônio Carlos Magalhães political machine. The group allegedly included congressmen, judges, public prosecutors and inspectors. In 2004, the situation changed somewhat because the group began to lose clout in the region.

> Denouncing corrupt police and politicians involved in crimes in the interior and in the hot, dry "sertão" region.

SÃO LUÍS DO MARANHÃO

Risk factors:

> Crimes committed by police officers.

>Politics: Newspapers not publishing some news items in order to avoid the risk of threats; there is major political polarization in the region.

> The agrarian issue, mainly in the southern region where most ranches are located.

> The indigenous question: some indigenous groups have not received rightful title to their lands and this has created conflicts with the ranchers.

PIAUÍ

Risk factors:

> Organized crime. Things have quietened down following the investigation by the CPI, but many journalists believe it is worse now because they don't know who is who in crime. They fear that the criminals will reorganize and take over key posts in the administration.

> When someone is arrested the news photographer is threatened to not publish the photo.

> Youth gangs that take control of areas and demand the payment of tolls. They are easily released from jail. They issue threats when a reporter goes to speak to family members or when they are interviewed in prison.

> In the Monte Castelo, Satélite, Vila Pé do Arame, Planalto and Ininga neighborhoods drug dealing goes on and it is very difficult for reporters to go there to do any kind of reporting.

>The judiciary. If a newspaper makes a strong charge against a judge or someone with considerable economic or political power, it fears retaliation and may not publish.

CEARÁ

Areas of greatest risk: cities known to be gunman hang-outs – Limoeira do Norte, Mombaça, Tabuleiro, São João de Jaguaribe, Morada Nova, Acaraú.

Risk factors:

> When there are police officers involved in crime, reporters covering the area have difficulty obtaining information from the police.

> Drug trafficking. The CPI has accused people, but they remain unpunished.

> Mayors wield great power in the style of the old-time "bosses." That is why there is no strong press in cities in the interior.

PERNAMBUCO

Risk factors:

> Death squads. Throughout Recife it is difficult to do investigative reporting.

> Contract killings/gunmen.

> News concerning the marijuana producing areas.

ALAGOAS

Areas of greatest risk: Areas under the control of political bosses (mainly in two hot, dry, poverty-stricken desert areas) – Minador do Negrão (family feuds) and Coruripe, São José da Tapera and Arapiraca.

Risk factors:

> Accusations involving congressmen known as "iron congressmen" or "political bosses." Many have been named by the CPI of drug trafficking but they continue operating and hold power in interior cities, principally in the hot, dry regions.

TESTIMONIALS

Walter Rodrigues was a correspondent for *O Estado de S. Paulo*, *O Globo*, Agência Estado news agency and *Isto É*. Today he is a columnist with *Jornal Pequeno*, an independent publication that comes out on Sundays in São Luís, Maranhão:

"Here, crimes committed by police officers are not only covered up by the authorities but also by newspapers, because the Security Minister is considered a saint and because crimes committed by the police are almost always against the disenfranchised. There is a tradition of submission by the press to the police. There have been cases of judges protecting gunmen."

Marconi de Souza, a special reporter for *A Tarde* in Salvador, Bahia state: "There were 10 radio and newspaper reporters murdered in Bahia in the 1980s. When the local press protested the murders it did not mention the names of the alleged culprits. I did a series of reports and I published the names of all 35 involved in those 10 crimes. All that happened was a lawsuit against me that has since been dismissed. I gave the right of reply to all of them but only three wanted the space. Such was the impunity that the others remained silent."

Marcel Leal, editor and publisher of *A Região* in Itabuna, Bahia state, son of **Manoel Leal de Oliveira**, murdered for publishing exposés. "When my father died, many journalists sent e-mails from Presidente Prudente (in São Paulo state), Nova Friburgo (Rio de Janeiro), Florianápolis (Santa Catarina) and Ouro Preto do Oeste (Rondônia, where shortly afterwards a television news anchor was murdered) saying that threats against journalists didn't just happen in Bahia. Impunity generates more crimes. After my father's murder we organized a campaign to get the crime solved and there have been no more killings in Bahia."

José Raimundo, special reporter for TV Bahia in Salvador, Bahia state: "In 1999, I did a program titled "Globo Reportero" about the Atlantic coast forests in Brazil and exposed the activities of loggers operating outside the law, the corruption by sawmill owners of enforcement officers from the Brazilian Environmental Institute (Ibama), clandestine transport of lumber and the deforestation to make way for coffee plantations in southern Bahia. After the report was aired, Ibama fined one

of the businessmen involved who then began sending me messages saying 'Don't come near here, you're not welcome.' On one occasion, I was warned and managed to escape from a restaurant where I was having lunch and where he had sent two people to beat me up."

Efrém Ribeiro Sousa, a reporter for the newspaper *Meio-Norte* and correspondent of *O Globo* in Teresina, Piauí: "In 1997, an engineer was murdered. I discovered that police officers had done it on the orders of Colonel **Correia Lima**, who was later arrested during an investigation into organized crime in the state. He was accustomed to committing all kinds of atrocities: he killed, he shot at people in public places. That's how, when I was investigating the murder of two merchants, I learned that Correia Lima had handcuffed the two of them, taken them to a rural area and shot them to death, then burned their bodies. The police could not say so, but I did, in the newspaper. I received an e-mail containing a death threat. I didn't take it seriously and I published the threat. The colonel hired two soldiers to attack me one day while I was dining at a restaurant ."

Erick Guimaraes, executive editor of *O Povo* in Fortaleza, Ceará, declared, "In 2000, there were denunciations against mayor **Luiz Antônio Farias** in Hidrolândia, a small town in the northern part of Ceará state. They said that Farias used to beat up people. I went to try and talk to him, but he wasn't there. Suddenly, we heard a scream and my photographer ran out into the street to see what was happening. The screams grew louder.

"The mayor had arrived with two bodyguards and they beat up the *O Povo* driver, **Valdir Gomes**, so badly that he lost his hearing. When the photographer ran the bodyguards and the mayor himself turned to beat him too. I ran to call the police. Nobody was there. The mayor was charged by the Public Prosecutor's Office and put on trial. He was ordered to pay damages, but he blamed us, saying that we had invaded the mayor's office and our car did not have the newspaper's logo. In 2003, the mayor was convicted of assaulting another photographer."

Ricardo Perrier, a reporter with the newspaper *Extra* and a stringer for *Jornal do Comercio*, both in Caruaru, Pernambuco, said, "There is a death squad here and the worst criminals continue to go unpunished. So, to avoid problems I stopped writing my police beat column in the newspaper, although there is more crime than anything here. But my theory is that you either publish everything or nothing."

Gilvan Ferreira, a reporter with *Gazeta de Alagoas* in Maceió, Alagoas, declared, "A series of reports on the murder of a jewelry salesman and his driver led to the three reporters investigating the incident being threatened several times. Then I took over the story. The person accused in the crime was city commissioner and police officer **Jesse James Viana**, nicknamed Nemo, who was also the bodyguard of **João Beltrão**, mentioned as one of the "political bosses in a CPI report." They are both now in custody. When Nemo appeared in court he made obscene gestures to the television camera and refused to talk to the press. He had said shortly before, 'I'm going to get all the journalists.' ❑

III
The Central-West Region

Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Goiás
and the Federal District

MATO GROSSO

Areas of greatest risk: Rondonópolis and Cáceres, which have a land border of more than 440 miles with Bolivia. There is a drug smuggling corridor and a great deal of police corruption.

Risk factors:

> Organized crime. For years, former civil police officer **João Arcanjo Ribeiro**, nicknamed "The Chief" for his accumulated wealth, operated in the region as the alleged head of one of the biggest criminal gangs in Brazil. According to a report from the Central Bank, between 1998 and 2002 his companies supposedly received $22 million from the Mato Grosso state legislature and another $2 million from the João Pessoa city hall (in Paraíba state). He had businesses in Mato Grosso, the Federal District, Uruguay and the United States. He was arrested in Montevideo, Uruguay, in April 2003 on charges of money laundering, illicit gambling and arms trafficking. He was also allegedly said to be the mastermind behind of a number of murders, among them that of **Domingo Sávio Brandão**, the owner of the newspaper *Folha do Estado* in Cuiabá, on September 30, 2002. In December 2003 "The Chief" and his wife, **Silvia Chirata**, were sentenced to 37 and 25 years' imprisonment, respectively, for operating a financial institution without the authorization of the Central Bank, for engaging in organized crime, for having a foreign bank account without the knowledge of the Brazilian authorities, and for money laundering. Until December 2004 he remained in Uruguay awaiting extradition to Brazil. (Sources: *Folha de S. Paulo* and *Consultor Jurídico*.)

> The power excercised by "The Chief" in the region left scars and fears.

1. Reports on the criminal activities of contract killers seldom go into detail for fear of reprisals.

2. The Legislative Assembly. There are still some congressmen involved in the Arcanjo affair who have not been punished.

3. When the accusations are against judges, some seek to intimidate by calling to stop the publication of stories and threatening the newspaper with lawsuits.

In late 2004, when **Celso Bejarano** was interviewed he was a reporter with *Folha do Estado* in Cuiabá, Mato Grosso. He said, "Today, it is still risky to write about 'The Chief' Arcanjo because a lot of people are involved. On his IOU list are jurists and congressmen and it's practically impossible to do investigative reporting and accusations of congressmen because the Legislative Assembly is the best client of almost all the news media. You get frustrated waiting for the national papers to write the story and to feel its repercussions here. In my city, besides being a journalist you have to be a warrior."

MATO GROSSO DO SUL

Areas of greatest risk: Campo Grande, Corumbá and on the border Ponta Porá (land border with Paraguay) and Coronel Sapucaia.

Risk factors:

> Organized crime.
> Drug trafficking.
> Clashes with landless peasants.
> Auto theft.
> Arms smuggling.
> Indigenous issues: disputes with ranchers over land ownership.
> White slavery, sexual exploitation of children and teenagers.

BRASÍLIA, FEDERAL DISTRICT

Risk: Lawsuits designed to intimidate newspapers and journalists have become a real industry.

TESTIMONIALS

Carlos Augusto Monfort, news editor and reporter of *Jornal da Praça* in Ponta Porá, Mato Grosso do Sul (on the Paraguayan border): "When they arrested a Paraguayan smuggler we did regular coverage and his family didn't like it. They called my home and the newsroom to warn that I had better watch out and that they knew where my family lived. It didn't go beyond that, but it left me scared. Today I just stick to the facts so I won't run any risks. It was my decision and the newspaper accepted it. But journalists from out of state run fewer risks. Those from Paraguay can investigate more and say that so-and-so is a smuggler. In Brazil that would be more complicated. On top of that, if someone in Ponta Porá receives a threat there is no one that can help you. We no longer publish those stories for fear of retaliation."

Andrei Meirelles, a reporter for the magazine *Época* in Brasília, Federal District: "I did a report about the case of **Eduardo Jorge** (former Secretary General accused of overcharging in public works projects), and I learned that I was being spied on. On another occasion I investigated organized crime in Espírito Santo and the former speaker of the Legislative Assembly, **José Gratz**, on winding up his testimony before the investigation commission came alongside me and told me, 'I'll get you later.'

"We know of many threats. There are a lot of journalists whose telephone conversations have been tapped. And then there's the so-called Operation Gutemberg (an investigation into the sale of news reports), but there's nothing certain on this." ❑

IV
The Southern Region

Santa Catarina,
Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul

RISK FACTORS

> Drug trafficking and smuggling on the borders with Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay.

> Friendship Bridge (linking Iguazú Falls in Brazil with Ciudad del Este in Paraguay), an area of arms, goods and drug smuggling and auto theft.

> Coverage of landless peasants/agrarian issues.

> Illegal logging, deforestation, illegal fishing.

> Police beat coverage.

> Child and teenage prostitution.

> Numbers game (illegal gambling).

> There is a long list of lawsuits against newspapers and journalists in a bid to intimidate them.

TESTIMONIALS

Giovanni Grizotti, a reporter for Rádio Gaúcha and RBS TV in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul: "They have threatened me on many occasions. In 2002, as a result of a report on private security companies that overcharged, I received phone calls but I never stopped reporting what was happening. A new call warned me, 'you got away, next time we'll get you.' Again I reported what had happened, saying that if anything, it spurred me on. For many days I talked about the matter on the radio. The threats ended."

Humberto Trezzi, a special reporter for the newspaper *Zero Hora* in Porto Alegre: "I went to Rio de Janeiro 10 times covering the drug wars and what was happening in the city. I covered two massacres, one in Vigário Geral, in which 21 died, and the other in Nova Brasília, with 15 dead, and the murder of Tim Lopes and I did a report on the 'killers for hire.' They shot at us twice, knowing that we were journalists."

Mauri König, a reporter with *Gazeta do Povo* in Curitiba, Paraná: "I had to leave Iguaçú Falls because of threats after publishing a story on the participation of Civil Police chiefs in stolen vehicles being taken apart in Brazil and shipped to Paraguay. The Brazilian police took money to recover the stolen vehicles. I discovered this when my own car was stolen. As a common citizen (not as a reporter, even if they knew I was) I asked the police to find my vehicle. They found it the next day. They said it was in Paraguay and that the thieves wanted $1,500 to return it. The newspaper lent me the money, which I handed over to the police superintendent. It was a network, and I denounced it. No sooner had I done so than they began to threaten me. I moved from Iguaçú Falls once and for all."

Carlos Wagner, special reporter for *Zero Hora* in Porto Alegre: "I did a report on drug dealing on indigenous reservations. A got a call on my cellphone threatening to kill me. I know who it was calling, but I want to know who is behind it. The person

who calls you is not the danger, it's the one who gave him the order to call.

"In Rio Grande do Sul there's a very subtle danger in the tricks they play to discredit a reporter. They use false sources and offer a lot of information by people who later refuse to confirm they have given it. To guard against danger you need to be rigorous in fact checking because news companies have faced an avalanche of lawsuits."

Zito Terres, a cameraman with TV Cataratas in Iguaçú Falls, Paraná: "In the border region I come across smugglers, traffickers of arms, drugs, cigarettes and stolen vehicles on the street every day. I work a lot with a mini camera. Once I crossed the border alongside a stolen truck with a hidden camera and the next day I was at the same place making another report.

"In street demonstrations there are all kinds of people and you never know who's going to throw a rock at you. I have been punched and hit with glass fragments and once I saw a person drop dead five yards from me. I also saw another person struck by a bullet during a demonstration by smugglers in Paraguay.

"The Paraguayan police use real bullets, they are untrained and cameramen find themselves in the crossfire between police and demonstrators. If I do a report in Paraguay for a week, I avoid going back there for awhile. The Friendship International Bridge area is a dangerous area for all those who work there.

"Here, you go into a slum only when accompanied by police. In 1998, I was assaulted in a shantytown and they stole my camera. I was forced to lie down on the ground with a gun at my neck for half an hour. When they realized I was from television, the police managed to negotiate the return of my equipment. A week later they returned my tapes – all destroyed. That was a report about children involved in drug dealing." ❑

V

The Southeast Region

Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo,
Espírito Santo and Minas Gerais

RIO DE JANEIRO

Areas of greatest risk: Slums and hills.

> Drug dealers in Rocinha are used to seeing the press, there to cover other activities such as commerce, banking, community activities and federal government facilities (The House of Culture).

> There are many criminals in the areas surrounding the Mangueira hillside.

> The Coréia slum is the most dangerous because a lot of police officers are in collusion with bandits there. It is a flat, very large slum. Drug dealers are well-armed with landmines and grenades. Nearby are the shantytowns São and Rebu in Senador Rio Camará. It is not recommended to go there at night unless you are familiar with the place.

> The Vigário Geral slum is a hotbed, very hostile, with a lot of drug dealers. It is possible to go in by car, but that means you cannot move around as people are not used to drivers there. When you enter a shantytown on foot you go one step at a time, you get a feel for the climate, you chat. A car scares bandits.

> The Penha Complex, where Vila Cruzeiro is located (where journalist **Tim Lopes** was killed) is very hostile. People there keep to themselves and the fact that it is on a hillside makes entry difficult – the main roads there are heavily trafficked and they are narrow and bisected by other roads.

> The Itararé highway and Itaoca Avenue lead to the Complexo do Alemão, one of the most dangerous in Rio de Janeiro. No one ventures there after 6:00 p.m.

> Automóvel Clube Avenue (also known as Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue) is dangerous because vehicles are stolen to make convoys for armed men. It is long. There is a stretch that is very dangerous in Inhaúma that goes from the slums to the Baixada Fluminense by way of Irajá, near the Galinha shantytown. Rival gangs operating there pose the danger.

> The Guarda slum does not appear to be dangerous, but it is easy to take the wrong road – and drug dealers are nervous types. A wrong turn on the road to Madureira could prove to be a fatal mistake.

Other violent cities in Greater Rio de Janeiro are:

SÃO GONÇALO

Areas of greatest risk: Areas where a journalist can go in only with a police escort: Jardim Catarina, Chumbada Hill, Menino Deus Hill, Coruja Hill, the Salgueiro complex, Estado Hill, Marítimo Hill.

NITERÓI

Areas of greatest risk: Alagoinha Complex, Caramujo, Céu Hill. The dealers are from Grota, Rio de Janeiro (they use the garbage incinerator to dispose of their victims).

Other kinds of risks:

Arms: In 2004, Rio de Janeiro traffickers began to use grenades and missile launchers; they shot at a Military Police bus and the impact sent it into a ravine. In

April, that year, police discovered and seized eight landmines, 161 grenades, 30,000 rounds of rifle, pistol and shotgun ammunition, a rifle and 10 bulletproof vests in Senador Camará, a suburb in the western area.

Assaults: Outlaws have mugged journalists to steal their photographic equipment to sell and make some money.

Traffickers:

> The younger the drug dealer the worse for the press. Because he is immature, he feels powerful and he believes he can do anything. In general, adults think before assaulting a reporter.

> Things are more dangerous when outside traffickers take over an area. They are generally aggressive towards the locals and reporters. When a trafficker has grown up in the place, knows everyone and is known, he feels safer and does not act so impulsively.

> When a trafficker allows a reporter to go into a shantytown he is accompanied at all times.

> Some reporters believe it is a good idea to limit reports on outlaws so their legend and fame are not increased.

> Sometimes an outlaw is so comfortable within his own "space" that the interview goes very smoothly. The reporter hopes the police don't appear so that there is no confrontation.

MINAS GERAIS

Areas of greatest risk: Pedreira Prado Lopes (northeast region of Belo Horizonte), Cabana do Pai Tomás (western area), Vila Pinho (metropolitan area), Ibirité.

Risk factors:

> Accusations against police.

> Accusations of politicians' and police officers' involvement with illegal slot machines and bingo games.

> Covering slums.

> Accusations against the government. Censorship.

ESPÍRITO SANTO

Risk factors:

> Still haunting the region is the specter of former state congressman **José Carlos Gratz**, speaker of the Legislative Assembly, who was accused of being the alleged mastermind behind several murders and involvement in illegal gambling. He exercised almost total control for 12 years. He was sentenced to 15 years on charges of corruption but his case is on appeal for dismissal in the state court. Meanwhile, in February 2006 he was released under a writ of "habeas corpus". Although he cannot seek reelection because of the charges against him, local journalists believe he will

try to do so, which would be a danger because he has the people behind him. The fear of his group is so great that reporters threatened by them have asked for their names not to be released in this investigation, for fear of retaliation.

> The situation in the state began to change after the federal government sent investigators in 2002. The atmosphere was very tense because of inquiries into corruption, the emergence of organized crime and the role of vested interests. There was an air of instability. Large corporations were blackmailed by congressmen seeking campaign funds and those who did not pay up found themselves in serious trouble.

> Organized crime lost political clout but there is widespread fear that it will retrench and regain power in the next elections.

> Drug trafficking. There are some outlying areas (Guaranbuns and Vila Velha) where reporters dare not go.

> The numbers game. This goes on, although illegal bingo parlors have been shut down. Since it is an unlawful activity with the participation of members of the police force and politicians, most journalists barely report it. It differs here from Rio de Janeiro where the "bicheiros" (the persons operating the game and receiving the money) are well known figures.

SÃO PAULO

Areas of greatest risk: Jardim Farina slum in São Bernardo (there is a curfew in effect there, although police deny this. Reporters hold their interviews from a distance); the Pontal do Paranapanema region; and Presidente Prudente where the Presidente Bernardes penitentiary houses drug traffickers and other criminals considered to be dangerous.

It is dangerous to go into to the southernmost area of the state capital, to districts such as Jardim São Luís and Jardim Ângela, and to the neighborhoods of São Mateus and the Buraco Quente slum in the eastern part of town. Other danger spots are Osasco, Parelheiros, Jardim das Imbuias, Sapo slum, Jardim Damasceno, Jardim Periperi and Jardim Elisa Maria. In the south of the city is the Capão Redondo area. Depending the situation at any given time reporters may not go in there.

There are shantytowns that reporters can enter only with prior permission from the drug dealers. Many have had their cameras stolen. Journalists are not held in respect.

Risk factors:

> Police, to show how efficient they are, sometimes arrest innocent people and reporters are not allowed to interview them. Even police chiefs are supposedly forbidden to grant interviews. To go into a police precinct or have access to case files you need to have the authorization of the press office.

> There are a large number of lawsuits filed against newspapers and journalists to intimidate them.

> The number of homicide investigations that are kept confidential is on the increase. When a victim is a famous person or has been killed by a police officer, judges have ordered the inquiries to be kept secret and journalists have no access to the information.

> The most frequent accusations concerning the police are for corruption, abuse of authority and shortcomings in the prison system.

TESTIMONIALS

Alex Silveira, injured while working in São Paulo and currently a freelance news photographer in the Amazon region: "On May 18, 2000, I was covering a teachers' strike in São Paulo when a rubber bullet fired by police struck me in the left eye. I suffered a detached retina and was left with only 10% to 15% vision in that eye. What made it worse is that my other eye has been bad since birth.

"They shot at the press. I wasn't wearing the jacket that identified me as such, but I was carrying a camera and a camera bag. The military police opened an investigation and so did the civilian police – with no result – and civil proceedings are under way, though at a snail's pace.

"I think the major problem is the lack of police training. They regard every situation where the press is present as something personal against them. I was threatened more than once while doing that coverage. It was a protest demonstration by strikers, it wasn't an armed conflict. We shouldn't have to take precautions under these circumstances; on the contrary, that should only be necessary when we're dealing with a war."

Roberta Trindade, of the newspaper *O Fluminense* in Niterói, Rio de Janeiro: "I was thrown out of the Salgueiro Complex when Claudinho (of the popular Claudinho and Buchecha singing duo) died. I went to see where he had been living and a local community leader told me to get out, otherwise they were going to "microwave" me, like they did to **Tim Lopes**, a reporter murdered in a Rio shantytown. After his body was dismembered his remains were incinerated at a site known locally as "the microwave". I don't think he was being serious, but I left anyway because after covering crime and the slums for a long time you develop a sixth sense, you sense when the atmosphere is getting hot, when people act differently and something might happen."

Jorge Martins, night beat reporter for *O Globo* in Rio de Janeiro: "Most police action happens in the early hours of the morning. There is an imminent risk in going to certain places in Rio de Janeiro. We go in groups. That's good, because seeing the number of cars makes the criminals think twice, apart from thinking we may be the police. The vehicles have to carry identification so we don't become a police target. The world is different at night, people are scared of their own shadows and it's riskier going into a dark street or slum."

Marcos Almeida, a reporter with the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *Extra*: "I did a series of reports on irregularities in bus companies in 2003. On the fourth day of

publication the Security Minister called the editor to tell him that they had recorded a conversation between two individuals who said they were going to kill me. The conversation had gone like this: 'We have to take those buses out of circulation because the reporter has found out all about it.' 'No, it's better to take that Marcos, the *Extra* reporter, out of circulation.' 'But who's going to do it?' 'Tell Souza. He'll do it.'

"We discovered that Souza is a former member of the military police accused of a number of homicides in the Baixada Fluminense. And the company we had written about is located there.

"Out of caution I stopped signing my stories after learning of the wiretap. But we didn't stop publishing them. I stayed in a hotel for a week and a half, under the protection of the Civil Police and very scared, including for my wife who is also a journalist. I was certain she was being followed.

"Having a bodyguard doesn't necessarily mean you're safe because you don't know the police officers and with all the corruption in Rio de Janeiro that can be very dangerous. While doing a story on trafficking in counterfeit products three months later I discovered that one of the people assigned as my bodyguard was a supplier of pirated products. I was at a loss. I did the report but I didn't mention that cop's participation because he knew all about my routine."

João Antônio Barros, a special reporter for *O Dia* in Rio de Janeiro: "A team from the newspaper was in the Vigário Geral shantytown and the police went there to conduct a search. The team had to stay in the local Community Association premises. The editor entered, in a panic. The reporter was the least nervous – the worst thing that can happen is that a reporter becomes scared and doesn't do the story. It's not easy but if he doesn't stay calm he's likely to give up on the story. That kind of censorship is worse than any other. Increasingly coverage is being done by telephone and less on the street. At *O Dia* it is forbidden to do reports on shantytowns in the style of 'A Day in the life of a Slum' or on drug dealing rules. Now you only report on what emerges on the streets outside the hillside slum areas. The murder of **Tim Lopes** was a wake-up call. People are a lot more scared."

Márcia Brasil, a reporter with Rio de Janeiro newspaper *O Dia*: "I was going to do a light, one-page story for the Sunday edition with photographer **Carlos Moraes** on the Civil Police's aerial support for land operations, the novelty being they used drug sniffing dogs. Usually such stories were pretty heavy-handed so the idea was to do something lighter. We would go to the Maré Complex, which is a hill where there's less risk and it would be easier to take photos. But in flying over Morro da Providência (the oldest shantytown in Rio) the police helicopter came under rifle fire from drug dealers. The police responded. We saw them going into the slum by land in pursuit of two men.

The news came later that the men had died in the shootout.

In publishing this report my life turned upside down. I was subjected to pressure, but no threats. I didn't want to accuse anyone unjustly until I was sure what the photos showed. There were demands from colleagues and police officers who also

wanted to know what was in the photos. I don't know how they found out we had the photos. I received phone calls from a religious leader telling me that an attempt would be made on my life and another criticizing me for protecting criminals. One even suggested they were going to put drugs in my car. I stopped answering the phone.

"I traveled for a while. I came back a month later. One weekend I was assigned to the police beat and told to go to the police precinct. The police chief there recognized me and ordered me to leave because, he said, I was dangerous. I got the information I needed from outside. When I got back to the newsroom I was so nervous that I cried. I felt bad after they called me dangerous. It was an attempt at intimidation, a way of undermining my self-esteem."

Carlos Moraes, an *O Dia* news photographer in Rio de Janeiro, gave this version: "On September 27, 2004, I went with reporter **Márcia Brasil** to do a report with the Civil Police's Special Resources Coordination Unit (Core) in Rio de Janeiro on dogs trained to sniff out drugs in the hillside slums. We were going to fly over the Maré shantytown to photograph strategic points, among them drug houses where narcotics are dealt and used.

"While flying over the Providência shantytown the helicopter was shot at by criminals; the police commander ordered us to get out and called for help from other officers on the ground. At that moment, I was squatting down and I put my hand out of the helicopter and began to take photos without knowing what I was shooting.

"The drug dealers fired several times. The ground police patrol arrived. I took shots of the men who had surrendered to them and then their being carried to the hospital. So far I hadn't seen what I had photographed from above. It was only when I got back to the newsroom that I found out there was one photo that showed the guys cornered in an alleyway, but it was very dark. You could see police officers pointing their guns at them. We enlarged the photo and what we saw indicated that this was an execution.

"The photo was published on the front page and reproduced by a number of other papers. The police officers were furious. They called asking for me; I didn't answer. I was scared and very concerned for my family. The newspaper's executives backed me up. I went into hiding for several days and then traveled for a month – covering politics. I'm now working normally, but my lifestyle has changed. I cover sports and urban affairs. I calmed down a bit when a report appeared in *O Dia* saying that the Security Ministry, Civil Police chief and state government would be held responsible should anything happen to Márcia or me."

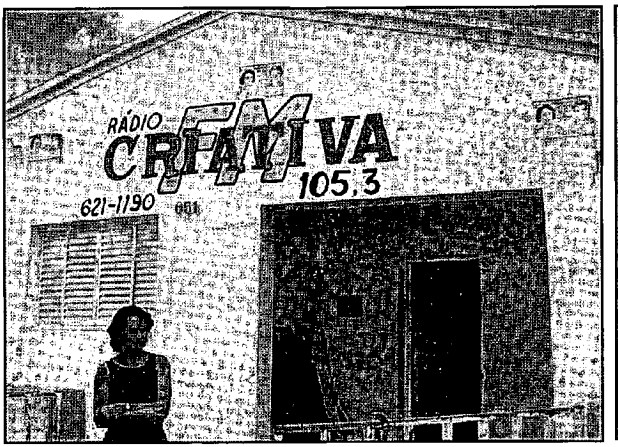
Alcyr José Ramos Martins, a news photographer with *O São Gonçalo* in São Gonçalo, Rio de Janeiro: " On May 1, 2004, I shot photos of a police officer who was in jail for extorting money from a shopkeeper. They released him 60 days later and he came after me. He thought I was the one that had caused his arrest. I didn't even know him.

"One morning he and two others beat me up, punching and kicking me. They didn't kill me because there were a lot of people who knew me in the street and

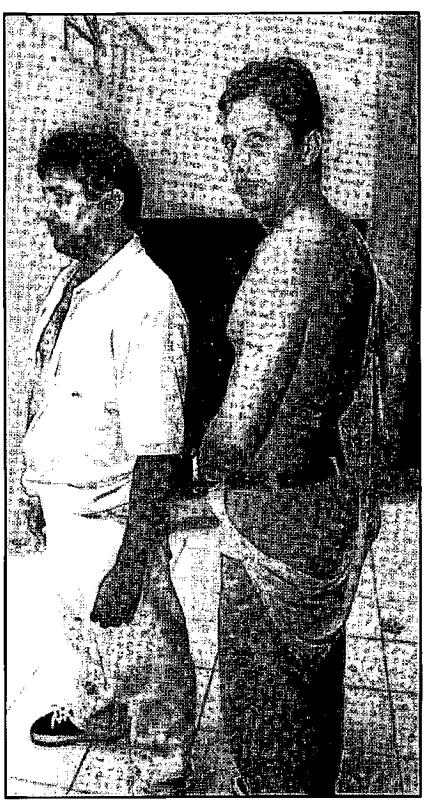
they yelled at them to stop. The cop said he was going to kill me – my daughter and me – at the next opportunity. I reported what had happened at the police precinct. I changed my address. I changed my work schedule. I was traumatized and bruised. I still cover the police beat but I'm scared that it might happen again."

Susana Loureiro Martins de Castro, crime editor of *A Tribuna* in Vitória, Espírito Santo: "Drug trafficking here is not as organized as in Rio de Janeiro. We can still gather information in the shantytowns. The people are scared, but they talk. The crime bosses are not so powerful here. To appear in the press is like awarding a trophy to a criminal, the press helps create myths. There are criminals that call you on cellphones from jail to ask for coverage. In some cases we do it. But if I were to say the information came from a prison, their cellphone would be confiscated and they would come after me. Closeness to criminals is dangerous. We keep the source but you have to know how to handle him. So long as he doesn't threaten me, I manage to keep the relationship going – You're passing me the information, that's OK, I'm going to check it out, but I'm not your buddy.

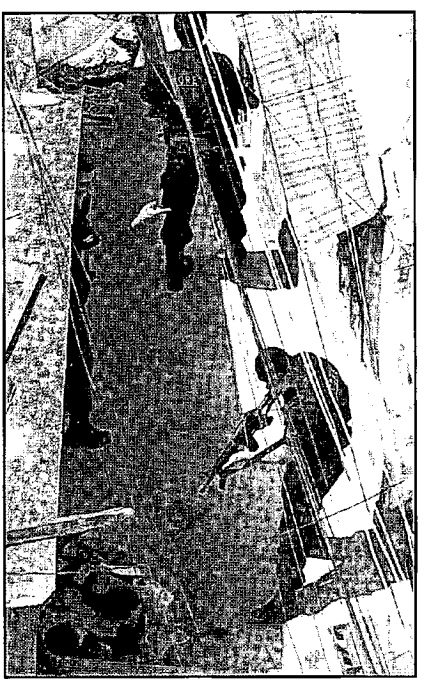
"Another problem is that when the police jail a criminal, we publish the news but we don't know when they'll free him. That happened with a shopkeeper who was taken into custody accused of killing a police chief. We did the story and published his photo. That same day he was released under a writ of habeas corpus. He called me asking me to publish the fact that he had been released, otherwise he was going 'to take steps.' I then published a news item saying, 'Merchant freed from custody.' Just think. He had murdered a police chief. To kill a journalist would probably be much easier." ❑



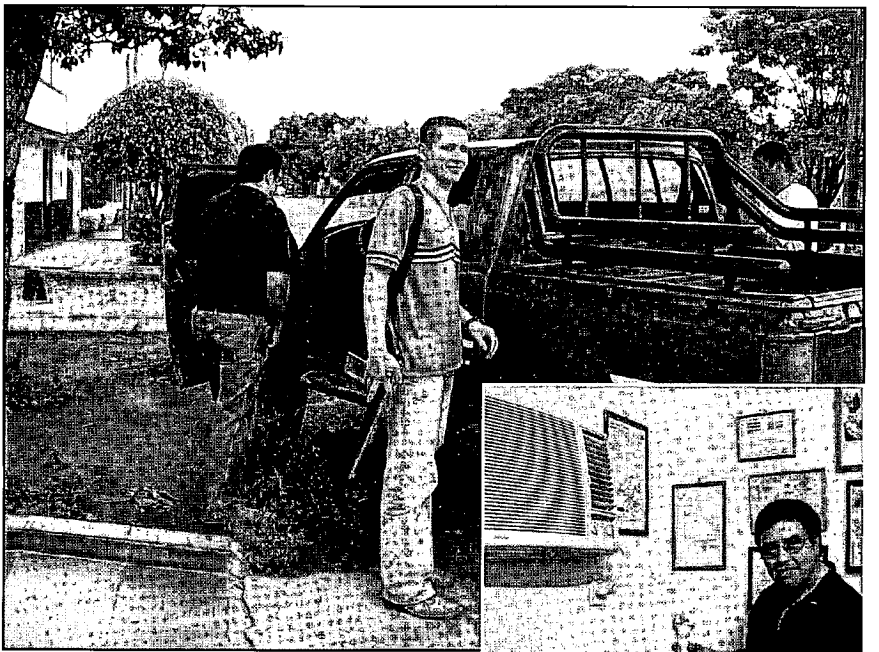
Journalist Jorge Lourençco do Santos, murdered in Santana do Ipanema, Alagoas state. At left, his widow outside his radio station studio. *(Photo Clarinha Glock)*

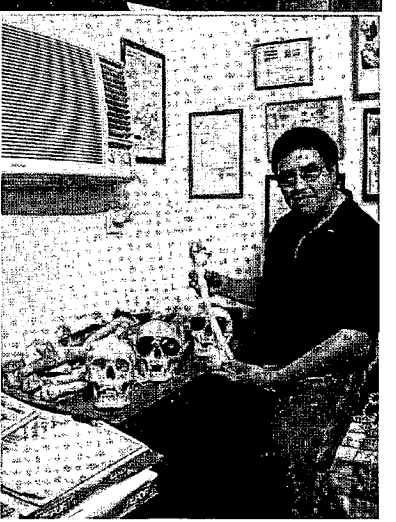


On February 22, 2000 driver Valdir Gomes (right) and photographer Marcos Studart of the Fortaleza newspaper *O Povo* were beaten up while reporting in Hidrolândia. Their case was reported to Amnesty International. *(Photo Jarbas Oliveira/O Povo)*



On September 27, 2004 photographer Carlos Moraes and reporter Márcia Brasil were covering a police operation when their helicopter came under fire from drug traffickers in Muro da Previdência. Moraes took photos of police officers attacking persons who shortly afterwards turned up dead. The pictures, published in a number of newspapers, led to threats being issued against the two news journalists. *(Photo Carlos Moraes/O Dia)*



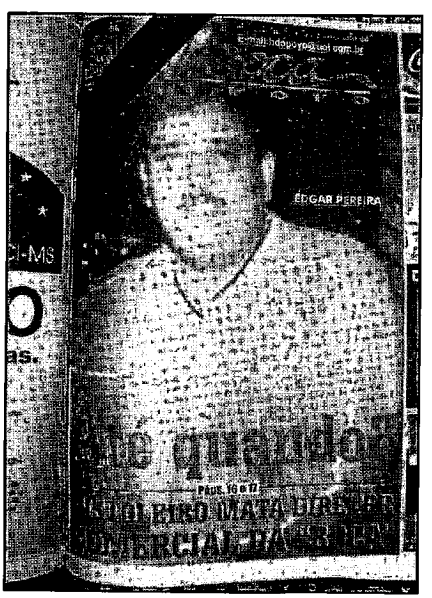


Cándido Figuereido, correspondent of the Paraguayan daily *ABC Color* in Pedro Juan Caballero, on the Paraguay-Brazil border, shows a collection of human bones in his office, at right. Above, he is accompanied by bodyguards and wears a bulletproof vest. *(Photos Clarinha Glock)*

Ponte da Amizade (Friendship Bridge): A common route for traffickers between Brazil and Paraguay. *(Photo Clarinha Glock)*

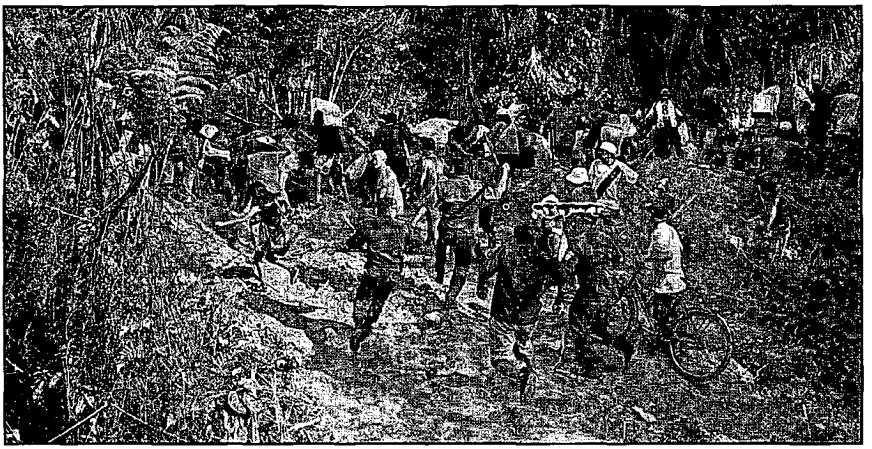
A family memento of journalist José Carlos Araújo Silva, murdered on April 24, 2004 outside the radio station where he worked in Timbaúba, Pernambuco state. *(Photo Clarinha Glock)*

Journalist Donizete Adalto dos Santos, murdered in Tersina, Piauí state, is honored in this monument erected in his memory on a public street. *(Photo Clarinha Glock)*

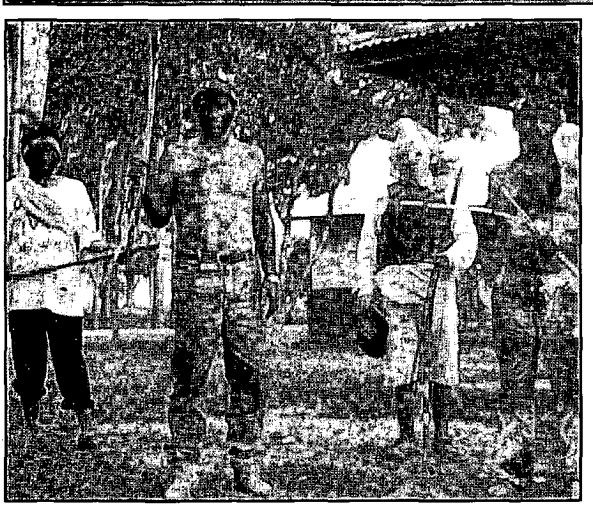


The cover of the magazine *Boca do Povo* in Campo Grande, reporting on the murder of its reporter Edgard Ribeiro Pereira de Oliveira. *(Photo Clarinha Glock)*

In October 2004 a police operation using helicopters hunted down assailants in the center of Maceió. *(Photo Gilbero Farias/Gazeta de Alagoas)*

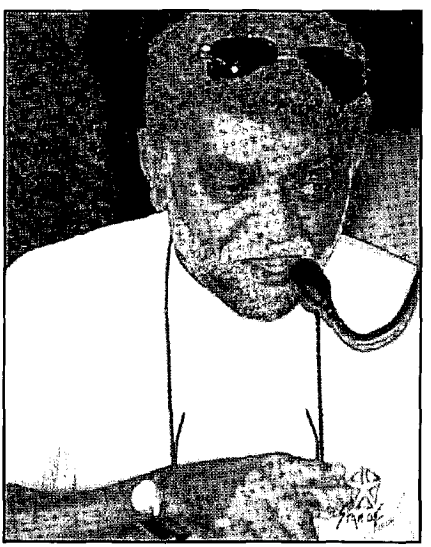


A 2004 eviction of squatters on land in the western part of Manaus, known as Geladinho, led to a clash in which an indigenous person died. This kind of situation, very frequent in the Brazilian provinces, represents a challenge for news coverage. *(Photo Alberto Araújo)*



Folha de S. Paulo reporter Hudson Corrêa and his driver were held in January 2004 during coverage of a ranch invasion by an indigenous group in Japorã, Mato Grosso do Sul, close to the Paraguayan border. The bodies of both were painted as a sign of war (left). At one point the hostages found themselves caught between the police and their captors. These photos were taken by Hudson.

On December 17, 2003 Col. Walter Ferreira, jailed in Acre, was transferred to Vitória, Espirito Santo, to testify in court. He was named in a report by the Parliamentary Investigative Commission (CPI) on Organized Crime. A military unit was brought to the state to reduce tension and put an end to veiled threats the press was receiving for publishing the story. *(Photo Nestor Müller/A Gazeta/Vitória)*



Former police officer Manoel Soares de Freitas, known as Falcon, informed on policemen and politicians in Pernambuco involved in organized crime. Based on his testimony, the Legislative Assembly expelled Rep. Eudo Magalhães, who later returned to his post. Falcon was murdered in what is believed to have been an act to silence him. A number of journalists were threatened over coverage of this. *(Diário de Pernambuco file photo)*

Journalist Jorge Vieira da Costa, from Tión, Maranháo, was murdered after broadcasting accusations on his radio program. Above, his official campaign photo when he ran for city commission, alongside a campaign T-shirt made by his brothers for the 2004 election. *(Photos by Clarinha Glock)*

Keeping Safe on Risk Missions

A Practical Guide for Journalists

These are recommendations and strategies to avoid or lower risks and threats while reporting news in hostile environments and are applicable in specific situations. There is no general rule. Every journalist should use his or her good judgment and common sense when faced with the changing conditions in which he conducts his work.

Opinions on ways to confront threats are divided. Some believe they should be ignored to avoid making the enemy angrier. Others feel that it is best to make them known and use them as a weapon of confrontation.

Different guides and manuals on this topic circulate in the worldwide press. The following is a summary of the most important considerations benefiting journalists and/or the media for which they work. Ideas and text have been taken from IAPA publications as well as manuals for journalists in conflict; for example, from the Press Freedom Foundation, UNESCO, and Antonio Narino project in Colombia; Committee to Protect Journalists; International Federation of Journalists; Reporters without Borders; Freedom Forum. Suggestions have also been taken from reporters interviewed for this guide.

Several of these recommendations were obtained from courses on Practicing Journalism in Hostile Environments organized by the IAPA in collaboration with the Argentine Center for Joint Training Peace Operations (Caecopaz), in Buenos Aires, Argentina; and with the British firm, Centurion Risk Assessment Services, in Woodstock, Virginia.

AT THE PERSONAL LEVEL

- The journalist is more important than the story he or she is investigating or reporting. No story is worth a life.
- Know your level of physical fitness.
- If you have been threatened change sections in the newspaper, don't sign the stories, leave the city for a while. Or, in extreme cases, move away indefinitely.
- If authorities cannot guarantee a reporter's safety, he needs to leave the country.
- On a personal telephone, use caller ID and voicemail.
- When going home, go around the entire block and turn you high beams on.
- Have a bright light at the front of your house.
- Change routes between work and home.
- Don't stop your vehicle in the same lane as motorcycles.
- Always carry ID.
- Have a list of telephone numbers and addresses of people you can trust wherever you are so you can ask for help or rescue in case of an emergency.
- Study the map before going to the place where you will be working, identify hideouts and ideal places to tape or film without being seen or without becoming a target
- Designate a person to be your support contact who knows where you are going, the expected date of return and who knows whom to contact in case of an emergency.

- Never carry a weapon.
- Don't point with your finger. It could be mistaken for a gun barrel.
- Try to get to know the other reporters going with you. Don't trust strangers.
- Take into account that stories in remote places far from authorities or medical services carry a greater risk.
- Weigh the known risks and possible benefits of the story. Sometimes you can report long distance.
- Mark your vehicle very clearly with the word PRESS.
- Don't move around in police vehicles or rental cars that resemble them.
- Never avoid checkpoints or open maps in public.
- In ambushes, the driver is the main target. The passenger should be ready to know how to use the emergency brake.
- It is better to keep the vehicle dirty from the trip: it will be less noticeable.
- Carry a white handkerchief.
- Be careful in selecting competent local help (guides, drivers, pilots).
- Dress according to the circumstances to blend in with the people and not stand out. Don't use olive green color clothing.

AT THE NEWSPAPER

- It is important that the newspaper or media outlet have a strategy in place to protect its staff, as well as have safety measures at its headquarters and other locations.
- Journalists with experience in covering violence should be sent to risk zones. Amateurs should be accompanied by an experienced journalist.
- Receptionists should be trained to prevent unknown individuals from entering.
- Monitor those entering and leaving with a hidden camera.
- Every once in a while rotate journalists assigned to hostile issues.
- Publish attacks and threats against journalists and press freedom that affect other newspapers or media outlets.

DURING RISKY REPORTING

The reporter should have a basic first-aid kit and other survival items, including a sleeping bag, extra batteries, plastic bags, etc. Also, all documents should be current (business card, personal ID, vaccination card, driver's license, passport).

During the different seminars the IAPA offers, it is recognized that it is the obligation of the company, and especially the journalist, to watch out for his safety and protection. Therefore, we suggest the following web sites that contain manuals and guides on this topic: **www.sipiapa.org**; **www.institutodeprensa.com**; **www.impunidad.com**; **www.centurion-riskservices.co.uk**; **www.flip.org.co**; **www.mediosparalapaz.org**; **www.ifex.org**; **www.rsf.org**; **www.ift.org**; **www.cpj.org**

Essential Documents Against Impunity Supported by IAPA

Conclusions of the Hemisphere Conference on Unpunished Crimes Against Journalists

Guatemala City, Guatemala
July 30 – August 1, 1997

WE CONDEMN, WE DEMAND
DECLARATION OF REPUDIATION

THE HEMISPHERE CONFERENCE ON UNPUNISHED CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS, called into session by the Inter American Press Association to review the serious consequences that this situation implies for freedom of expression in all its manifestations, such as freedom of the press and the right to information, and for society and democracy, declares that:

WHEREAS the right to life and to personal freedom and well-being, to reliance on personal safety and protection under the law, as well as freedom of expression are fundamental rights of persons recognized and guaranteed by international conventions and instruments ;

WHEREAS freedom of expression is a fundamental right of all persons and is the prerequisite and guarantee of all other rights and freedoms in a democracy;

WHEREAS the Declaration of Chapultepec, paragraph 4, states that "freedom of expression and of the press are severely limited by murder, kidnapping, pressure, intimidation, the unjust imprisonment of journalists, the destruction of facilities, violence of any kind and impunity for perpetrators; such acts must be investigated promptly and punished harshly ";

WHEREAS in the last 10 years 173 journalists were murdered in the Americas for practicing their profession and the majority of these crimes remain unpunished;

WHEREAS this fact has been proved by the IAPA in investigations conducted in Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico and by special missions carried out in other countries of the Americas, such as in the case of Argentina, and the responsibility by commission or omission of the authorities in failing to solve these crimes has been demonstrated;

WHEREAS this situation of impunity is the result of negligent, deceitful or complacent conduct on the part of public officials;

WHEREAS the murder of journalists goes beyond the taking of their lives, it presupposes deprivation of freedom of expression with all that this implies in the restriction of freedoms and rights of society as a whole

The Hemisphere Conference resolves:

TO REPUDIATE the murder of and all physical violence directed against

journalists as one of the greatest crimes against society, in that it restricts freedom of expression and, as a result, all other rights and freedoms;

TO REPUDIATE acts of commission or omission by those who have the responsibility to investigate and mete out punishment for those crimes but fail to do so, allowing the guilty to go unpunished, thus making the matter even more serious;

TO DEMAND that the authorities carry out their duty to prevent, investigate and mete out punishment for these crimes and to make good for their consequences.

WHAT WE MUST DO
INSTITUTIONAL ACTION PLAN

THE REPRESENTATIVES OF ORGANIZATIONS dedicated to the defense of press freedom propose this Institutional Action Plan, within the framework of the Hemisphere Conference on Unpunished Crimes Against Journalists, organized by the Inter American Press Association.

We pledge:

1.To recognize the importance of the Recommendations to Governments of the Hemisphere Conference on Unpunished Crimes Against Journalists and in accordance with them to take specific joint actions to solve the unpunished crimes against journalists.

2. To encourage the dispatch of multi-organization investigative missions to the countries concerned, so that the authorities may guarantee the safety of journalists and conduct investigations and legal proceedings without delay.

3. To coordinate widespread publicity campaigns on unpunished crimes against journalists and other acts of violence to bring about news coverage of all violations of press freedom.

4. To encourage journalism schools and mass communication departments to include in their curricula studies of the terrible impact that crimes against journalists, and their going unpunished, have on democratic societies. In addition, to promote the inclusion in the curricula of subjects or specific courses on press freedom and to coordinate activities among press associations, news media and journalism schools.

5. To recommend to the participating organizations that they study ways of

funding legal actions and investigations so that crimes against journalists do not go unpunished.

6. To intensify and promote the exchange of information and objectives among organizations dedicated to the protection, defense and promotion of press freedom, making the issue of lack of punishment in the murder of journalists a priority;

7. To circulate this document to other institutions dedicated to the defense, protection and promotion of human rights, freedom of expression and press freedom around the world and, in this way, to begin to encourage working commitments.

8. To create a multi-organizational group with the aim of putting the Institutional Action Plan into effect with the collaboration of the Inter American Press Association.

International Press Institute (IPI); Reporters Without Borders (RSF); Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ);World Association of Newspapers (FIEJ); The Freedom Forum; Canadian Committee to Protect Journalists (CCPJ); International Federation of Journalists (FIP); World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC); International Association of Broadcasting (IBA); P.E.N. International; Argentine Newspaper Association (ADEPA); International Center for Journalists Knight International Press Fellowships ;Guatemalan Journalists Association (APG); Journalists Human Rights Office, Peru; Argentine Inland Newspaper Association (ADIRA); Inter American Press Association (IAPA)

THE GUILTY MUST BE BROUGHT TO JUSTICE RECOMMENDATIONS TO COMBAT THE GUILTY GOING UNPUNISHED

THE HEMISPHERE CONFERENCE ON UNPUNISHED CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS makes the following recommendations to combat the impunity that surrounds crimes against journalists.

1. To urge national congresses to adopt the principle of not permitting the statute of limitations to expire on crimes against the person when they are perpetrated to impede the exercise of freedom of information and expression or when intended to obstruct justice. Also to urge the prohibition of amnesties or pardons of those responsible for these crimes.

2. To urge the national congresses to improve legislation to provide for the trial and conviction of the masterminds of murders of those who exercise the right to freedom of expression.

3. To encourage constitutional reforms or interpretations to set forth that the laws and regulations governing states of exception (state of siege) not permit or authorize restrictions or limitations on news coverage and press freedom.

4. To enact in those countries where necessary laws prohibiting trial by military or special tribunals of those accused of crimes against journalists while carrrying out their work.

On Specific Cases

With respect to the specific cases that the Inter American Press Association has investigated in its Unpunished Crimes Against Journalists project and which were presented in this Hemisphere Conference, it is recommended:

5. To ask the governments of Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico to give the necessary cooperation to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission which, at the request of the IAPA, has agreed to take up the investigation and corresponding legal proceedings in the following cases: Víctor Manuel Oropeza (Case No.11.740); Guillermo Cano Isaza (Case No.11.728); Carlos Lajud Catalán (Case No.11.731); Héctor Félix Miranda (File No.11.739); Irma Flaquer Azurdia (File No.11.766); as well as the case of Jorge Carpio Nicolle (File No.11.333), which the commission had already begun before the IAPA's investigation.

COLOMBIA

6. To call upon the national attorney general's office to review the investigation of the murder of Guillermo Cano Isaza and the legal findings in the case in order to document possible connections among the actual perpetrators of this crime and the murder of Giraldo Galvis, the Cano family's lawyer, and the irregularities in the investigations and verdicts.

7. To urge the attorney general's office to change the venue of the new investigations of the Lajud Catalán case to a court based in Bogotá and to look into why the investigation during the past three years has not included those suspected of masterminding the crime.

8. To call upon the attorney general's office to investigate the death threats made to relatives of Lajud Catalán and to provide them due protection and that it extend the investigations into corruption in the signing of municipal contracts related to the crime and the possible involvement of former government officials.

GUATEMALA

9. To insist to the president of Guatemala that he demand that the Public Ministry hold an exhaustive investigation to determine the actual perpetrators and the masterminds of the murder of Jorge Carpio Nicolle and fulfill the obligation of guaranteeing the security of the investigators, plaintiffs, prosecution witnesses and judges.

10. To ask the president of Guatemala to encourage a thorough official investigation to determine the whereabouts of Irma Flaquer and to have the attorney general intervene to begin legal proceedings against those who may be responsible for Flaquer's forced disappearance, a crime whose statute of limitation should not expire under international law and the recent Law of National Reconciliation.

11. To urge the Human Rights Office to appoint officials to investigate, in particular, the violent death or disappearance of journalists Jorge Carpio Nicolle and Irma Flaquer Azurdia; that it be a party in the respective proceedings, supervising strict compliance with the law in those proceedings.

12. To urge the Commission For Historical Clarification to conduct a special investigation into the violent death of journalists in the past 35 years, establishing at what stage the respective legal proceedings currently are, urging their possible prosecution and closure.

MEXICO

13. To insist to the Chihuahua State governor that he order the state attorney general to have the Víctor Manuel Oropeza case taken up again, act on the information provided by the IAPA in its report and ask the National Human Rights Commission to provide a copy of all the documents in its files.

14.To urge, given the fact that the Oropeza murder is about to expire under Mexico's statute of limitations amid a widespread and suspicious silence, that the president of Mexico be asked to head a social movement to prevent those guilty of this murder going totally unpunished because of the said statute of limitations.

15. To ask the governor of Baja California state to order the state attorney general to reactivate, as pledged to the IAPA, the investigations into the Héctor Félix Miranda case and bring about the arrest of the mastermind behind the crime.

16. To urge all the governments of the hemisphere to order the immediate reopening of investigations into the cases of the murder of journalists that remains unsolved or have been closed as lacking legal merit.

On The Institutions

17. To urge the Organization of American States (OAS), through its secretary general, to include the issue of unpunished crimes against journalists on its agenda of hemisphere topics and also to include it as a topic at its next General Assembly.

18. To urge the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to name a special rapporteur to look into repeated violations against journalists and to follow up on the investigations into those homicides.

19. To ask UNESCO to require that data be included in its annual reports on crimes against journalists and the guilty going unpunished, and that all cases be pursued until they are solved.

20. To urge that unpunished crimes against journalists be an item on the agenda for commemoration by UNESCO, together with other international organizations, of World Press Freedom Day on May 3 each year, and that this opportunity be taken to demand that member states solve these cases.

21. To suggest to UNESCO that it include the issue of unpunished crimes against journalists on its agenda for 1999, currently under consideration for declaration as "The International Year of Peace Culture."

22. To urge the Inter-American Human Rights Court to resolve those matters that have been brought before it concerning freedom of expression and crimes committed against journalists during the course of their work, creating case-law on the issue of freedom of expression, the right of people to information and the safety of journalists.

23. To request that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights include as a subject for review in its on-site visits and in its general country-by-country reports the issue of press freedom and the question of the safety of journalists.

24. To urge governments in the Americas to provide for the necessary resources so the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights can exercise its function of protecting human rights, specifically the processing of individual cases concerning the murder of journalists, and to require that the American states provide the Inter-American Human Rights Commission with all relevant information in their possession concerning cases of murders of journalists within the legal time frames required.

25. To ask the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to create a special rapporteur for freedom of expression and the situation of journalists and ask that it

prepare a special report on these subjects, updating it periodically.

26. To recommend to multilateral and bilateral institutions of international cooperation and financial assistance that they require from recipient countries as a specific condition of eligibility full respect for freedom of expression and effective protection of the exercise of press freedom, also to recommend to these institutions that the murder of journalists and those responsible going free are cause for revision, suspension or revocation of such cooperation. ❑

Official Resolution Adopted by UNESCO

November 12, 1997

29 C/DR.120 (Uruguay, Colombia, Costa Rica, Germany, Mexico;supported by Belarus, Brazil, Canada, Chile,Comoros, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Gabon, Haiti, Panama, Paraguay, Russian Federation, Switzerland, Ukraine, Venezuela) as amended by Uruguay and Canada:

The General Conference,

Recalling Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,which provides that 'everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression;this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers ',

Confirming that freedom of expression is a fundamental right of everyone and is essential to the realization of all the rights set forth in international human rights instruments,

Also recalling the American Convention on Human Rights (Pact of San Josć, Costa Rica), the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights, Fundamental Freedoms and the African Charter of Human and People's Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Bearing in mind resolution 59 (1) of the of United Nations General Assembly of 14 December 1946 in which it is stated that freedom of information is a fundamental human right, and General Assembly resolution 45/76A of 11 December 1990 on information in service of humanity, and the Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1997/27, on the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Reaffirming that the rights to life and to personal freedom and integrity, the right to liberty and the security of persons,and freedom of expression are fundamental human rights that are recognized and guaranteed by international conventions and instruments,

Considering:

(1)that over the past ten years an increasing number of journalists have been assassinated for exercising their profession, a development denounced by various international organizations, and that the majority of these crimes still go unpunished,

(2)that this reality in the Americas,for example,has been corroborated by the Inter American Press Association (IAPA)through investigations conducted in various countries and by special missions,

Mindful that, as a consequence of the Hemisphere Conference on 'Unpunished Crimes against Journalists' convened by IAPA, several professional organizations have decided to engage in specific joint action to shed light on unpunished crimes against journalists,

Conscious that the assassination of journalists goes beyond the fact of depriving people of their lives, in that it involves a curtailment of freedom of expression, with all that this implies as a limitation on the freedom and rights of society as a whole,

Invites the Director-General to:

a)condemn assassination and any physical violence against journalists as a crime against society, since this curtails freedom of expression and,as a consequence, the other rights and freedoms set forth in international human rights instruments;

(b)request the authorities to discharge their duty if preventing,investigating and punishing such crimes and remedying their consequences;

Calls upon Member States to take the necessary measures to implement the following recommendations:

(a)that governments adopt the principle that there should be no statute of limitations for crimes against persons when these are perpetrated to prevent the exercise of freedom of information and expression or when their purpose is the obstruction of justice;

(b)that governments refine legislation to make it possible to prosecute and sentence those who instigate the assassination of persons exercising the right to freedom of expression;

(c)that legal provision be made for the persons responsible for offences against journalists exercising their professional duties and the media to be judged before civil and/or ordinary courts. ❑

Resolution Adopted by the Organization of American States (OAS)

General Assembly
June 2, 1998
Caracas, Venezuela

ASSAULTS UPON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY,

HAVING SEEN the request of the Secretary General that the item "Crimes Against Journalists" be included on the agenda for the twenty-eighth regular session of the General Assembly;

BEARING IN MIND that Article 3.1 of the Charter of the Organization of American States establishes as one of its principles that "the American States proclaim the fundamental rights of the individual without distinction as to race, nationality, creed or sex";

RECALLING:

That Article I of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man states that "every human being has the right to life, liberty and the security of his person,"; and

That Article IV of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man provides that "every person has the right to freedom of investigation, of opinion, and of the expression and dissemination of ideas, by any medium whatsoever ";

REAFFIRMING that Article 4 of the American Convention on Human Rights provides that "every person has the right to have his life respected ";

REITERATING the full validity in every democratic society of freedom of expression, which should be subject not to prior censorship but, rather, to subsequent liability arising from the abuse of that freedom, in accordance with the domestic law legitimately enacted by states to ensure respect for the rights or reputation of others, or to protect national security, public order, health or public morals;

BEARING IN MIND that, at the Second Summit of the Americas, held

in Santiago, Chile, in April 1998, the heads of state and government expressed their support to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in this area, in particular the recently established position of Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression;

CONSIDERING that, at the same Summit of the Americas, the heads of state and government reaffirmed in Santiago "the importance of guaranteeing freedom of expression, information and opinion"; and

CONSIDERING that, inter alia, the Hemisphere Conference on Unpunished Crimes Against Journalists, held in Guatemala in 1997, reported that in recent years assaults have been made upon the right to life of media professionals in the performance of their duties,

RESOLVES:

1.To condemn vehemently assaults upon freedom of the press and crimes against journalists.

2.To urge member states to strengthen the measures needed for the investigation and punishment, in accordance with their domestic law, of assaults upon freedom of expression and crimes against journalists.

3.To reaffirm that the communications media make an indispensable contribution to strengthening democratic systems in the Hemisphere.

4.To urge the member states to support the work of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, whose position was recently established by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

5.To instruct the Permanent Council to study the advisability of preparing an Inter-American Declaration on Freedom of Expression.

6.To request the Permanent Council to report in due course to the General Assembly on the implementation of this resolution. ❑

Declaration of Hermosillo

Hermosillo, Sonora, México
August 30, 2005

We, executives of Mexican newspapers gathered at the Meeting of Publishers in the Border Region, note with increasing alarm the number of murders of and attacks upon journalists, especially in the north of the country. The deaths and disappearances of news men and women have placed Mexico in recent months in first place among the countries of the Americas in this dreadful matter.

We, information professionals, joined in this act by colleagues from the Inter American Press Association, a hemisphere organization truly concerned at this situation, are determined to alert society to the harm that this criminal violence does to the climate of freedoms in the country, especially to the most precious of freedoms, that upon which all others are based – freedom of expression.

The impact of this violence, brutally expressed in depriving these journalists of life, taking them from their families, friends and colleagues, is expressed also in a climate of intimidation that silences many voices, damaging society's means of coexistence and sentencing freedom itself to a slow death. It is not only the right to life that is cancelled, but the right to free expression of ideas and the people's right to know.

Faced with this problem, today we have agreed on a series of actions aimed at defending our professional mission and making those communities that we serve aware that every time a journalist's voice is silenced society is deprived of vital information it needs in order to consolidate a fairer, freer and truly democratic nation.

This is similarly the first step to bring together Mexican newspapers with a common purpose, in devotion to the trust that society has deposited in us. We wish to send a message that we will fight together against crime.

To this end, we agree the following:

1. We call upon the Mexican authorities, both federal and state, to solve crimes committed against journalists in Mexico. Impunity is the major incentive for these attacks to be repeated. This call is issued, with the greatest firmness, to the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, that they may join together to provide increased guarantees in favor of freedom of expression. In this context, what is essential is to elevate crimes

against journalists to federal jurisdiction and establish that there be no statute of limitation in such cases, they being considered to be extremely damaging to basic human rights, not only of the journalist concerned but of the community that he or she serves.

2. We intend to hold regional seminars for the training of reporters and editors in news coverage in situations of high risk and to advocate among the different sectors of our communities the need to defend and safeguard freedoms and human rights.

3. We have decided to set up a special team of investigative reporters to look into what the murdered journalists had been reporting on. We undertake to see that the result of the work by the special team will be published in all those newspapers taking part in this effort.

4. We will conduct in our pages public awareness campaigns about impunity surrounding crimes against journalists.

5. We will follow up this Meeting of Publishers in the Northern Border Region with similar ones in central and southern Mexico, to provide encouragement to the Mexican press with similar aims. We will take additional steps to get the largest number of newspapers throughout the country involved. Furthermore, we will call upon the electronic media (radio, television and Internet) to give their support to this initiative. ❑

Declaration of Pucallpa

Pucallpa, Peru
September 20, 2005

The Peruvian Press Council, Inter American Press Association, and Press and Society Institute, signatories to this Declaration, express our concern at the murders of journalists in the exercise of their professional duties, in particular the murder of journalist Alberto Rivera Fernández, which has yet to be fully solved.

The executives, editors, reporters and professionals of the Peruvian news media who have come together in this initiative wish call the public's attention to the harm this criminal violence inflicts the state of freedoms in the country, especially freedom of expression. This affects not only the right to free expression of ideas but also the people's fundamental right to know.

Faced with this situation, we agree to take action that seeks to defend our professional mission and to establish before those communities we serve that each time a journalist's voice is silenced society is deprived of essential information needed to consolidate a fairer, freer and more democratic nation.

This is the first step toward a collaboration born of the confidence that society has placed in us. It sends a clear message that by uniting we shall combat crimes against the press and the impunity surrounding them.

For the above reasons and in accordance with UNESCO's Resolution 29, we agree:

1. To repudiate murder and declare any physical violence against journalists a crime against humanity.
2. To call on the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, the Judicial Branch and the Attorney General's Office to provide the guarantees necessary to the practice of journalism, and especially, to solve unpunished crimes against journalists.
3. To ask the Peruvian Congress to improve legislation ensuring that those responsible for these murders are brought to trial and convicted and to adopt the principle that there be no statute of limitation for crimes against those who are exercising the right to freedom of expression.

In accordance with the foregoing, the signatories to this Declaration undertake:

1. To appoint a specialist team of investigative reporters from the various news media to continue investigations initiated by journalist victims, with the findings to be published simultaneously in the participating media.
2. To hold regional training seminars for reporters and editors on high-risk situ-

ations, ethics and professional development.

3. To continue conducting public awareness campaigns in our news media calling attention to crimes against journalists, impunity and the value of freedom of expression.

4. To invite all journalists, press organizations and news media to embrace this Declaration. ❑

Nuevo Laredo Conclusions

Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas
January 27, 2006

Seminar on "Drug Trafficking: Investigation and News Coverage"

The Seminar ratified the concern at the failure to act by the authorities, at various levels of government, when confronted by the advance of organized crime throughout the country, in the border region in general and in the Nuevo Laredo area in particular.

The climate of violence that this situation is generating counts among its main victims the people's freedoms, especially freedom of expression. One of the effects of this of most concern is an increasing level of self-censorship by the media and individual journalists.

The views expressed by speakers and participants in this seminar all underscored the need for the Mexican government, in its respective branches, to move forward more decidedly in bringing about and administering justice more rapidly and effectively in prosecuting crimes against journalists, and in passing new legislation that provides protection for press freedom and free speech as tools for society to thrive.

The event ratified the demand contained in the Declaration of Hermosillo for crimes against journalists to be made federal offenses, that they not be subject to any statute of limitation and that punishment for this kind of crime be stiffened.

In addition, the meeting confirmed the initiation of the "Fénix Project," which will be carried out by journalists from various newspapers conducting investigations into the murder of colleagues for merely doing their job. The aim of this initiative is to bring more pressure to bear on the authorities assigned to these cases, to look further into what inquiries the victims were carrying out and to shed light on who the culprits might be.

Those participating in the seminar agreed on the following principles:

• It is the responsibility of the media to provide greater protection to their journalists, as well as improved conditions for independent journalism to exist.

• There must be a review of security measures at newspaper premises to the benefit of the journalists and all other workers there.

• A mechanism for coordinating with authorities should be created in order to improve communication in regards to matters of security, both physical and in terms of vigilance in the case of special coverage or cases arising from high-risk situations.

• It is a journalist's professional and ethical duty to design a personal strategy to protect his own safety and his work through relevant mechanisms, depending on the circumstances he finds himself in. The available literature, especially on the Internet, facilitates such a task.

• The ability of journalists to do their job and of news companies to prosper is directly linked to the raising of technical, work and ethical standards in the profession. It is recommended that the media and journalists deliberate more extensively on the objective aspects related to this process (training, ethics, salaries, working conditions, style books, codes of ethics, etc.).

• The tremendous challenge that organized crime represents in the country makes it essential for media and journalists to know more about the issues involved in this phenomenon, so as to be able to come up with strategies or codes of conduct in covering it.

• It is the responsibility of the media and journalists to encourage greater public awareness of the importance of freedom of expression as a human value that is not the heritage of journalists alone but something that fosters the common good.

• Freedom of expression is not just for journalists. Society has given them the responsibility of observing and protecting it. The media and journalists must ratify their commitment in this regard every day. ❑

The publication of "Risk Map for Journalists" has two fundamental purposes: first, it documents the violence against journalists, tracks down its sources and shows how it influences their daily work. Our second purpose is to alert and educate journalists and foreign correspondents on the dangers inherent to news coverage in the hope they will take preventive measures to eliminate or at least lower these risks. Prevention is essential. No journalist should have to put his life at risk in order to report the news.

Diana Daniels
IAPA President (2005 – 2006)

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