

via fax 011 571 596 0631

Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos
President of Colombia

via fax 011 571 570 2000 ext2023

Sr. Fiscal Eduardo Montealgre
Attorney General of Colombia

September 26, 2015

Dear Sirs:

We urge you to take immediate action to investigate and respond to threats against the press and thoroughly investigate the murder of journalist **Flor Alba Núñez Vargas**. Much to Colombia's shame, impunity continues to strangle Colombia's justice system, especially when journalists are slain and their killers go free. As a direct result of journalistic work, several members of the press have been subject to death threats, disappearances, and death – ultimately finding Colombia's justice system ill-equipped to prosecute. In light of these threats and attacks, we urge you to take immediate action to effectively protect journalists and combat impunity.

On September 10, TV and radio reporter **Flor Alba Núñez Vargas** was murdered by an unidentified gunman in front of the radio station where she worked in Pitalito, Huila Department. Núñez, the host of an hour-long daily news program, *Red Noticias*, and correspondent for *Nacion TV*, received violent threats in response to her reporting. Recently, Núñez reported incidents of soldiers rounding up young men in the streets of Pitalito and conscripting them into the Colombian army – a practice forbidden by the Constitutional Court. Later, sources confirmed that Núñez received telephonic threats from military personnel in direct response to her focus on the issue. Similarly, Núñez reported on the arrest and trials of drug traffickers and criminal groups. Indeed, Bogotá-based *Foundation for Freedom of the Press* (FLIP) theorized that a possible motive for Nuñez's assassination was her recent publication about a criminal group carrying out robberies in Pitalito.

As is widely publicized, powerful non-government groups intolerant of unfavorable reporting pose a lethal threat to journalists in many countries, including Colombia. In a report released by the *Committee to Protect Journalists* (CPJ), Colombia ranked 8th on the 2014 Impunity Index. The Index, which spotlights countries where journalists are slain and their killers go free, underscores the extent to which Colombia and its justice system are stagnated by impunity and the need for immediate action to protect the freedom of the press.

As a matter of principle and a fundamental right, freedom of the press—guaranteed by Colombia's 1991 Constitution—is the right to gather, publish, and distribute information and ideas without government restriction. Freedom of the press—central to any self-respecting democracy—must include freedom from actual or threatened restraints on unfettered publication of matters vital to the health of the state. With the death of Núñez, the international community urges Colombian authorities to uphold the 1991 Constitution and make good on the president's promise to protect the press and combat impunity.

We **strongly urge** that you:

- thoroughly and impartially investigate the murder of Flor Alba Núñez Vargas and the threats she received in connection with her reporting, and bring the perpetrators to justice;
- protect freedom of the press in Colombia and the rights of journalists to practice their trade

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

copies: Juan Carlos Pinzón, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
 Andy O'Neal, Human Rights Officer, US Embassy in Colombia ~ via email: onealRA@state.gov
 John Brandt, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via email: brandtJG@state.gov
 José de Jesús Orozco Hernández, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
 Edison Lanza, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

2015_09_11 CPJ

The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter:

