

via fax: 011+503 22 43 99 47
Sr. Salvador Sánchez Cerén
 President of El Salvador

via fax: 011 503 2207 3586
Sr. Douglas Arquímedes Meléndez Ruíz
 Attorney General of El Salvador

September 12, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply troubled about death threats to **journalists at *El Faro* and *Revista Factum***, two digital news outlets specializing in investigative journalism.

On August 22, *El Faro* and *Revista Factum* began receiving direct threats on social media networks, including Twitter and Facebook. The threats identified journalists by name and included photos. One threatening tweet said *Factum* and *El Faro* journalists would "end up like Christian Poveda," a French-Spanish journalist killed by members of the Mara Salvatrucha gang in 2009. Another shared a photo of a soldier allegedly killed by gang members, with the caption "Revista Factum and El Faro write in favor of this." The social media accounts responsible for the threats often share content supporting security forces and celebrating violence against alleged thieves and gang members.

Journalists at the two outlets believe the threats were in response to an article published on *Revista Factum's* website that same day about an elite anti-crime unit's alleged involvement in criminal activity, including three extrajudicial killings, sexual assault, and extortion. Howard Cotto, head of the Salvadoran National Police, and Vice President Óscar Ortiz told *Factum* that they were aware of reports of illegal activity by police officers and promised to open an investigation.

On August 26, four people claiming to be from the office of the national human rights ombudsman, visited *Factum's* offices asking about the magazine's hours and when staff normally arrived. The ombudsman's office said it had not sent any employees to visit *Factum* that day.

On August 28, two more groups of four people came to the outlets' offices. They claimed to be "reporters' sources from the police." The first group asked the guard at *El Faro* for *Factum's* address while the second group knocked on the door at the *Factum* offices, which were empty at the time.

The human rights ombudsman's office requested precautionary measures to protect the publication and the two journalists who wrote the original article. Following the in-person threats on August 26, the police promised to provide additional security on the block outside *Factum's* offices. However, the patrols were there only briefly on August 28 and were not present when the second group of people stopped by.

Because of our serious concern about the violence and threats towards journalists, we **strongly urge that you**

- conduct a swift and credible investigation of escalating online and physical threats against journalists at *El Faro* and *Revista Factum*, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice
- enact sufficient measures to ensure the journalists' safety, in accordance with their wishes
- ensure that journalists are able to work without facing violence from the very groups they are investigating, including security forces tasked with combating criminal gangs

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinators

and

Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

copies: Jean Manes, US Ambassador to El Salvador ~ via fax
 Claudia Canjura, El Salvador Ambassador to the US ~ via fax and email
 Mazin Alfaqih, El Salvador Desk, US State Department ~ via email
 Margarete May Macaulay, Rapporteur for El Salvador, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
 Edizon Lanza, Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

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