

Sr. Nayib Bukele  
Presidente de la República  
Calle Circunvalación #248,  
Colonia San Benito, San Salvador  
El Salvador

August 1, 2019

Dear President Bukele:

We are deeply concerned about smear campaigns, threats, and online harassment that have intensified during the past several weeks against journalists **Bessy Ríos** and **Karen Fernández** and **Mariana Belioso**. Each has expressed concerns about adverse human rights impacts of the government's new "*plan de control territorial*" which will increase police and military presence in certain regions.

On June 25, journalist Bessy Ríos addressed Guillermo Gallegos of the GANA party on national television after he referred to human rights defenders as defenders of gang members. That same day, a number of anonymous Twitter accounts attacked Bessy Ríos, associated her with illegal groups, blamed her for criminal acts, and threatened to kill her.


On June 28 Karen Fernández, a journalist for *FOCOS TV*, pointed out in an interview for the program *Republica SV* the similarities between the justifications that previous governments used to provide rationale for their repressive measures and the justifications that your government is currently using. She also expressed concern about the conditions that people deprived of liberty will experience in the framework of the plan. After parts of the interview were retweeted (out of context) by your government, Karen Fernández began receiving a wave of insults and sexual threats from fake and anonymous Twitter accounts. Previously, in 2018, Karen Fernandez received insults and misogynistic comments after an interview with you and your vice-president.

On June 30 Maria Beiloso, a journalist for *La Prensa Gráfica*, wrote an opinion column called "o conmigo o contra mi" which criticized continuous online attacks and harassment that are hampering freedom of expression. Following its publication, public figures close to your office referred to her as "trash of journalism." There was a wave of cyber harassment against her from anonymous accounts. After her tweet about gangs in El Salvador, her Twitter account was deactivated for three days.

It is unconscionable that government officials, instead of condemning these attacks, encourage them, often with misogynistic, sexist and degrading remarks. We **strongly urge** that you

- carry out a thorough and impartial investigation into the anonymous tweets attacking and threatening Karen Fernández, Bessy Ríos and Maria Beiloso, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- refrain from publicly discrediting human rights defenders and journalists for exercising their right to freedom of expression and opinion
- take all necessary measures to prevent hate speech and online violence against human rights defenders and journalists.

Sincerely,

  
Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinator

  
Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Sra. Raquel Caballero de Guevara, Ombudswoman for the Defense of Human Rights ~ via email & US mail  
Rogelio Rivas, Ministro de Justicia y Seguridad Pública ~ via US mail  
Jean Elizabeth Manes, US Ambassador to El Salvador ~ via US mail  
Claudia Ivette Canjura de Centeno, El Salvador Ambassador to the US ~ via email  
El Salvador Desk, US State Department ~ via email  
Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur for El Salvador and Rapporteur on the Rights of Women, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email & US mail  
Edison Lanza, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email & US mail  
US Senators Brown & Portman  
US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Gonzalez, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

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