

<p>Excmo. Sr. Presidente Iván Duque Márquez President of the Republic of Colombia contacto@presidencia.gov.co</p>	<p>Sr. Fiscal General Francisco Barbosa Delgado Attorney General of Colombia despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co</p>
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July 5, 2021

Dear Sirs:

Police officers have been using excessive force against journalists. We are writing to demand their protection.

On June 29, police officers of the ESMAD unit (*Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios*, or Anti-Riot Squad) assaulted journalists while they covered protests in Bogotá for the independent broadcaster RCN Radio. **Katy Sánchez**, a reporter, and **Alexandra Molina**, an intern, were attacked by police officers while they were filming ESMAD police officers beating and kicking a youth during the demonstration. In a video recorded by Alexandra Molina, the two journalists can be heard urging police to stop beating the youth; officers are also seen accosting the reporters.


One officer shoved Katy Sánchez to the ground with his shield, kicked her in the back, and hit her with his nightstick, leaving her with a badly sprained left ankle and bloodied knees. The same officer also shoved Alexandra Molina to the ground, but she did not sustain serious injuries. Katy Sánchez, however, reported that her injuries would keep her from working for a week.

Journalists seem to be a specific target during the past two months of popular protests, which have turned out repeated accounts of police brutality. The Bogotá-based Foundation for Press Freedom (FLIP), released a message via Twitter on June 29 that it was investigating 240 attacks on members of the press amid demonstrations, including 138 by police.

The government must guarantee the safety of both journalists and demonstrators. We understand that three of the officers involved in the attacks on the two journalists and on the youth have been fired. That is a good first step, but we also urge that you:

- conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the ESMAD police attack on Katy Sánchez and Alexandra Molina, publish the results, and bring the perpetrators to justice with appropriate sanctions
- instruct police across the country to stop targeting journalists with violent attacks
- guarantee that all journalists who carry out their legitimate activities of exercising freedom of expression can do so free from all restrictions and without fear of reprisal

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator


Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Francisco Santos Calderón, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via email, US mail
IACHR: Edison Lanza, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email, US mail
IACHR: Antonia Urrejola Noguera, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email, US mail
UN: Juliette De Rivero, Representative in Colombia of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ~ via email
FLIP: Fundación para la Libertad de la Prensa ~ via email
CPJ: Committee to Protect Journalists, Natalie Southwick, Coordinator for Central & South America Program ~ via email
US Embassy: Kristen Farrell (human rights) and Mariel Chatman (vulnerable populations) ~ via email
US State Department: Christine Russell, Desk Officer for Colombia ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email
US Representatives Beatty, 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: