

**REPORT ON THE GUARANTEE, PROTECTION AND DEFENSE OF THE  
RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION OF THOUGHT AND FREEDOM OF  
THE PRESS**

**Report on Freedom of Expression in Ecuador, period 2018-2024 for the United  
Nations Human Rights Committee.**

**This report has been prepared, consolidated and reviewed by:**

**Mesa de Articulación para la Protección de Periodistas  
(MAPP).**

**Composed of:**

**Fundación Andina para la Observación y Estudio de Medios (FUNDAMEDIOS),  
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**WE AUTHORIZE ITS PUBLICATION**

## United Nations Human Rights Committee Report Mesa de Articulación para la Protección de Periodistas (MAPP)

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### INTRODUCTION

Freedom of expression is a fundamental pillar of democracy and an essential human right that allows individuals to express their opinions, inform society and participate in public debate without fear of reprisal. This right is enshrined in numerous international instruments, such as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantee the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas.<sup>1</sup>

In Ecuador, freedom of expression faces significant challenges that reflect a complex and often conflictive context. Over the years, the country has experienced a series of tensions between the practice of journalism and political, economic and social pressures. The situation has been aggravated by the influence of drug trafficking and political polarization, which have increased threats and attacks against journalists and the media.

In Ecuador, journalism is at a crossroads. On the one hand, there are professionals committed to contrast contrasting information; on the other, the adverse environment often hinders the free and safe exercise of journalism. Attacks, both physical and verbal, threats and pressures from various actors, including organized crime, have tested the ability of journalists to report independently and critically.

In this context, protecting freedom of expression and strengthening the integrity of journalism are more important than ever. Ensuring an environment where journalists can work without fear of reprisals is essential to the health of democracy and the well-being of society as a whole.

## **1. Coordinating Committee for the Protection of Journalists**

### **1.1. Definition and Purpose**

The Mesa de Articulación para la Protección de Periodistas (MAPP) is an established collaborative space that brings together organizations, media and key actors committed to the safety of communicators and the promotion of freedom of expression, with the aim of strengthening the protection of the rights of journalists and communication professionals.

### **1.2. Structure and Operation**

The Articulation Board for the Protection of Journalists (MAPP) was presented on September 7, 2023, to the public and the media, as a voluntary union between civil society actors, media and communication workers, with a view to creating effective networks to address cases of imminent risk to the life and freedom of journalists in the exercise of their profession. MAPP is formed by the organizations Fundamedios, Nos Faltan 3, Periodistas Sin Cadenas, the media outlets GK and Plan V, and journalist Mónica Almeida, who are united by, among other causes, the kidnapping and murder on the Colombian-Ecuadorian border, in 2018, of Javier Ortega, Paúl Rivas and Efraín Segarra, colleagues of Diario El Comercio, and other cases

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<sup>1</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966:  
<https://www.ohchr.org/es/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

of displacement and exile of journalists occurring with increasing frequency. These tragedies have prompted a concerted effort to protect journalists who carry out their work in a context of growing insecurity and risk, in the face of a State that has been unable to address the structural causes of systemic violence.

### 1.3. Main Activities

- **Assistance and Protection:** Development of support mechanisms for journalists at risk, including legal advice, accompaniment in seeking support from international organizations or for emotional support, and security measures.
- **Research and Documentation:** Data collection and reporting on attacks and violations of journalists' rights.

## 2. Context

In just over 16 years, the average number of attacks against freedom of expression in Ecuador has been 20 cases per month. In no year -except in 2008- less than 100 threats per year were registered. In 2015, 2016 and 2022 the highest number of facts against freedom of expression and the press were reported, with 400 annual cases of aggressions and attacks, according to reports made by Fundamedios and the Fundación Periodistas Sin Cadenas (FPSC).

### One thousand journalists attacked in 3 years

Between June 2021 and May 2024, the Fundación Periodistas Sin Cadenas recorded a total of 933 journalists assaulted. 426 were aggressions against men, 291 against women journalists, while 216 were attacks against different media outlets.

So far in 2024 alone, the Fundación Periodistas Sin Cadenas (Journalists Without Chains Foundation) has registered a total of 162 attacks against journalists in Ecuador. This includes aggressions considered serious as death threats, which so far total 11. It also registers 53 aggressions against women; 53 against men and 56 against the media.

For its part, the Communication Council registered 1,016 threat alerts against the press between 2021 and the first semester of 2024, including physical aggressions, threats and judicial harassment. In 2022, the highest peak was reached with 600 alerts, of which 67 were against the media. In 2023, there were 232 alerts and in 2024, 76 alerts between January and June.

In 2024, Ecuador dropped 30 positions in the annual Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index. While in 2023, Ecuador ranked 80th, in 2024 it is ranked 110th out of 180 countries.

An alarming aspect is the aggressions perpetrated by the State, with 15 of the 21 recorded aggressions coming from this actor in June 2024 alone. This highlights a pattern of increasing restrictions by the government of President Daniel Noboa, who has intensified control over the dissemination of content and has resorted to certain actions of censorship against critical voices.

Fundamedios has been monitoring and recording attacks against freedom of expression, press, access to information and related rights for 17 years. In this regard, since 2008, 3,748 aggressions against these fundamental rights have been recorded.



Source: Fundamedios- annual aggressions

### State aggressions

Since November 23, 2023, the date on which Noboa took office as president, 139 aggressions have been registered, indicating a significant increase in aggressions against freedom of expression under his administration.

Authorities, politicians and even fugitives from justice have made social networks their daily channels for violent diatribes and attacks against journalists and the media. Among the latest examples is a satirical "meme" launched by the Vice Minister of Government, Esteban Torres Cobo against a journalist.

According to the Fundamedios alert, the official quoted the tweet and accompanied it with a meme-style image, in which he insinuates that Martín Pallares is an uneducated person.

On June 10, 2024, the interview and political analysis program *Los Irreverentes*, broadcasted by RTU television channel and hosted by journalists Sol Borja, José Luis Cañizares and Fabricio Vela, was taken off the air. The hosts denounced that the closure was due to pressure from the government of President Daniel Noboa and highlighted the low tolerance of the president and his team to criticism. This act of censorship occurred after a public exchange of opinions between journalist Borja and presidential advisor Diana Jácome, on the social network X (formerly Twitter).

Just ten days later, on June 25, 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs revoked Cuban journalist Alondra Santiago's residency visa in Ecuador, alleging that she had committed acts that allegedly undermined public security and the structure of the State. However, the details of these acts were never made public; in fact, the Government declared the reports justifying its accusations confidential, thus blocking the possibility of knowing what the alleged crime was actually committed by Santiago or the real reasons why his visa was revoked.

Both actions were perceived as a new political attempt to limit the open discussion on matters of public interest, and as a warning to others. media and journalists. Following the aforementioned actions, the regime initiated a campaign of The President's official activities and some of those carried out with his wife, in the family environment, were broadcast on social networks, but he avoided giving explanations for the case. Requests for information made by other journalists on the communications channel that the Presidency maintains on the WhatsApp messaging network were also ignored.

### **3. Starting point**

On March 26, 2018, the *Diario El Comercio* journalistic team made up of journalist Javier Ortega, photographer Paúl Rivas, and driver Efraín Segarra were kidnapped on the northern border of Ecuador, in Mataje, by a dissidence of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). For two weeks, amidst allegedly failed negotiations between the Ecuadorian government and the Oliver



Sinisterra, on April 13, 2018, the Ecuadorian government of Lenín Moreno confirmed the murder of the three communication workers.

#### **4. Organized crime**

In Ecuador, organized crime has emerged as a prominent concern in recent decades. This phenomenon, characterized by the consolidation of criminal groups operating with sophisticated structures and strategies, has exacerbated the challenges of public security and social stability in the country. Criminal organizations have diversified their activities beyond drug trafficking, engaging in extortion, kidnapping and money laundering, among other crimes.

One of the key factors in the rise of organized crime is Ecuador's strategic geographic location, which makes it a crucial point on drug trafficking routes. Collaboration between local groups and international cartels has intensified violence and chaos.

In addition, until June 2024, the Fundación Periodistas Son Cadenas records a total of 27 armed attacks against media outlets and journalists throughout Ecuador. The most recent and violent attack occurred in January 2024 at the facilities of TC Televisión in Guayaquil, capital of the province of Guayas, which in 2023 registered 89 aggressions, thus becoming the second with the most aggressions; the first is Pichincha, with 103.

In March 2023, journalists Lenin Artieda, Milton Pérez and Mauricio Ayora, from Ecuavisa, Telemazonas and TC Televisión, respectively, received pen drives that were actually explosive devices. Artieda's exploded when inserted into the channel's computer, but the journalist escaped unharmed.

According to Fundamedios figures, in 2021<sup>2</sup> aggressions by organized crime began, especially related to drug trafficking and non-state control of prisons. The aggressions and attacks that occurred in 2021 against the press in Ecuador and that were carried out by criminal groups reflected a worrying increase, not only because of the violence with which the aggressions have occurred, but also because of their exponential growth compared to last year: In 2021, 21 aggressions were registered, when in 2020 there were only two. Of this total of aggressions, 45% occurred through threats and another 55% with assaults and attacks.

In 2022, Fundamedios reported a complex scenario faced by journalism that year, which was compounded by the message of impunity from the State: two murders occurred in 2022.

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<sup>2</sup> 2021: Fundamedios Report:

[https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Informe-ec\\_compressed-1.pdf](https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Informe-ec_compressed-1.pdf)

in 2022<sup>3</sup> continue without culprits. In addition to these murders - with the application of lethal violence, the use of hired killers and even torture techniques - there have been attacks and death threats against the media and journalists (Juan Alcívar, Paúl Zamora, Roosevelt Congo, Esteban Ávila and Charlie Castillo), which are another aspect of the lethal violence that organized crime has inflicted in Ecuador. The five most frequent aggressions during 2022 were threats (76), physical aggressions (69), stigmatizing speech (60), judicial processes (29), restriction in the digital space (29), and the use of the Internet in the media.

(28) and problems of access to information (22).

Fundamedios' 2023 report exposes how organized crime has emerged as one of the main enemies of freedom of expression without precedent, with an alarming increase in its threats, attacks and murders. The aggressions perpetrated by these organizations shot up 800% compared to 2020 and 340% compared to 2022. Although Fundamedios had already warned about this situation last year, in 2023 the violence intensified even more, highlighting the growing vulnerability and lack of protection faced by journalism in Ecuador.<sup>4</sup> That year, fear and lethal violence struck at freedom of expression with their claws. Of the 68 aggressions carried out by organized crime, 53 were against journalists, media outlets and other communication workers.

#### **4.1 Prison Crisis**

Ecuador's prison crisis is a direct reflection of the violence and corruption associated with organized crime. The country's prisons have been the scene of riots, clashes between rival gangs and extremely overcrowded conditions. These problems not only reflect the intensity of the violence, but also intensify it within the walls of the penitentiary institutions.

Prison overcrowding has led to a lack of control and oversight, creating an environment in which criminal gangs can operate with relative freedom. Riots in recent years have resulted in numerous deaths and injuries, highlighting the urgent need for reforms in the prison system. The lack of adequate infrastructure and trained personnel to handle crisis situations contributes to the escalation of violence in prisons.

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<sup>3</sup> Fundamedios 2022 Report:

<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/LIBERTAD-DE-EXPRESIO%CC%81N-2-022.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> 2023 The Year of Communication Workers' Exiles, 2023:

[https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Fundamedios%C2%AE-Informe-2023\\_.pdf](https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Fundamedios%C2%AE-Informe-2023_.pdf)



The criminal gangs currently disputing power are: Los Choneros, Los Tiguerones, Los Lagartos, Los Lobos, Aguilas, Latin King. In addition, there are sub-cells or armed groups, which play a key role and which, together with the criminal gangs, make up the 10 main criminal groups identified by the National Police: Chone Killers, R7, Fatales, Gángsters.<sup>5</sup>

Since 2021, constant waves of violence have been reported, especially in prisons, where there have been massacres of dozens of prisoners and, in parallel, threats against journalists who cover this violence. In 2022 there was the murder of journalist Gerardo Delgado, which was later known to have been planned by drug trafficking groups.

## **4.2 Impact on the Press and Challenges for Journalism**

The prison crisis and organized crime have had a significant impact on the Ecuadorian press. Coverage of these issues has increased, driven by public interest and the need to report on the most recent events. However, this type of coverage is not without its challenges.

**Safety of journalists:** Reporters covering these issues often face significant risks. Threats and attacks on journalists, in some cases linked to the very criminal groups they are covering, have highlighted the vulnerability of media professionals in such a volatile environment.

**Access to Information:** In Ecuador, access to information and emphasizing the prison crises is fundamental to understanding the magnitude and causes of these problems. The crises in Ecuador's prisons, characterized by overcrowding, violence, corruption and inhumane conditions, have had a profound impact on security and human rights in the country.

In 2023, Fundamedios recorded 224 aggressions against freedom of expression, press, right of access to information and related rights. As a result, 343 victims were reported, including journalists, media, candidates, organizations, citizens and activists.<sup>6</sup>

Access to information in this context faces several challenges. Authorities often limit the disclosure of accurate data on the conditions

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<sup>5</sup> [ii] How to cover the prison crisis in Ecuador, 2023: <https://www.periodistassincadenas.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/manual-carceles-final.pdf><sup>6</sup>  
2023 The year of the exiles of communication workers, 2023: [https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Fundamedios%C2%AE-Informe-2023\\_.pdf](https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Fundamedios%C2%AE-Informe-2023_.pdf)

This makes it difficult to fully assess the situation and formulate effective policies. Reporting and studies by human rights organizations and the media play a crucial role in providing critical information and promoting transparency.<sup>7</sup>

The impact of the prison crisis in Ecuador is significant. Violence and overcrowding affect not only inmates, but also society in general, with repercussions for public security and the administration of justice. The lack of accurate and up-to-date information can perpetuate impunity and hinder the reforms needed to improve the prison system.

**Self-Censorship and External Pressures:** In some cases, the media may face pressure to avoid covering certain aspects of organized crime due to threats of retaliation or corrupt influences. This can limit the ability of the press to provide a complete picture of the situation.<sup>8</sup>

## **5. Journalists killed**

Since 2005, Fundamedios has registered 11 cases of journalists who have been murdered and remain unpunished<sup>9</sup>. In too many cases, crimes committed against journalists go unpunished. Those responsible are often not brought to justice, which sends an alarming message to those who might be considering committing similar acts. This fosters a climate of fear and self-censorship among journalists, who often have to work in extremely dangerous conditions to report on issues of public interest.

According to records obtained from the Communication Council, from 2005 to date there have been 17 violent deaths of journalists and communication workers. Details are as follows:

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<sup>7</sup> Journalists and media denounce the lack of official information on the riots in the country's prisons, 2023:

<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/alertas/periodistas-y-medios-denuncian-falta-de-informacion-oficial-ante-los-disturbios-en-las-carceles-del-pais/>

<sup>8</sup> Ecuadorian journalist went into self-exile after serious threats and persecution, 2024:

<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/periodista-ecuatoriana-se-autoexilio-tras-graves-amenazas-y-persecucion/>

<sup>9</sup> Fundamedios Report Impunity of journalists

killed:<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Informe-IMPUNIDAD.pdf>



# MAPP

Mesa de Articulación para la  
Protección de Periodistas

No.	Date	Nombre	Judicial Institution	Case No.	Current Status
1	19/04/2005	Julio Augusto Garcia Romero	No information	No information	No information
2	13/02/2006	José Luis León Desiderio	Twelfth Court of Guarantees Penalties	0926220060351	It is located in the Fourth Criminal Court of Guayas with the No. 10-2007.
3	22/03/2010	Jorge Santana	No information	No information	Journalist in the canton Passage, The Gold In process
4	01/07/2012	Byron Baldeón	No information	No information	Journalist of the newspaper Extra
5	03/09/2012	Luis Arnoldo Ruiz	No information	No information	Journalist of the journal Extra and Express in Guayas. In process
6	11/04/2013	Fausto Guido Valdivieso Moscoso	Unit Judicial North 2 Criminal with headquartered in the Canton Guayaquil	09286202201852 G	In process
7	13/04/2018	Paúl Rivas Bravo	Prosecutor's Office General of the State	080501818060070	At Research
8	13/04/2018	Javier Ortega Reyes	Prosecutor's Office General of the State	080501818060070	At research
9	13/04/2018	Efrain Segarra April	Prosecutor's Office General of the State	080501818060070	At research
10	27/01/2021	Efrain Ruales	Prosecutor's Office General of the State	090101821073560	At research

In the last three years, it has become evident that only one case, that of journalist Leonidas Gerardo Delgado Olmedo, has resulted in the conviction of those who carried out the murder, however, the masterminds of the crime remain unpunished.

No.	Fecha	Expediente No.	Name	Medium	Provincia	Judicial Institución	Case No.	Current Status
1	8/10/2021	ATC-021-026	John Gonzalo Rojas Allauca	V MICC	Cotopaxi	No information	No training	No information
2	1/02/2022	ATC-022-028	Shahanna open wayguacundo Tingo	Sheet of Route	El Chimbo	No information	No training	No information
3	5/07/2022	ATC-022-204	Kelvin Mike Cabrera Velez	Nexus Digital Manabí	Manabí	Unit Judicial to the Penal	3283202201464G	Archive of the Preliminary Investigation
4	1/08/2022	ATC-022-212	Leonidas Gerardo Delgado Olmedo	the Manta	Manabí	multicompetent Criminal based in the Canton Montecristi	3U05202201113	Sentence condemnatory
5	4/11/2022	ATC-022-253	Cesar Henry Vivanco Castro	HV Entertainment at	El Oro	Prosecutor's investigation General of the State	Office70701822110042	
6	30/08/2023	ATC-023-171	Andres Ignacio hernández Garcia	tribuna de Freedom	El Oro	Court of Warranties Penalties With headquartered in the cantón Machala	7283202302239	In process
7	2/10/2023	ATC-023-197	Jonathan Aníbal Sanchez Sanchez	Dept. of communication refectura from Esmeraldas	Esmeraldas	Court of Warranties Penalties with headquartered in the canton Emeralds	8282202308902	In process

Source: **Technical report on the need for current information regarding cases of violent deaths of communication workers in Ecuador. Communication Council 2024.**

## 6. Exiled journalists

From the beginning of 2023 to 2024, 13 journalists have been documented in exile in Ecuador, none of whom have been attended to by the State. The first recorded case corresponded to Karol Noroña, who received threats from organized crime in March 2023. MAPP organizations have followed up on these cases and have provided direct assistance in the relocation of at least nine journalists.

### 1. Karol Noroña

On March 24, 2023, Karol Noroña, a GK journalist, received a death threat due to her coverage of organized crime and the prison crisis. Given the risk, emergency protocols were activated for her evacuation. Noroña, who had reported on state impunity and the formation of a committee of victims of prison massacres, is now safe. GK highlighted the threat as a reflection of the security crisis and state ineffectiveness in the country. A day before his departure, Noroña announced a pause on social networks to protect his safety and that of his entourage.<sup>10</sup>

### 2. Second journalist exiled (name protected)

On April 24, 2023, the Fundación Periodistas Sin Cadenas reported that a second journalist in Ecuador had to leave the country due to persistent death threats from criminal gangs over the past eight months. The journalist's identity is being withheld. Despite having reported the case to the authorities, the response was inadequate: the Attorney General's Office classified the threat as "intimidation" rather than "death threat", and the Communication Council suggested a face-to-face complaint, without considering the journalist's vulnerability. The Communication Council claimed to have informed the Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of the Interior, highlighting its protection policy towards journalists and communication workers.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Lissette Ormaza

On June 23, 2023, Lissette Ormaza, a journalist and presenter for Majestad Televisión, was the victim of an attack that resulted in a traffic accident. Ormaza, who had been threatened for several months by criminal gangs due to her investigative work, suffered injuries to her neck, chest and legs after losing control of her vehicle on the Santo Domingo-La Concordia highway. The journalist has indicated

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<sup>10</sup> Ecuadorian journalist is threatened and leaves the country due to imminent risk, 2023: <https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/alertas/periodista-ecuatoriana-es-amenazada-y-sale-del-pais-an-te-un-risgo-inminente/>

<sup>11</sup> Journalist leaves the country after receiving death threat, 2023: <https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/alertas/periodista-sale-del-pais-tras-amenazas-de-muerte/>

that the incident appears to have been a deliberate attempt to end his life, which would have left his children and family devastated.

Ormaza had received death threats related to his coverage of a traffic accident in Flavio Alfaro, where he reported mechanical failures and overcrowding on a bus.

In addition, she received intimidating messages urging her to cease her research, under threat of violence. After the accident, she also received a threatening message stating that the next attack would not be an accident but a direct hit.<sup>12</sup>

#### **4. Marcos Mancero**

In July, a journalist from the Amazon region, whose name is withheld, was attacked by a hooded gunman who demanded his computer and hard drive. During the incident, the journalist managed to escape and found his house in disarray and with a hole in the wall, through which the assailant had entered and stolen some household appliances. Despite the fact that the journalist had previously been intimidated for his work, the complaint filed with the police and the Prosecutor's Office did not go forward. The police did not file a report, and the Prosecutor's Office demanded information that the journalist could not provide, such as the name of the aggressor. The Mesa de Articulación para la Protección de Periodistas (MAPP) denounces these obstacles and calls on the Prosecutor's Office to improve its procedures for protecting journalists at risk.<sup>13</sup>

#### **5. Exiled journalist (name protected)**

An Ecuadorian journalist, whose identity is being withheld for security reasons, had to be relocated after receiving death threats along with his family. The threats arose after the journalist removed a member of a WhatsApp group chat of the media outlet he manages for violating internal rules. He subsequently received further threats from an organized criminal group (GDO) accusing him of bias in his journalistic coverage, favoring one criminal gang over another.

The journalist's home region is one of the most dangerous in the country, with high levels of violence and crime, with no effective control by the authorities. Despite filing a complaint of intimidation with the Public Prosecutor's Office and informing the Ministry of the Interior about the situation, no measures have been taken to protect the journalist or his family. Direct threats against the family members through networks

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<sup>12</sup> Ecuadorian journalist suffered attack disguised as traffic accident, 2023:

<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/alertas/periodista-ecuatoriana-sufrio-atentado-encubierto-como-transit-accident/>

<sup>13</sup> Sixth journalist leaves the country so far in 2023 due to the situation of insecurity and violence, 2023:

<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/sexta-periodista-deja-el-pais-en-lo-que-va-del-2023-por-la-situacion-of-insecurity-and-violence/>



social programs have also gone unanswered.<sup>14</sup> This was the first case that MAPP was able to address in the face of state inefficiency.

#### **(6-7) Couple of exiled journalists (name protected)**

Two journalists who founded a radio station in the Amazon region of the country have had to be relocated urgently after receiving direct death threats. In this case, once again, the State has been largely absent and civil society has had to coordinate protection actions.

The victims, whose names are being withheld for security reasons, received direct warnings that they were on a list of people to be "silenced" and that they should refrain from talking about politics and the activity of organized crime groups (OCGs) operating in the Amazon.

On their radio show, the communicators covered politics, crime and organized crime. Recently, they began to broadcast reports of extortion by illegal money lenders, which is said to have put them in the sights of criminal groups operating in the area. The province where they lived before their relocation is a key territory for the transport of narcotics in the value chain of transnational organized crime.

Weeks before the direct warning, a foreign citizen intercepted them at night, from his motorcycle, and told them that they were going to "break them". Then, on October 14, another stranger stopped next to one of the journalists and evidently took a photograph of him while he was in his vehicle.

The journalists had reported the previous threats, but so far have not formalized the complaint due to the lack of action by the judicial system and security forces.<sup>15</sup>

#### **8. exiled journalist (name protected)**

On December 27, 2023, a journalist from a coastal province suffered an attack when his vehicle was vandalized with a toxic substance, allegedly by officials of a public institution that he had denounced for irregularities in contracts. Eight days later, he received threatening letters at his home warning: "either you shut up or you die". Despite having reported a previous threat with no response from the Attorney General's Office, the threats intensified and unknown individuals began to

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<sup>14</sup> Another Ecuadorian journalist must be relocated after receiving serious death threats, 2023: <https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/otro-periodista-ecuatoriano-debe-ser-reubicado-tras-recibir-serias-amenazas-de-muerte/>

<sup>15</sup> Two journalists had to be relocated; nine cases of exile already this year, 2023: <https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/alertas/dos-periodistas-debieron-ser-reubicados-ya-son-nueve-casos-de-exilio-en-este-ano/>

to guard his house. The journalist, due to the imminent risk, had to be relocated. This incident not only directly threatens the journalist, but also threatens freedom of the press.<sup>16</sup>

## **9. Katherine Heredia**

On January 19, 2024, the Mesa de Articulación para la Protección de Periodistas (MAPP) reported the second case of self-exile of a journalist so far this year, highlighting the case of Katherine Heredia. Heredia, who was investigating irregularities in the Municipality of Quito and the Prefecture of Pichincha, was subjected to a series of threats and serious acts of intimidation.

The first significant incident occurred on August 2, 2023, when Heredia was followed for several blocks in Quito. Nine days later, an individual who initially appeared to be a homeless man approached her and directly threatened her with a message related to her investigative work on electoral corruption. The threats escalated with an episode in which unknown individuals pointed a gun at her while she was in her car.

As her investigation continued, she faced further harassment, including vandalism at her parents' home on August 24 and a death threat in an envelope found on the windshield of her parents' car on October 3. These acts of intimidation culminated in Heredia being followed and chased as she moved around, leading her to file a complaint with the Attorney General's Office.

Due to the growing threat to her safety, Heredia was forced to go into self-imposed exile and resign from her job at the media outlet. MAPP expresses its serious concern for the safety of Katherine Heredia and for the attacks on press freedom in Ecuador.<sup>17</sup>

## **10. Elsa Bejarano**

On January 25, 2024, it was reported that Elsa Bejarano, a communicator and human rights activist, was forced to leave the country due to serious threats against her life. Bejarano, who worked for four years in the Alliance for Human Rights and participated in the collective 'Quito without mining', received an intimidating message on August 18, 2023, which read, "If instead of minerals underground, we leave you?". Following this threat, Bejarano filed a complaint on August 21, 2023.

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<sup>16</sup>The first exiled Ecuadorian journalist is registered in 2024, 2024:

<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/se-registra-el-primer-periodista-ecuatoriano-exiliado-en-2024/>

<sup>17</sup> Ecuadorian journalist went into self-exile after serious threats and persecution, 2024:

<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/periodista-ecuatoriana-se-autoexilio-tras-graves-amenazas-y-persecucion/>

However, the threats intensified. On December 7, she received a threatening call via WhatsApp, and subsequently, on December 15, 16 and 22, she received insistent calls from unknown numbers. On December 16, a guard at her condominium informed her that someone was asking for her, but left no record. Due to the increasing danger and the lack of effective measures to protect her, Bejarano decided to leave the country at the end of December. She is currently safe in a third country.<sup>18</sup>

### **11. Exiled journalist (name protected)**

On April 26, 2024, La Mesa de Articulación para la Protección de Periodistas (MAPP) reports a new case of relocation of an Ecuadorian journalist (name withheld for security reasons).

After publishing content of local interest, the journalist received a call in which he received a death threat. The journalist covers current affairs and red chronicle of his city.<sup>19</sup>

### **12. José Luis Calderón**

Ecuador, May 21, 2024.- Journalist José Luis Calderón, the visible face of the terrorist attack on the TC Televisión channel, has taken the decision to go into exile after the violent event strongly affected his mental health. This is not the only incident he has suffered because of his profession.

At the beginning of 2024, Ecuador experienced one of the most critical moments for press freedom. The facilities of the nationwide TC Televisión channel were interrupted by members of a criminal gang in the city of Guayaquil. In the middle of a live broadcast, armed people beat and kidnapped the media workers on the afternoon of January 9. The entire country and the international community witnessed, in real time, the kidnapping and the violence that ensued. Guns were pointed at their heads and they even shouted that they had grenades and lighters. Shots were fired and pleas were heard from the workers. José Luis Calderón decided to talk to the delinquents and mediate the situation while they pointed a shotgun at his neck and put dynamite in his jacket. His face was the only one recognizable and his images went viral worldwide.

<sup>18</sup> Environmentalist exiled after threats: 'If instead of minerals underground, we leave you?' she was told, 2024:

<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/alertas/ambientalista-exiliada-tras-amenazas-si-en-lugar-de-minerales-under-earth-we-let-you-just-told-you/>

<sup>19</sup> Ecuadorian journalist is relocated after receiving death threats, 2024:

<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/periodista-ecuatoriano-es-reubicado-tras-recibir-amenazas-de-death/>

More than a week after the TC Televisión facilities were taken over, the surveillance cameras of the housing complex where Calderón lived recorded two individuals handing a firearm to the security guard who was hidden in the bathrooms. The next day the security agent was caught and fired. There is no evidence that this was related to the journalist. However, it caught Calderón's attention in a context of violence. After this, the journalist could not return to the media where he worked because he did not feel safe. In addition, he was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder by a psychiatrist from the Ecuadorian Institute of Social Security (IESS).

As a worker, he did not feel that the company gave him security and support, so he filed an administrative appeal to mediate with TC Televisión, pointing out that due to his mental health he could not return to work, but he needed to reach an agreement on economic benefits and settlements, since he was only two years away from retirement.

The media never responded to the mediation calls. On March 18, 2024, Calderón decided to present his formal resignation, which was accepted, but he was told that he had to sign a mediation agreement, with different points from those proposed by the TV presenter, so he refused. Two days later he received an "okay" notice, which meant a dismissal for unjustified absences. Calderón went to the media again and was forced to sign the minutes stipulating the money he would be paid for his resignation and that he could not sue the media over the matter. The channel at no time offered security support beyond bulletproof vests, according to the journalist.

The TC Televisión attack is not the only risky moment to which Calderón has been exposed. Fundamedios, a member organization of the Mesa de Articulación para la Protección de Periodistas (MAPP), reported that Calderón and his journalistic team suffered two assaults in the middle of their coverage in Guayaquil in 2023. The first took place on March 21, when Calderón and his cameraman were ready to go on the air in Huancavilca Sur, in Guayaquil, when they were approached by two individuals on a motorcycle and at gunpoint took their cell phones.

The second case occurred on May 29, 2023 around 6:30 am, in the sector of Las Acacias, south of Guayaquil. While Calderón was interviewing a citizen, an individual arrived on a motorcycle. He threatened them with a concealed weapon and, according to the journalist, the subject angrily demanded their belongings and cash. All these facts were denounced by the journalist to the Prosecutor's Office.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> New journalist goes into self-exile after lack of guarantees to practice his profession in Ecuador, 2024:

On August 2, 2024, the Mesa de Articulación para la Protección de Periodistas (MAPP) expressed its grave concern over the conviction of journalist Jonathan Quezada, who was sentenced to 15 days in prison for allegedly affecting the honor of Judge Hernán Cherres. This conviction is considered a dangerous precedent of censorship and judicial harassment in Ecuador.

Quezada, who investigated irregularities in Bolivar's judicial system and denounced possible crimes by Judge Cherres, received death threats in a pamphlet shortly after his sentence was ratified. These threats, believed to have come from criminal gangs, were issued just two days after the sentence was confirmed in the second instance.

The case began with a conflict between Quezada and Cherres in December 2023, when the judge insulted and threatened him. Cherres' complaint against Quezada, filed in January 2024, alleged that the journalist had disgraced him with epithets that Quezada denies having used. The conviction, which also included a fine and a public apology, was ratified in May 2024, and only days later, the journalist received new threats.

MAPP condemns the sentence and the threat received by Quezada, warning of the serious threat to press freedom and the safety of the journalist and his family. The organization urges the authorities to investigate the threats and to review the use of the judicial system in this case.<sup>21</sup>

## **7. Modus operandi of the crime**

Ecuador has witnessed an increase in violence and systematic threats against journalists and media outlets that report on organized crime. Such actions not only seek to silence, but also reinforce the climate of insecurity and censorship that surrounds the practice of journalism in the country. The attacks come mainly from organized crime that operates with impunity, and any attempt to expose its operations is quickly met with reprisals.

Another pattern that has become evident is that crime has identified the media as a tool to expand its discourse of violence, and they do so through threats and intimidation.

One of the most serious events occurred in August 2023, when journalists in the province of Bolivar began to receive threats for reporting on insecurity in the region. The intimidations continued for several months,

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<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/nuevo-periodista-se-autoexilia-tras-la-falta-de-garantias-para-ejercer-el-oficio-en-ecuador/>

<sup>21</sup> MAPP rejects conviction of Guaranda journalist and warns that his life is in danger, 2024:

<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Comunicado-MAPP.pdf>



included phone calls and messages forcing journalists to disseminate violent communiqués in favor of criminal groups. On September 14, several journalists received a message via WhatsApp warning them that if they did not share a communiqué addressed to the National Police and the mayor of the city, they would suffer serious consequences. The message, which circulated among several media, announced attacks against public spaces, such as schools and terminals<sup>22</sup>.

On the afternoon of October 30 a pamphlet circulated in Manabí that allegedly came from a gang, in which insults and threats were made directly to digital media that broadcast live and which went viral in instant messaging groups in the province. The violent message was addressed to digital journalists of Manta who carried out red chronicle coverage in the city. In it, they were warned that, from now on, every journalist would be located and killed. The pamphlet referred directly to three media workers who are identified as 'el orejón' and his son.

-referring to Henry Suárez as the father and the young Josué Suárez. They both work and founded the media outlet 'Triple vía digital'. They accused the father of being part of a gang. Then they identified the journalist Carlos García, part of the media La Marea, from Manta, and pointed out that they are locating him. They closed the communiqué with the following: "Be warned, don't mess with the mafia"<sup>23</sup>.

Ecuador experienced one of the most critical moments for press freedom. The facilities of the nationwide channels TC Televisión and Gamavisión were interrupted by members of a criminal gang in the city of Guayaquil. In the middle of a live broadcast, armed individuals beat and kidnapped the channel's workers on January 9, 2024. It was 14:17 when TC's live signal was interrupted. The first image that was seen was an individual with his face covered and a gun; then they began to beat and intimidate all the workers of the media. The whole country witnessed the kidnapping and the violence that ensued. They pointed guns at their heads and even shouted that they had grenades and lighters. Shots were fired and pleas were heard from the workers. It is an unprecedented event in Latin America. The objective of the criminals was to speak in a media with live signal<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Alert Bolivar journalists receive crime communiqué:

<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/alertas/periodistas-de-bolivar-reciben-un-nuevo-comunicado-de-organizaciones-criminales/>

<sup>23</sup> Manta media received a threatening pamphlet:

<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/alertas/medios-de-manta-reciben-un-panfleto-amenazante-y-violento-por-part-of-an-organized-crime-group/>

<sup>24</sup> TC Television terrorist attack:

<https://www.fundamedios.org.ec/alertas/terroristas-secuestran-y-se-toman-instalaciones-de-medios-de-co-ammunition/>



These threats and attacks have created an environment of extreme vulnerability for journalists in Ecuador. Organized crime has demonstrated its ability to exert control and violence against those who report on its activities, leading many communicators to self-censor or abandon their investigations for fear of reprisals. This pattern of intimidation reflects not only the growing influence of criminal gangs in the country, but also the lack of effective protection for those who report.

## **8. Impunity**

In Ecuador, impunity in crimes against journalists is an alarming problem that seriously affects press freedom and the rule of law in the country. Since 2018, with the kidnapping and murder of the journalistic team of El Comercio newspaper.

-known as Nos Faltan 3- there has been a worrying increase in violence directed at communication professionals, who, in the exercise of their work, face threats, aggressions, attacks and, in the worst cases, assassinations. These violent acts not only threaten the lives of journalists, but also seek to silence critical voices and restrict access to public information.

According to the register of aggressions kept by the Communication Council in the country, from 2021 to date, 1,025 alerts have been registered. Of these, 891 (86.93%) are directed to communication workers and 134 (13.07%) to media. Of the alerts directed at communication workers, 655 (73.51%) are for men and 227 (25.48%) for women, while 9 (1.01%) are unknown.

Impunity in these cases is manifested in the lack of effective investigations and justice, where many of these crimes or abuses go unresolved. This situation not only perpetuates violence, but also creates a climate of fear and self-censorship among the media and journalists, limiting their scope of action and the way to do journalism independently.

Impunity in the murder of journalists in Ecuador reflects a series of failures in the judicial system and in the different state agencies involved in the pursuit of justice and access to the truth. Many of these crimes are linked to political, economic or organized crime interests that seek to silence those who dare to question established power or expose corruption and other injustices. The lack of response, silence and state inaction not only undermines the right to information, but also weakens the foundations of democracy.

In this context, it is essential to analyze the underlying causes of impunity, the institutional responses and possible solutions to ensure that journalists in

Ecuador can carry out their work in safety and freedom. Examining this issue allows us not only to understand the dynamics of violence against the press, but also to advocate for an environment where truth and justice prevail.

In 2018, there was the kidnapping and murder of three journalists on the Colombian-Ecuadorian border. This case is known as "Nos Faltan 3". Six years and seven months have passed without the Prosecutor's Office having presented significant progress in the investigations, which are still in the inquiry stage. In 2024, the Constitutional Court issued sentence 4-21 DN/24, ordering the declassification of the information contained in minutes 18, 19 and 20 of the Council of Public Security and State (COSEPE), but only in relation to this case. It was not taken into account that the minutes also contain additional information that could help to understand the context of what happened. The provision of information has been partial and incomplete, which could affect the progress of the investigation.

In addition, it is presumed that the minutes have been manipulated and do not correspond to the original documents. A further pronouncement is expected from the Constitutional Court on these facts.

## **9. Conclusion**

Freedom of expression in Ecuador is in a critical situation, affected by a series of challenges that seriously compromise the exercise of journalism and the right to information. Despite ongoing efforts by organizations such as Fundamedios and the Mesa de Articulación para la Protección de Periodistas (MAPP), the environment for journalists remains extremely hostile.

Recent cases of threats and attacks against journalists, such as that of Jonathan Quezada, illustrate a worrying trend towards censorship and judicial harassment. Quezada, sentenced to prison for allegedly undermining the honor of a judge, has been the target of death threats shortly after the ratification of his sentence, revealing a dangerous intersection between justice and the repression of critical journalism. This situation not only puts the lives of journalists at risk, but also threatens the health of democracy by curtailing the media's ability to inform and provide independent oversight of power.

The context in which journalists operate in Ecuador, characterized by the influence of organized crime and political polarization, adds to the complexity of their work. The physical violence and legal pressures faced by journalists have generated an atmosphere of insecurity that makes it difficult to carry out independent and critical journalism. Cases of forced exile and direct attacks are evidence of the lack of effective protection and the failure of the authorities to guarantee a safe environment for the press.

To preserve freedom of expression and strengthen democracy, it is imperative that Ecuadorian authorities take urgent and effective measures to address these problems. This includes a thorough review of the use of the judicial system to censor and silence journalists, as well as the implementation of robust mechanisms to protect communicators at risk. In addition, it is crucial that institutional support and adequate security be guaranteed for those who face threats due to their investigative and whistleblowing work.

Ultimately, the ability of journalists to work without fear of reprisal is fundamental to the health of democracy and the well-being of society. Protecting press freedom not only ensures the right of citizens to receive accurate and free information, but also strengthens the fabric of democracy by enabling independent scrutiny and informed public debate.

## **10. Recommendations**

The State must guarantee a budget for the mechanism for the protection of journalists.

The State must incorporate differentiated protocols for journalists to report to the prosecutor's office.

The State must answer for the murder of the three journalists on the border, as well as the other three reporters in 2022.