



Colombia	
Años	1997-2000

1997 World Press Freedom Review

Seven Journalists murdered. The grisly statistic for 1997 showed just how brutally dangerous Colombia remains for the press. Several more reporters were kidnapped, threatened or otherwise harassed during the year. The first fatal victim was Santiago Rodriguez Villar, 43, a reporter employed as head of a local government press office in Sincelejo, capital of the northern province of Sucre. He was dragged out of his house and shot three times in the head by unidentified gunmen on February 20. There were two murders within a week of one another in and El Heraldo de Barranquilla, he was found dead in his taxi in the port city of Cartagena. His murder on March 18 was initially believed to have been motivated by robbery, but the fact that he had been found handcuffed, on his knees, and stabbed suggested that the murder had been in retaliation for his journalistic work - in particular his coverage of police brutality during demonstrations by March. Freddy Elles, a freelance photographer who worked for Bogota's El Espectador newspaper municipal workers in 1995 and the illegal construction of residences in the Corales del Rosario National Park.

On March 20, Gerardo Bedoya, 55, director of the editorial pages of the Cali daily, El Pais, was murdered by a hired killer who shot him five times as he was leaving an apartment building in the city centre. Bedoya was an outspoken critic of both the scandal-ridden government of President Ernesto Samper and the corrosive influence of the drug trade on virtually every area of Colombian life. In his final column, which appeared just three days before his death.

1998 World Press Freedom Review

For the eighth consecutive year, Colombia proved to be the most dangerous country in Latin America to work in as a journalist. Ten journalists were killed - at least four of them for their investigative work - while the climate of impunity that exists in Colombia sent a clear message to those who wish to silence the media's critical reporting through violence. Eight other journalists were kidnapped and later released by guerrillas or paramilitary groups. On a more positive note, the Constitutional Court, in a ruling on March 18, declared unconstitutional Law 51 of 1975, which required a professional degree to practice journalism in Colombia.

The first fatal victim was Oscar García Calderon, a journalist with the Bogotá daily *El Espectador*, who was killed on February 22. García, who covered bullfights for more than two decades, was murdered shortly after leaving his paper's offices at 7.30 p.m. He was killed by three gunshot wounds - two to the head and one to the neck - in the residential area of Ciudad Salitre. Although the assailants took García's wallet, they did not take his watch or gold ring, making robbery an unlikely motive. García had been conducting investigations into the links between bullfighting and organised crime.

On March 2, Didier Aristizabal, a professor and former radio journalist, was killed in the city of Cali. Aristizabal, a well-know political reporter who had worked for the *Todelar* station in Cali and other local radio stations, was gunned down by unidentified assailants as he left the Santiago de Cali University where he taught. There was no claim of responsibility, but press freedom organisations feared that Aristizabal may have been killed as a direct result of his work with the National Police in helping them set up their own FM news radio station in Cali in 1997.

On March 14, radio journalist Jose Abel Salazar Serna was found dead in his apartment in the central Colombian town of Manizales, the capital of Caldas Department. Salazar, the host of a radio programme called

“Youth in Action” on the *Todelar* station, had been stabbed 15 times.

On April 16, Nelson Carvajal, a teacher and journalist, was shot and killed in Pitalito, south-west of Bogotá. Carvajal was shot by a young man who was waiting for him at the exit of the elementary school in the Los Pinos area, where the journalist taught. The killer escaped on foot, after shooting the journalist with a revolver. Carvajal had worked for *Radio Sur*, a subsidiary of the National Radio Chain (RCN), for the last 12 years. In 1987, he became news director at *Radio Sur*, and produced the morning show, “Dawn in the Countryside”, which attracted record audiences, since 1988. According to his colleagues at *Radio Sur*, Carvajal’s murder was connected to allegations of corruption made on his radio shows, which implicated members of the former municipal administration. The journalist’s sister, Judith Carvajal, publicly accused Ramiro Falla Cuenca, the former mayor, of having been behind the murder, while Carlos Andres Correa Meneses, 20, was interrogated by the police, after being identified by eyewitnesses.

On May 19, Bernabé Cortes was murdered by several gunmen in Cali, CPJ reported. Cortes was a reporter with the nightly news programme “Noticias CVN”, broadcast on the *Telepacífico* network. Cortes reported frequently on such topics as drug trafficking, corruption, and recent negotiations between the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and authorities over soldiers held by the guerrillas. According to local journalists, several men opened fire on Cortes at 11:30 a.m. as he was riding in a taxi near his office, killing both the journalist and the taxi driver. The assailants fled in a Mazda automobile and later changed to another car. Cortes was killed while on his way to an appointment with an individual who had paged him earlier in the morning with “important news.”

On August 11, Luz Amparo Jimenez Pallares, a former correspondent for the TV news programmes “En Vivo” and “QAP”, was killed in Valledupar, north-east Colombia. Jiménez, who worked for the news service of a non-governmental organisation, REDEPAZ (Network of

Initiatives for Peace and Against War), was shot in the head three times by a man who later fled in a vehicle driven by an accomplice. She had just taken her eleven-year old son to school. According to local journalists, Jiménez began receiving death threats in 1996 while working on a documentary about peasants who had been displaced when a government official appropriated land in the town of Pelaya. While she was filming the documentary, members of a right-wing militia stole her video and tapes.

On the morning of August 27, journalist Nelson Osorio Patiño was killed as he waited for a car repair shop to open near Avenida Boyuca in western Bogotá, CPJ reported. A man walked up to Osorio and shot him twice in the head and twice in the shoulder, then fled on a motorcycle driven by an accomplice. Osorio was a sports reporter and producer with the “Gran Prix” sports programme, broadcast on *Señal Colombia*. He was also the owner of a regional sports newspaper in Florence, in the department of Caquetá, and owner of a local news show, “Revista 7.” He had previously worked as a regional correspondent for the Bogotá daily *El Tiempo* and *RCN* radio.

On September 11, Nestor Villar Jimenez, a prominent journalist and former congressman, was killed by gunmen in Villavicencio, capital of Meta province. It was not immediately clear if his murder was politically motivated, but a local police spokesman said his brother, also a journalist, was killed under similar circumstances two years ago.

Saúl Alcaraz, the spokesperson for “Mi Río”, an environmental group in Medellín, was shot to death on October 14, CPJ reported. Alcaraz was a former correspondent for *Teleantioquia Noticias Fin de Semana*, but had not worked in journalism for four years.

On October 15, José Arturo Guapacha, director of the local bi-monthly *Panorama*, was shot in the head in the city of Tuluá, close to Cali, Valle Department, by a gunman who was waiting for him near a garage exit, RSF reported. Guapacha, who had been practising journalism for some 20 years, had worked for *RCN* and *Todelar* radio stations, before becoming

director of Panorama ten years ago.

On April 2, eight journalists and technicians were kidnapped near Santander, district of Bolivar, in northern Colombia, by members of the “Heroes and Martyrs to Santa Rosa Front” of the National Liberation Army (ELN). Ana Mercedes Ariza of *Radionet* and the television programme “CM&”, Rocio Chica of the TV programme “Noti 7”, Javier Santoyo of the TV programme “Noticias de la Noche”, and cameramen and technicians Marcos Quintero, Edgard Osmar Gonzalo Cepeda, Fernando Mogollon, Reynaldo Perez and Saul García, were abducted after having been invited to a press conference on the draft peace accord, which was signed by ELN delegates and then-president Ernesto Samper in Madrid in February. The ELN broke that accord on March 31, stating that it had been drafted “for electoral ends.” By kidnapping the journalists, the guerrillas said they wanted to send a message to the government about human rights violations carried out by paramilitary groups in the region. The local guerrilla chief, Commander Samuel, told *Radionet* that they would hold the journalists “indefinitely” but that “their physical safety would be respected.” The following day, the guerrillas released one of the hostages, Saul García, so that he could deliver a series of video cassettes outlining the ELN’s demands to media outlets in Santander, as well as personal letters from the journalists to their families, asking them to send them clothing. The seven remaining journalists and technicians were released on April 6.

On April 4, three other journalists, Sonia Solano of the national television, Jorge Caicedo of *Hora Cero* and Orlando Manzini of *Uninoticias*, as well as cameraman Johnny Lopera and their driver, Carlos Julio García, were detained for more than two hours by six men, presumed to be members of a paramilitary group, the “Self-defence of Magdalena Medio”, as they tried to establish contact with their kidnapped colleagues in order to bring them extra clothing. Before letting the journalists leave, they destroyed their materials without explanation.

On June 18, a suitcase packed with four kilograms of dynamite was

found in the front yard of the premises of *El Tiempo* newspaper in Medellín, IAPA reported. Security guards notified the police bomb squad before the device exploded.

While drug-traffickers, corrupt local officials, leftist guerrilla forces, and right-wing paramilitary groups continued to target journalists, the media's hopes that things would change for the better under the new president, Andrés Pastrana, who began his term on August 7, quickly dissolved as the killings continued and the government was accused of a blatant act of censorship when it ordered the temporary closure of the Caracol media group's leading radio station.

A resolution from the Communications Minister on 20 October ordered the three-day suspension of all broadcasts by the *Caracol Radio Network's* Bogotá-based all-news radio station. The measure was adopted on the grounds that a popular *Caracol* sports commentator, Edgar Perea, had openly made political remarks while narrating a World Cup match in France in June to plug the campaign of then-presidential candidate Horacio Serpa. The Ministry argued that under Colombian law it had the right to shut down any radio station that broadcast political commentary during a sporting event or was partisan in its political coverage. Caracol owns and operates more than 120 radio stations in Colombia, the United States, Chile and France, and is part of the financial empire of Julio Mario Santo Domingo, a prominent Colombian entrepreneur.

There was some welcome news, however. In a ruling on March 18, the Constitutional Court declared unconstitutional Law 51 of 1975, which required a professional degree to practice journalism in Colombia. According to IAPA, the court considered that "to prevent someone who usually comments or informs from doing so because of alleged intellectual incompetence is a form of prior censorship disguised with reasons of convenience and incompatible with a democratic system."

On June 20, the Supreme Court ruled that all court papers, with the exception of documents which could infringe on "privacy, sexual modesty



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and state security” would be open to the public and that journalists could have access to them.

In October, President Pastrana’s administration sent to Congress a tax reform bill which would make advertising in the print and broadcast media subject to a 15 percent tax.



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Colombia again proved to be the most dangerous country in Latin America to work in as a journalist. Particularly in the provinces, journalists who attempt to expose illegal activities and corruption, or report on the country's 35-year-old civil conflict, continue to face threats, harassment, physical attacks and even death. Seven journalists were killed this year – at least three of them because of their profession. At least 16 journalists were kidnapped and later released by left-wing guerrillas or right-wing paramilitary groups, while four others were forced into exile because of death threats. One media outlet was bombed, injuring three persons and causing heavy damage.

The first fatal victim was Hernando Rangel Moreno, an editor for the *Sur 30 Dias* radio station and a community leader, who was shot dead by a hired gunman on April 12 in Magdalena Department. Investigators were uncertain whether his murder was the result of his work with the community or his coverage of local political corruption.

Jaime Garzón, a beloved journalist and satirist known for his scathing parodies of politicians, was gunned down on August 13 by unidentified assailants as he was driving to the radio station, *Radionet*, where he had a morning show. He had served as an intermediary between left-wing rebels and the families of kidnap victims and had been recently named to a team of influential civilians entrusted with starting peace talks between the government and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional – ELN (National Liberation Army), Colombia's second largest rebel group. There were anonymous claims of responsibility from callers who said they represented right-wing paramilitary death squads, but the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – AUC (Colombian United Self-Defence Forces), a paramilitary umbrella group, denied its involvement. According to Garzón's friends and colleagues, the journalist had received threats from AUC chief Carlos Castaño.

On September 16, Guzmán Quintero Torres, editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper, *El Pilón*, in the northern town of Valledupar, César Department, was killed by a masked assassin. Quintero Torres, who was also correspondent for the “Televista” news programme and vice president of the Valledupar Journalists’ Group, was shot three times in the face and once in the chest. A photographer and a reporter for *El Pilón* were accompanying Quintero Torres to his house and witnessed the attack. *El Pilón* was founded four years ago and is the only periodical that is distributed throughout César Department, which is one of the regions in the country that has been affected most by political violence and the national economic crisis. Quintero Torres’s death marked the second such death in the province in less than 15 months. The former correspondent for the TV news programmes “En Vivo” and “QAP,” Luz Amparo Jimenez Pallares, was shot in the head three times on August 11, 1998.

On October 21, Rodolfo Julio Torres, correspondent with the Cartagena-based radio station, *Emisora Fuentes de Cartagena*, was found murdered along the highway on the outskirts of Berrugas, part of the Atlantic coastal municipality of San Onofre, Sucre Department. He had been shot three times in the head after being dragged from his home by at least four men, police said.

Two local television reporters, Luis Alberto Rincón and Alberto Sánchez, were shot dead on November 28, while covering local elections in El Playón, Santander Department. Their bodies were found by the side of a road in the northern province, where left-wing rebels and paramilitary groups are fighting for control. One journalist had a single shot through the eye, the other 10 bullets put into his head. Although both men had covered various Colombian civil war factions in the past, it was not clear whether they were killed because of their journalistic work.

On December 4, Pablo Emilio Medina Motta, a cameraman with the regional television station, *TV Garzón*, was killed by multiple shots to the



head and back when more than 100 leftist guerrillas stormed the town of Gigante, Huila Department. Six other people died and 20 were wounded in the attack. Medina Motta was filming in Gigante when members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the country's largest rebel group, stormed the town. According to local journalists, Medina Motta got onto the back of a motorcycle with a commander from the police intelligence service and tried to film the attack. Local journalists say the FARC guerrillas shot Medina Motta because they thought he was a member of the police forces.

Jorge Rivera Sena, a correspondent for the daily *El Universal* in Bolívar Department, was kidnapped by a group of armed men reportedly belonging to the paramilitary umbrella group, Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), on May 22. The kidnappers threatened to kill Rivera – who has on several occasions condemned violence by guerrillas and paramilitary groups in the region – if he did not publish information supplied by them. He was released on May 31.

On October 26, members of the ELN kidnapped Henry Romero, a freelance photographer for *Reuters*, and announced that they intended to put him on “trial” for revealing the identity of one of their regional commanders in a photograph. Members of the ELN's José María Becerra unit seized Romero at a press conference because he had taken a photograph of a rebel commander without his trademark red-and-black face mask when he was given access in early June to a camp where some 160 Cali churchgoers – kidnapped by the ELN on May 30 – were being held. Romero was released after nine days in captivity.

On October 29, members of the FARC abducted seven journalists who they had invited to cover alleged atrocities committed by paramilitary forces against local farmers in Bolívar Department. A rebel leader who identified himself as Commander Leonardo called the Bucaramanga daily, *Vanguardia Liberal*, to report the kidnapping. He said the journalists would be released when they reported the “truth” about atrocities committed

against local farmers by paramilitary forces. The seven journalists were released on November 2. According to one of the journalists, Ademir Luna, the rebels had forced them to march long distances in order to visit villages where they heard farmers denouncing alleged paramilitary atrocities. The media concerned – the *Caracol* and *RCN* television networks, “Noticiero de las 7” and “CM&” news programmes, and *Vanguardia Liberal* – issued a statement saying, “All the undersigned media have constantly denounced the outrages of both the paramilitary and guerrillas and will continue to do so, exercising their professional rights and duties. However, it is totally unacceptable that the armed actors should attempt to manipulate journalistic content by any means – much less by violence and kidnapping.”

On November 10, seven journalists and their driver were kidnapped by guerrillas while travelling to cover a paramilitary attack in Atánquez, César Department. The kidnapped journalists – David Sierra Daza and Isabel Ballesteros of *RCN Televisión*, José Urbano Céspedes and Aldemar Cárdenas of *Caracol Televisión*, Pablo Camargo Alí of the TV news programme “24 Horas,” Libar Gregorio Maestre of the “CM&” TV news programme, and Edgar de la Hoz of the daily *El Pilón* – were released four days later. While the kidnapping was initially attributed to the ELN, it was later believed that Front 59 of the FARC was actually responsible.

Threats, harassment, and physical attacks against journalists, particularly those working in the provinces, occurred throughout the year.

On January 21, Alfredo Molano, a columnist for the Bogotá newspaper *El Espectador*, was forced into exile after he was threatened by Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) chief Carlos Castaño. Molano had published a story in July 1998 condemning the AUC.

Journalist Manuel Vicente Peña Gómez was detained on March 5 for failure to post bail, set in August 1998, in relation to criminal defamation charges against him stemming from articles he wrote in 1996, when working for the now-defunct Bogotá daily, *La Prensa*.

On April 11, Wilson Lozano and Henry Duran Padilla of the *NTC* news agency were injured while covering an anti-drug operation when ELN rebels shot down the police helicopter they were in near the town of San Pablo, Bolívar Department. The journalists were taken to the police clinic in Barrancabermeja and treated for minor injuries.

José Laureano Restrepo Colé of *Radio Caracol* and *El Meridiano* in Sucre, Bolívar Department, received several death threats beginning in March. The journalist is known for his investigations into corruption.

On May 27, Yineth Bedoya, a legal reporter for the daily *El Espectador*, escaped unharmed following an attack by two men on a motorcycle. The journalist had been the victim of repeated threats in connection with her investigations into prison facilities. In August 1998, she was threatened for having revealed the existence of an escape plan by jailed drug traffickers in Bogotá.

Carlos Pulgarín, a correspondent for *El Tiempo* in the city of Montería, Córdoba Department, was forced to leave the region because of death threats he received in late June after reporting on the fighting between the Colombian Army, FARC guerrillas, and paramilitaries in the southern part of the province. “We are going to light a candle for you. Your family should prepare a nice funeral procession for you so that you will no longer be an informant or a press relations man for the guerrillas,” one message on his answering machine said. “Tell [Pulgarín] to stop defending the Indians,” said another. AUC chief Carlos Castaño was thought to be behind the threats, because Pulgarín reported that the AUC had suffered heavy casualties in clashes with the guerrillas.

Other journalists who received threats included reporter Juan Carlos Aguiar and cameraman Jhon Jader Jaramillo of *RCN* television, and José Laureano Restrepo of *Radio Caracol* and the magazine, *El Meridiano*.

In August, following the murder of Jaime Garzón, a pamphlet containing threats against 21 intellectuals started circulating in the streets of Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín. Signed by the previously unknown Colombian Rebel

Army (ERC), the pamphlet accused the intellectuals, including three journalists, of “fuelling the war between Colombians” and “fomenting hatred and class struggle.” The three journalists mentioned by name were Alfredo Molano, the *El Espectador* journalist who was forced to flee Colombia in January, Patricia Lara of *El Tiempo*, and Arturo Alape, a columnist for *El Espectador*. Some journalists suspected hard-liners in the Colombian army of being behind the ERC.

Colombia’s TV stations announced in August that they would broadcast news about the country’s civil war exclusively in black and white in an effort to discourage violence. The move, announced two weeks after the killing of Jaime Garzón, was designed to call attention to the Colombian people’s obsession with violence, said Felipe Zuleta, director of the “Hora Zero” nightly news show.

In September, four journalists went into exile after receiving threats against their life. Jorge Rivera, who was kidnapped by the AUC in May, left Colombia for Spain on September 11. A few days later, Antonio Morales of *El Espectador* and Hernando Corral Garzón of the TV news programme “Telenoticiario de las siete,” both of whom had been threatened for speaking out in favour of the peace process, decided to go into exile. Plinio Mendoza, a columnist for *El Espectador*, was forced to leave the country on September 18 after being declared a “military target” by the ELN. On March 24, a bomb sent to Mendoza’s home had been detected before it could explode.

On November 14, a bomb exploded near the Cali offices of the Bogotá daily, *El Tiempo*, injuring three employees. A man identifying himself as a member of the FARC called the *Todelar* radio station and the Cali office of *El Espectador*, claiming responsibility for the attack. The caller said *El Tiempo* was bombed in retaliation for an article about FARC attacks on Colombia’s oil industry that had run in that day’s paper. A previously unknown group identifying itself as the Colombian Patriotic Resistance

(RPC) also claimed responsibility for the attack. In a communiqué distributed to Colombian media, the group said it had bombed *El Tiempo* to protest the government practice of extraditing suspected drug traffickers to the United States. Police speculated that the RPC might be an alliance between drug traffickers and dissident members of the left-wing M-19 guerrilla group. Police also investigated the possibility that the ELN carried out the attack. *El Tiempo* news editor Francisco Santos, in a radio broadcast on the day of the attack, had denounced the May 30 kidnapping of some 160 Cali churchgoers by the ELN.

Responding to the increasing number of violent attacks on journalists, President Andrés Pastrana and Attorney General Gómez promised the Inter American Press Association (IAPA) that they would put in place a plan of protection for journalists whose lives have been threatened by armed groups and confirmed the creation of a special investigative unit dedicated exclusively to solving the murders of journalists.

2000 World Press Freedom Review

It was another violent year for Colombia's journalists, who are caught in the cross-fire of a conflict that has lasted almost four decades. 11 journalists were killed – at least six of them because of their profession. Several others were kidnapped by leftist guerrillas or right-wing paramilitary groups, or forced to flee the country because of death threats. Most prominent among those journalists forced into exile was Francisco Santos Calderón, editor of Colombia's largest daily, *El Tiempo*.

Despite some progress in the peace negotiations between the country's largest rebel army, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the Colombian government, which aim at bringing to an end the country's 36-year-old civil war, journalists are still confronted with death threats, harassment, physical attacks, and assassination. The kidnapping of journalists, who are later released with a message, has become a routine practice among both Marxist rebels and right-wing paramilitaries.

However, there were some positive developments in the year 2000. Responding to the increasing number of violent attacks on journalists, President Andrés Pastrana made good his promise to put in place a plan of protection for journalists whose lives have been threatened by armed groups. Decree 1592 of 18 August 2000, establishing the Programme for the Protection of Journalists and Social Communicators, was welcomed as a step in the right direction by press freedom groups.

In another positive development, which was heralded as a blow to impunity, a criminal court in Bogotá sentenced the killer of two journalists to 60 years' imprisonment in November. Juan Carlos Gonzalez Jaramillo was sentenced for the May 1997 murders of Mario Calderón and Elsa Alvarado, investigative reporters who worked for the Research and Popular Education Centre – CINEP. Also convicted were Walter José Alvarez Rivera, who was sentenced to 45 years in prison, and Pablo Wanderley Vargas, who received a 55-month term. The court also asked prosecutors

to open a formal investigation of Gustavo Adolph Upegui López, the suspected mastermind of the double murder.

The first fatal victims of the year were John Restrepo Abello, a cameraman for a local television station, and his brother, Fabio Leonardo Abello, a radio presenter, who were murdered in the latter's home by unknown assailants in Girón, Santander department, on 7 February. Authorities found no clues as to the motive of the crime.

On 9 February, Antonio Gómez Gómez, owner of the radio station Ecos de la Sierra in Palmor, Magdalena department, was killed by hooded gunmen in his home while his wife and 25-year-old daughter were forced to lie on the floor. Gómez used his station to promote community action campaigns in the Santa Marta region, where armed rebels are active.

The journalist María Elena Salinas Gallego was found dead in San Carlos, Antioquia department, on 5 March. Her body was found next to the bodies of two dead guerrilla fighters from the National Liberation Army (ELN), the country's second-largest rebel group, who were killed during a clash with army troops. Salinas, who was reported missing on 2 March, was said to have been researching armed conflicts in the area. She worked as a professor of social communications at the University of Medellín and also for several local radio stations.

On 21 March, Humberto Garcés Angulo, a correspondent for the magazine Presencia Colombiana, was shot five times by unknown men in a discotheque in Acopi-Yumbo, Valle del Cuaca department. The gunmen took his car, but later abandoned it. A motive for the killing was not immediately clear.

Journalist Marisol Revelo Barón was killed on 4 July by unidentified gunmen who fired three bullets into her stomach in front of her home in the Pacific coast port of Tumaco, Nariño department. Her companion was wounded in the leg. The journalist worked for a local TV news programme sponsored by an environmental agency.

Gunmen shot dead Carlos José Restrepo Rocha, publisher and editor,

respectively, of two regional newspapers in Tolima department, Tangente and Usocoello El Día. Restrepo was seized on 9 September near the town of El Cerrito by a group of some 20 men who claimed they were members of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), a right-wing paramilitary umbrella group. The gunmen led him away in handcuffs and later shot him in the neck and chest, dumping his body on a remote roadside. Witnesses told police that the men accused Restrepo of being in league with the FARC.

On 31 October, Juan Camilo Restrepo Guerra was killed in Aragón, north-western Colombia, by a presumed member of the AUC. Restrepo was the director of Radio Galaxia Estereo, a community radio station, and had covered several cases of alleged corruption by local officials. He was shot at least five times, once in the head.

Radio correspondent Gustavo Rafael Ruiz Castillo was shot by two men in Pivijay, Magdalena department, on 15 November. The journalist's colleagues at Radio Galeón allege that Ruiz was killed by "a gang of hired gunmen financed by the rich people in the area." Ruiz had twice received threats from the right-wing gang, which is not linked to the AUC, and was warned by them to "stop reporting bad news about Pivijay".

Alfredo Abad López, director of La Voz de la Selva (Voice of the Jungle), a local affiliate of the national Caracol radio network, was killed outside his home in Florencia, Caquetá department, by two gunmen on a motorcycle on 13 December. He was hit at point-blank range by at least four shots in the stomach, chest, and head. His murder came two weeks after a colleague at La Voz de la Selva, Guillermo León Agudelo, was stabbed to death in his home in Florencia on November 30. Police said Agudelo had been murdered after refusing an extortion demand, and that there was no connection between his death and his work as a journalist.

Colombian journalists, faced with death threats and increasingly dangerous working conditions, continued to leave the country in large

numbers. On 11 January, journalist Carlos Pulgarín, who had already fled Colombia in December 1999 and took refuge in Lima with the Peruvian Institute for Press and Society (IPYS), received a message on the IPYS's answering machine, warning him that even though he was trying to hide, the callers knew his whereabouts and were going to kill him.

Pulgarín, a correspondent with *El Tiempo*, was first threatened at the end of June 1999, while working in the city of Montería, Córdoba department, where he wrote about a clash between the Colombian army, right-wing paramilitaries and the FARC in the department's southern region. In one of his articles, Pulgarín wrote that the AUC had suffered 14 casualties, and not two as he was told by paramilitaries who had detained him, along with several other journalists, in La Rica, close to the site of the battle.

On 29 June 1999, shortly after publishing this information, Pulgarín was warned that "your family better prepare a nice little funeral procession for you, so that you will no longer be the guerrillas' informant and press relations man". Carlos Castaño, the AUC leader, was suspected of being behind the threat, but denied the charge.

On 7 December 1999, after he was briefly kidnapped and held at gunpoint by a number of men who threatened that there would be no "second time," Pulgarín fled Colombia and took refuge with the IPYS. On 27 December 1999, he received a threatening message left on the IPYS's answering machine, advising him to watch out because the callers knew where he was. On 11 January 2000, he received the second ominous message. The IPYS called on both the Peruvian and Colombian authorities to provide security for the journalist.

Francisco Santos Calderón, editor of *El Tiempo*, was forced to flee the country on 11 March after authorities confirmed the existence of a plan by the FARC to assassinate him. On 8 March, Santos was about to enter a restaurant that he frequented, when his security guards noticed that a number of vehicles that had been following the editor for over a month

were parked outside. Santos changed his plans, foiling an apparent assassination attempt. Less than a week before the 8 March incident, police officers apprehended an individual who said that the FARC had hired a number of professional assassins to kill the journalist. Santos, who is the founder and director of an NGO devoted to putting an end to kidnapping, La Fundación País Libre (Foundation for a Free Country), has publicly denounced the kidnapping of journalists as an attempt by the FARC and other groups to stifle independent journalism. Santos himself was kidnapped in 1990 by Pablo Escobar, the leader of the Medellín drug cartel. Along with ten others, he was held for eight months in an unsuccessful attempt to extort a promise from the then-president of Colombia, César Gaviria, that he would not extradite drug traffickers to the United States.

Another prominent journalist, Fernando González Pacheco, host of the acclaimed TV programme “Charlas con Pacheco” (Chats with Pacheco), was forced to leave the country the week before Santos, also due to threats from the FARC.

In March, Mireya Álvarez Ramírez, owner and director of the La Palma de Facetas newspaper in Cundinamarca department, was forced to leave Colombia as the result of death threats. She had been told to pay 10 million pesos (approx. US \$ 5,000) within 30 days or she would be assassinated. Álvarez had already been forced to leave Colombia between May and October 1999 after members of the FARC demanded 10 million pesos.

Journalist María Alejandra González Mosquera was forced to leave Colombia in June after receiving death threats from the AUC, who claimed that she was a member of the FARC.

On 21 January, Edgardo Montenegro of the daily El Caleño, was targeted by two unknown assailants on motorcycles while in front of his home in Cali. The assailants shot at him four times. Hit by a bullet, Montenegro nevertheless survived the assassination attempt. It was not known whether

the incident was related to his work as a journalist.

Guillermo Cortés, director of “Hora Cero” (Hour Zero), a popular TV news programme on Canal A, was kidnapped by leftist guerrillas on 22 January. Cortés, a 73-year-old veteran journalist known to colleagues as La Chiva (Scoop), was at his weekend home in Choachí on the outskirts of Bogotá when he was abducted by six armed men who identified themselves as members of the FARC and said they were abducting Cortés in order to send a message to the government. He was rescued by soldiers, along with four other kidnap victims, after 200 days in captivity. The FARC had demanded US \$ 1 million for his release.

On 11 February, two press vehicles owned by the radio stations RCN and Radio Caracol were attacked between the cities of Santuario and Cocorna by men allegedly belonging to the Carlos Alberto Buitrago group of the ELN. The attackers set the vehicles on fire and told the media workers that the action, as well as an ELN blockade on the highway between Medellín and Bogotá, was a demonstration of resistance against press controlled by the government and the army.

Carlos Andrés Gómez, a reporter for the news programme “90 Minutes” and correspondent for the TV news programme “Informativo 11 P.M.”, was injured on 10 April when an unidentified object exploded and wounded his right leg. The incident occurred in Cajibío, Cauca department, where guerrilla members of the ELN were carrying out an armed blockade of the Pan-American highway.

On 25 May, Jineth Bedoya of the daily El Espectador, was kidnapped by alleged members of the AUC. Circumstantial evidence suggested that law enforcement personnel were complicit in the kidnapping, which took place in broad daylight in front of La Modelo prison, near Bogotá, where Bedoya had hoped to interview a paramilitary leader about recent death threats to herself and her colleagues. Bedoya was drugged, beaten, and raped, then dumped by the side of a road near the city of Villavicencio some ten hours later. The brutal incident was apparently in response to

El Espectador's coverage of a 27 April clash at La Modelo in which 25 prisoners, mostly common criminals, were killed by inmates belonging to the AUC. Bedoya's colleague at El Espectador, Ignacio Gómez, head of the paper's investigative unit, was forced into exile on 1 June after receiving death threats from the AUC.

On 14 June, Eduardo Pilonieta, a lawyer and contributor to the daily Vanguardia Liberal in Bucaramanga, was seriously injured when he was shot three times by two unknown individuals on motorcycles. It remained unclear whether he was attacked because of his work as a journalist or as a lawyer.

FARC guerrillas confiscated and burned copies of El Tiempo on 20 June. According to an El Tiempo report, more than 50 guerrillas from the FARC's Front 19 stopped an El Tiempo delivery truck between the towns of Caracolicito and Alto del Bálsamo. The truck was travelling from the northern city of Barranquilla when the FARC guerrillas stopped the vehicle and unloaded its contents. Approximately 3,000 copies of El Tiempo were burned on the roadside. Both the FARC and the ELN have targeted El Tiempo's delivery networks in the past. On 4 April, FARC guerrillas stole 3,000 copies of El Tiempo in the town of Aracataca, Magdalena department. That same day, the ELN stole several thousand copies of El Tiempo near the town of Camperucho, César department.

On 5 October, RCN TV journalists Andrés Gil, Gustavo González and Pedro Pinto Gil were kidnapped by members of the ELN near the town of San Luis, where they were covering an ELN blockade on the highway linking Bogotá to Medellín. In a telephone call with the station's staff, the guerrillas blamed the press for not reporting on the ELN's disclosure of information about human rights abuses committed by the army in eastern Antioquia. The three journalists were released after 13 hours in captivity.

On 8 October, ELN guerrilla forces released reporter Jaime Horacio Arango and photographer Jesús Abad Colorado two days after abducting them in Antioquia department. The two journalists, who work for the

Medellín daily El Colombiano, were sent to cover the same ELN roadblock of the Bogotá-Medellín highway where the three RCN TV journalists had been abducted. They were stopped by the ELN guerrillas between the towns of El Santuario and Cocorná and their jeep was set on fire. Once again, the ELN's apparent motive for the kidnappings was to protest the lack of coverage in the media of alleged human rights abuses by the Colombian army.

ELN guerrillas released TV journalist Carlos Armando Uribe on 9 November, a week after kidnapping him in central Tolima department, but continued to hold his colleague, TV producer Jorge Otalora. In exchange for releasing Otalora, the guerrilla group called on the government to pledge money for road improvements in northern Tolima, Uribe said.

On 6 December, a number of reporters, cameramen and photographers were detained by a guerrilla group in Antioquia department. The group was headed for the municipality of Granada, in the department's western region, to report on an attack by the FARC, when they were detained at a roadblock set up by the guerrillas. The journalists – Oscar Montoya, Oscar Alvarez and Alexander Cardona of Caracol, Fernando Tabares, Sergio Goez and Pedro Pinto of RCN, Yolanda Bedoya, Luis Fernando Marín and Gildardo Alvarez of CM&, Diego Argáez of Canal A, Luis Benavides of El Espectador, and Miguel Jaramillo and his technical assistants of the news programme “Noticiero de las 7” – were released after 18 hours in captivity.