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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Edison Lanza

Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression



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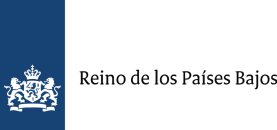
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**Approved by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on December 31, 2017**

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

**2017**

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**TABLE OF ACRONYMS AND REFERENCES**

ACHPR: African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights

American Convention: American Convention on Human Rights

American Declaration: American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man

Declaration of Principles: Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression

European Convention: European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental

Freedoms

European Court: European Court of Human Rights

IACHR: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

ICCPR: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ILO: International Labor Organization

Inter-American Court: Inter-American Court of Human Rights

OAS: Organization of American States

OSCE: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Office of the Special Rapporteur: Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression

UN: United Nations

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**INTRODUCTION**

1. The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (hereinafter, “Office of the Special Rapporteur”) was created in October of 1997 by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (hereinafter, “IACHR”) during its 97th Period of Sessions. Since its establishment, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has had the support of not only the IACHR, but also Member States of the Organization of American States (OAS), Observer States, civil society organizations, communications media, journalists, and, particularly, the victims of violations of the right to freedom of expression. Indeed, those who have turned to the inter-American system for the protection of human rights as a mechanism for the protection and guarantee of their right to freedom of expression have found that the Office of the Special Rapporteur offers decisive support for reestablishing the guarantees necessary for exercising their rights and for insuring that the damage from the violation of those rights is repaired.
2. Since its inception twenty years ago, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has worked for the promotion of the right to freedom of expression through technical assistance in the processing of cases, precautionary measures and hearings, among others. With the same objective, and in the framework of the IACHR, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has prepared thematic and regional reports, carried out official visits and promotional trips, and participated in dozens of conferences and seminars that have sensitized and trained hundreds of public officials, journalists, and defenders of the right to free expression.
3. The annual report of 2017 follows the basic structure of previous annual reports and fulfills the mandate established by the IACHR for the Office of the Special Rapporteur. The report begins with a general introductory chapter that explains in detail the Office’s mandate, the most important achievements of the Office of the Special Rapporteur, and the activities carried out in 2017.
4. Chapter II presents the now-customary evaluation of the situation of freedom of expression in the hemisphere. In 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur received information from multiple sources about situations that could affect the exercise of the right to freedom of expression as well as progress in the effort to guarantee this right. Following the methodology of previous reports, this information was evaluated in light of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression (hereinafter, “Declaration of Principles”), approved by the IACHR in 2000. The Declaration of Principles constitutes an authoritative interpretation of article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights (hereinafter, “American Convention”) and an important instrument to help States to resolve challenges and promote, guarantee, and respect the right to freedom of expression.
5. Based on analysis of the situations reported in the hemisphere, the Office of the Special Rapporteur highlights some of the progress and challenges being faced by States in the region. In particular, Chapter II of this report highlights the adoption by national courts of judicial rulings that represent progress at the domestic level in the recognition and protection of the right to freedom of expression. For example, this Office found there was also some progress in the investigation, trial, and punishment of some of those responsible for crimes committed against journalists in past years. However, despite these efforts, the majority of these crimes remain in a troubling state of impunity. Indeed, this section of the report places emphasis on the murders, detentions, attacks, and threats against journalists for the exercise of their profession. The report also points to numerous attacks and threats in the context of protests. According to the information received by the Office of the Special Rapporteur, 22 journalists or media workers were killed during 2017 in the region, while several others disappeared or were dislocated from the areas in which they worked, for reasons that could have been related with their exercise of freedom of expression. States have the obligation to protect journalists who confront particular risks as a result of the exercise of their profession. States have an obligation to investigate, try, and punish those responsible for these acts, not only to provide reparation to the victims and their families, but also to prevent future occurrences of violence and intimidation.
6. Similarly, the Office of the Special Rapporteur considers it’s important to draw attention to other obstacles to the exercise of freedom of expression in the Americas, such as the application of criminal legislation to prosecute those who have made declarations that offend public servants, the use of stigmatizing declarations against journalists and the media by senior state authorities, and the use of mechanisms of direct and indirect censorship to restrict the free flow of information. The report also identifies some of the obstacles that remain in the region to achieve diversity and pluralism of voices in broadcasting, and deals with some of the new challenges arising from indirect or massive surveillance and data retention practices implemented with the aim of maintaining public order and on security grounds.
7. The intense efforts of the Office of the Special Rapporteur have allowed it to become an expert office charged with promoting and monitoring respect for freedom of expression in the hemisphere. This standing has generated, in turn, a substantial increase in the expectations of the hemispheric community with regard to the work of the Office of the Special Rapporteur. In order to meet this demand, it is necessary to pay attention not only to the institutional and political support of the Office of the Special Rapporteur, but also its financial support, since without this support it cannot function and carry out the activities required by its mandate. It is important to once more urge OAS Member States to follow those countries that have responded to the call of the hemispheric summits to support the Office of the Special Rapporteur. The Plan of Action approved by the Heads of State and Government at the Third Summit of the Americas, held in Québec in April of 2001, establishes that “[t]o strengthen democracy, create prosperity and realize human potential, our Governments will […] [c]ontinue to support the work of the inter-American human rights system in the area of freedom of expression through the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR[.]”
8. The Office of the Special Rapporteur thanks the various Member States that have collaborated with it during 2017, as well as and the IACHR and its Executive Secretariat for their constant support. The Office of the Special Rapporteur especially recognizes those independent journalists and media workers who, on a daily basis, carry out the important work of informing society. Finally, the Office of the Special Rapporteur profoundly laments the murders of journalists who lost their lives defending the right of every person to freedom of expression and information.
9. Also, the Office of the Special Rapporteur expresses its appreciation for financial contributions made by the States of Chile, Costa Rica, the United States of America, Peru, Uruguay, France, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, as well as the Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation, the Swiss Confederation, Open Society Foundations, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and Google Inc. which allowed for the implementation of the Office’s 2017 program. The Office of the Special Rapporteur invites other States to add to this necessary support.
10. This annual report intends to contribute to the establishment of an improved climate for the exercise of freedom of expression in the region, and in this way ensure the strengthening of democracy, wellbeing, and progress of the hemisphere’s inhabitants. Its objective is to collaborate with OAS Member States in raising awareness about the existing problems and in formulating viable proposals and recommendations based on regional doctrine and jurisprudence. To achieve this aim, it is necessary that the work of the Office of the Special Rapporteur be understood as a useful tool for responding to the challenges we face and for generating a broad and fluid dialogue not only with the Member States, but also with civil society and journalists in the region.

**CHAPTER I:** **GENERAL INFORMATION**

1. **Creation of the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression and Institutional Support**
2. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, by the unanimous decision of its members, created the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression during its 97th period of sessions, held in October 1997. This Special Rapporteurship was created by the Commission as a permanent, independent office that acts within the framework and with the support of the IACHR. Through the Office of the Special Rapporteur, the Commission sought to encourage the defense of the right to freedom of thought and expression in the hemisphere, given the fundamental role this right plays in consolidating and developing the democratic system and in protecting, guaranteeing, and promoting other human rights. During its 98th period of sessions, held in March 1998, the IACHR defined in general terms the characteristics and functions of the Office of the Special Rapporteur and decided to create a voluntary fund to provide it with economic assistance.
3. The Commission’s initiative to create a permanent Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression found full support among the OAS Member States. Indeed, during the Second Summit of the Americas, the hemisphere’s Heads of State and Government recognized the fundamental role of freedom of thought and expression, and noted their satisfaction over the creation of the Special Rapporteurship. In the Declaration of Santiago, adopted in April 1998, the Heads of State and Government stated the following:

*We agree that a free press plays a fundamental role [in protecting human rights] and we reaffirm the importance of guaranteeing freedom of expression, information, and opinion. We commend the recent appointment of a Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, within the framework of the Organization of American States.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

1. The Heads of State and Government of the Americas likewise expressed their commitment to support the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression. On this point, the Summit Plan of Action recommended the following:

*To strengthen the exercise of and respect for all human rights and the consolidation of democracy, including the fundamental right to freedom of expression, information and thought, through support for the activities of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in this field, in particular the recently created Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

1. Moreover, the Heads of State and Government ratified the mandate of the Office of the Special Rapporteur during the third Summit of the Americas, in Québec, adding that their governments would:

*Continue to support the work of the inter-American human rights system in the area of freedom of expression through the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR, as well as proceed with the dissemination of comparative jurisprudence, and seek to ensure that national legislation on freedom of expression is consistent with international legal obligations.[[3]](#footnote-3)*

1. The OAS General Assembly has on various occasions expressed its support for the work of the Office of the Special Rapporteur and entrusted it with follow-up or analysis of some of the rights that comprise freedom of expression. Thus, for example, in 2005 the OAS General Assembly approved Resolution 2149 (XXXV-O/05), in which it reaffirms the right to freedom of expression, recognizes the important contributions made in the Office of the Special Rapporteur’s 2004 annual report, and urges follow-up on the issues included in that report, such as the evaluation of the situation regarding freedom of expression in the region; indirect violations of freedom of expression; the impact of the concentration in media ownership; and the way hate speech is addressed in the American Convention.[[4]](#footnote-4) The Office of the Special Rapporteur has analyzed these issues in different annual reports, in the context of its evaluation of the state of freedom of expression in the region and in fulfillment of its task of creating expertise and promoting regional standards in this area.
2. In 2006, the OAS General Assembly reiterated its support for the Office of the Special Rapporteur in its Resolution 2237 (XXXVI-O/06). In this resolution, the General Assembly reaffirmed the right to freedom of expression, recognized the important contributions made in the Office of the Special Rapporteur’s 2005 annual report, and urged follow-up on the issues mentioned in the report. These included, among others, public demonstrations as an exercise of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, as well as freedom of expression and the electoral process.[[5]](#footnote-5) As in the previous case, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has followed up on these issues in its annual evaluation of the situation regarding freedom of expression in the region. In the same resolution, the General Assembly called for convening a special meeting of the Committee on Juridical and Political Affairs to delve deeper into existing international jurisprudence regarding the subject matter of article 13 of the American Convention, and to specifically address issues such as public demonstrations and freedom of expression, as well as the development and scope of article 11 of the American Convention. That meeting was held on October 26-27, 2007.
3. In 2007, the OAS General Assembly approved Resolution 2287 (XXXVII-O/07), in which it invited the Member States to consider the Office of the Special Rapporteur’s recommendations on the matter of defamation laws. In that resolution, the General Assembly reiterated its request to convene a special meeting in the Committee on Juridical and Political Affairs to delve deeper into existing international jurisprudence regarding article 13 of the American Convention. That meeting was held on February 28-29, 2008.
4. In 2008, the General Assembly approved Resolution 2434 (XXXVIII-O/08), which reaffirms the right to freedom of expression and requests once again that the IACHR conduct appropriate follow-up on compliance with standards in this area and deepen its study of the issues addressed in its annual reports. The resolution invites the Member States to consider the recommendations of the Office of the Special Rapporteur regarding defamation, namely by repealing or amending laws that criminalize *desacato*, defamation, slander, and libel, and in this regard, to regulate these conducts exclusively in the area of civil law.
5. In 2009, in its Resolution 2523 (XXXIX-O/09), the General Assembly underscored the importance of the Office of the Special Rapporteur’s recommendations contained in the 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008 annual reports. It also requested once again that the IACHR follow up on the recommendations included in these reports and in particular invited the Member States to take into consideration the Office of the Special Rapporteur’s recommendations, namely by repealing or amending laws that criminalize *desacato*, defamation, slander, and libel, as well as by regulating this conduct exclusively in the area of civil law.
6. In 2011, the General Assembly passed resolution 2679 (XLI-O/11) reiterating the importance of freedom of expression for the exercise of democracy and reaffirming that free and independent media are fundamental for democracy, for the promotion of pluralism, tolerance and freedom of thought and expression, and for the facilitation of free and open dialogue and debate in all sectors of society, without discrimination of any kind. The Assembly invited the Member States to consider the recommendations of the IACHR Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression and asked the IACHR to follow up on and deepen its research on the subjects contained in the pertinent volumes of its annual reports for the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 on freedom of expression.
7. On the subject of access to information, the General Assembly has made several statements supporting the work of the Office of the Special Rapporteur and urging the adoption of its recommendations. In its Resolution 1932 (XXXIII-O/03) in 2003, reiterated in 2004 in Resolution 2057 (XXXIV-O/04), and in 2005 in Resolution 2121 (XXXV-O/05), the General Assembly asked the Office of the Special Rapporteur to continue reporting on the situation regarding access to public information in the region in its annual reports. In 2006, through Resolution 2252 (XXVI-O-06), among other points, the Office of the Special Rapporteur was instructed to provide support to the Member States that request assistance in the development of legislation and mechanisms on access to information. The IACHR was also asked to conduct a study on the various forms of guaranteeing that all persons have the right to seek, receive, and disseminate public information based on the principle of freedom of expression. As a follow-up to this resolution, the Office of the Special Rapporteur in August 2007 published the *Special Study on the Right of Access to Information*.[[6]](#footnote-6) In 2007, the General Assembly approved Resolution 2288 (XXXVII-O/07), which highlights the importance of the right of access to public information, takes note of the Office of the Special Rapporteur’s reports on the situation regarding access to information in the region, urges the States to adapt their legislation to guarantee this right, and instructs the Office of the Special Rapporteur to offer advisory support to the Member States in this area. In 2008, the OAS General Assembly also approved Resolution 2418 (XXXVIII-O/08), which highlights the importance of the right of access to public information, urges the States to adapt their legislation to meet standards in this area, and instructs the Office of the Special Rapporteur to offer advisory support, as well as to continue including a report on the situation regarding access to public information in the region in its annual report.
8. In 2009, in its Resolution 2514 (XXXIX-O/09), the General Assembly once again reiterated the importance of the right of access to public information and recognized that the full respect for freedom of expression, access to public information, and the free dissemination of ideas strengthens democracy, contributes to a climate of tolerance of all views, fosters a culture of peace and non-violence, and strengthens democratic governance. It also instructs the Office of the Special Rapporteur to support the Member States of the OAS in the design, execution, and evaluation of their regulations and policies with respect to access to public information and to continue to include in its annual report a chapter on the situation regarding access to public information in the region.
9. In that same resolution, the General Assembly entrusted the Department of International Law, with the collaboration of the Office of the Special Rapporteur, the Inter-American Juridical Committee and the Department of State Modernization and Governance, as well as the cooperation of Member States and civil society, with drafting a Model Law on Access to Public Information and a guide for its implementation, in keeping with the Inter-American standards on the issue. In order to comply with this mandate, a group of experts was formed - in which the Office of the Special Rapporteur took part - that met three times during the year to discuss, edit and finalize the documents. The final versions of the two instruments were approved by a group of experts in March 2010 and presented to the Committee on Political and Juridical Affairs of the Permanent Council in April of 2010. In May of 2010, the Permanent Council submitted a resolution and the text of the Model Law to the General Assembly, which issued resolution AG/RES 2607 (XL-O/10) in June of 2010. This resolution approved the text of the Model Law[[7]](#footnote-7) and reaffirmed the importance of the annual reports of the Office of the Special Rapporteur.
10. In 2011, in resolution 2661 (XLI-O/11), in 2012 in resolution AG/RES. 2727 (XLII-O/12) and in 2013 in resolution AG/RES 2811 (XLIII-0/13), the General Assembly, among other matters, has entrusted the Office of the Special Rapporteur of the IACHR to continue to include in the annual IACHR report a report on the situation or status of access to public information in the region and its effect on exercise of the right to freedom of expression.
11. In 2014, the General Assembly of the OAS approved resolution AG/RES. 2842 (XLIV-O/14) on Access to Information and Protection of Personal Data, which, among other things, includes entrusting the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression to continue including in the annual IACHR report a report on the situation/status of access to public information in the region and its effect on exercise of the right to freedom of expression.
12. In 2016, the general Assembly of the OAS approved resolution AG/RES. 2885 (XLVI-O/16) on Access to Public Information, which instructs the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression to develop and disseminate the content of the inter-American legal framework on access to information, including the inter-American Model Law on Access to Public Information, through the preparation of reports on the scope of the law and the application of its principles. Additionally it also instructed the Office of the Special Rapporteur to assist Member States and to organize and participate in capacity building programs for public officials on access to information and justice operators.
13. In 2017, the General Assembly of the OAS adopted resolution AG / RES. 2908 (XLVII-O / 17) regarding the right to freedom of thought and expression and the safety of journalists and media workers in the hemisphere. The proposal was presented by the delegation of Uruguay and co-sponsored by the delegations of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru and the Dominican Republic. The Office of the Special Rapporteur joins the commitment that the States make in this resolution to implement strategies and resources that end with the prevailing impunity in crimes against journalists.
14. Since its creation, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has also had the support of civil society organizations, the media, journalists and, most importantly, individuals who have been victims of violations of the right to freedom of thought and expression, along with their family members.
16. **Mandate of the Office of the Special Rapporteur**
17. The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression is a permanent office with its own operative structure and functional autonomy, which operates within the legal framework of the IACHR.[[8]](#footnote-8)
18. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has a general mandate to carry out activities for the protection and promotion of the right to freedom of thought and expression, including the following:
19. Advise the IACHR in evaluating cases and requests for precautionary measures, as well as in preparing reports;
20. Carry out promotional and educational activities on the right to freedom of thought and expression;
21. Advise the IACHR in conducting on-site visits to OAS member countries to expand the general observation of the situation and/or to investigate a particular situation having to do with the right to freedom of thought and expression;
22. Conduct visits to OAS Member Countries;
23. Prepare specific and thematic reports;
24. Promote the adoption of legislative, judicial, administrative, or other types of measures that may be necessary to make effective the exercise of the right to freedom of thought and expression;
25. Coordinate with ombudsman’s offices or national human rights institutions to verify and follow up on conditions involving the exercise of the right to freedom of thought and expression in the Member States;
26. Provide technical advisory support to the OAS bodies;
27. Prepare an annual report on the situation regarding the right to freedom of thought and expression in the Americas, which will be considered by the full Inter-American Commission for its approval and inclusion in the IACHR’s annual report, presented annually to the General Assembly;
28. Gather all the information necessary to prepare the aforementioned reports and activities.
29. In 1998, the Commission announced a public competition for the post of Special Rapporteur. Once the process was completed, the IACHR decided to designate as Special Rapporteur the Argentine attorney Santiago A. Canton, who assumed the post on November 2, 1998. In March 2002, the IACHR named Argentine attorney Eduardo A. Bertoni as Special Rapporteur. Bertoni occupied this position from May 2002 to December 2005. On March 15, 2006, the IACHR chose Venezuelan attorney Ignacio J. Alvarez as Special Rapporteur. In April 2008, the IACHR announced a competition to select Álvarez’s successor. During the period in which the post was vacant, the Office of the Special Rapporteur was under the responsibility of then-Commission Chairman Paolo Carozza. The selection process ended on June 1, 2008 and on July 21, 2008, the IACHR chose Colombian attorney Catalina Botero Marino as Special Rapporteur,[[9]](#footnote-9) who served in that post for two consecutive periods, from October 6, 2008 until October 5, 2014. On December 19, 2013, the IACHR began a selection process to choose the Rapporteur for a new period. The process ended on February 20, and the candidates preselected to hold this position were interviewed during the 151st Period of Sessions. On July 22, 2014, the IACHR chose Uruguayan attorney and journalist Edison Lanza as Special Rapporteur, pursuant to article 15.4 of its Regulation.
30. On April 27th, 2017, within the framework of the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Special Rapporteurship for Freedom of Expression, Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza presented alongside the IACHR and the Inter-American Court, the Annual Report for 2016 to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Politicians (CAJP) of the OAS. The representatives of the countries of Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and the United States, led by the Ambassador of Uruguay, recognized the important work carried out by the Special Rapporteur since its inception in relation to the protection and promotion of the right to freedom of expression in the hemisphere and stressed the importance of ensuring the continuation of its mandate. In the celebration of its 20 years, the Special Rapporteur thanked Member States and, in particular, the countries that, through financial contributions, have made possible the work of the office in the hemisphere.
31. **Principal Activities of the Office of the Special Rapporteur**
32. During its twenty years of existence, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has carried out each of the tasks assigned to it by the IACHR and by other OAS bodies such as the General Assembly in a timely and dedicated manner.
33. This section of the report summarizes very generally the tasks that have been accomplished, with particular emphasis on the activities carried out in 2017.
    * + 1. **Individual Case System**
34. One of the most important functions of the Office of the Special Rapporteur is to advise the IACHR in the evaluation of individual petitions and prepare the corresponding reports.
35. The appropriate advancement of individual petitions not only provides justice in the specific case, but also helps call attention to paradigmatic situations that affect freedom of thought and expression, and creates important case law that can be applied in the inter-American human rights system itself as well as in courts in countries throughout the region. The individual case system also constitutes an essential factor within the broad strategy of promoting and defending the right to freedom of thought and expression in the region, a strategy that the Office of the Special Rapporteur carries out through various mechanisms offered by the inter-American human rights system.
36. Since its creation, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has advised the IACHR in the presentation of important cases involving freedom of expression to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (hereinafter, the “Court” or the “Inter-American Court”). The most relevant cases in the area are:

* *Case of “The Last Temptation of Christ” (Olmedo-Bustos et al.) v. Chile*. Judgment of February 5, 2001. This case dealt with prohibition of prior censorship. The Court’s decision led to an exemplary constitutional reform in Chile and to the establishment of an important hemispheric standard in this area.
* *Case of Ivcher-Bronstein v. Peru*. Judgment of February 6, 2001. The petitioner was a naturalized citizen of Peru who was a majority shareholder in a television channel that aired a program that was severely critical of certain aspects of the Peruvian government, including cases of torture, abuse and acts of corruption committed by the Peruvian Intelligence Services. As a result of these reports, the State revoked the petitioner’s Peruvian citizenship and removed his shareholding control of the channel. The judgment of the Inter-American Court found that the government’s actions had violated the right to freedom of expression through indirect restrictions and ordered the State to restore the victim’s rights.
* *Case of Herrera-Ulloa v. Costa Rica*. Judgment of July 2, 2004. This case involved a journalist who had published several articles reproducing information from various European newspapers on alleged illegal conduct by a Costa Rican diplomat. The State convicted the journalist on four defamation charges. The Inter-American Court found that the conviction was disproportionate and that it violated the right to freedom of expression, and ordered, among other things, the nullification of criminal proceedings against the journalist.
* *Case of Ricardo Canese v. Paraguay*. Judgment of August 31, 2004. During the 1993 presidential campaign in Paraguay, candidate Ricardo Canese made statements to the media against candidate Juan Carlos Wasmosy, whom he accused of being involved in irregularities related to the construction of a hydroelectric plant. Canese was prosecuted and sentenced in the first instance to four months in prison, among other restrictions to his basic rights. The Inter-American Court found that the conviction was disproportionate and violated the right to freedom of expression. The Court also underscored the importance of freedom of expression during election campaigns, in the sense that people should be fully entitled to raise questions about candidates so that voters can make informed decisions.
* *Case of Palamara-Iribarne v. Chile*. Judgment of November 22, 2005. Palamara, a former military official, had written a book that was critical of the National Navy. The book gave rise to a military criminal trial for “disobedience” and “breach of military duties,” and led the State to withdraw from circulation all existing physical and electronic copies. The Court ordered a legislative reform that would ensure freedom of expression in Chile, as well as publication of the book, restitution of all copies that had been seized, and reparation of the victim’s rights.
* *Case of Claude-Reyes et al. v. Chile*. Judgment of September 19, 2006. This case addresses the State’s refusal to provide Marcelo Claude Reyes, Sebastián Cox Urrejola and Arturo Longton Guerrero with certain information that they requested from the Foreign Investment Committee regarding forestry company Trillium and the Río Cóndor project. In this ruling, the Inter-American Court recognized that the right to access to information is a human right protected under article 13 of the American Convention.
* *Case of Kimel v. Argentina*. Judgment of May 2, 2008. The decision refers to the conviction of journalist Eduardo Kimel who in a book had criticized the conduct of a criminal judge in charge of investigating a massacre. The judge initiated a criminal proceeding in defense of his honor. The Inter-American Court found that the journalist’s punishment was disproportionate and violated the victim’s right to freedom of expression. In its decision, the Inter-American Court ordered the State to, among other things, provide the victim with reparations and reform its criminal legislation on the protection of honor and reputation, finding that it violated the principle of criminal definition or strict legality.
* *Case of Tristán Donoso v. Panama*. Judgment of January 27, 2009. This judgment refers to the proportionality of the sanctions imposed on a lawyer convicted of the crimes of defamation and slander for having declared during a press conference that a State official had recorded his private telephone conversations and had disclosed them to third parties. The Inter-American Court concluded that the State violated the lawyer’s right to freedom of expression, since the criminal conviction imposed as a form of subsequent liability was unnecessary. The Inter-American Court also established criteria on the intimidating and inhibiting nature of disproportionate civil sanctions.
* *Case of Rios et al. v. Venezuela*. Judgment of January 28, 2009. The judgment refers to different public and private acts that limited the journalistic endeavors of the workers, management, and others associated with the RCTV television station, as well as to certain declarations by agents of the State against the station. The Inter-American Court found that statements were incompatible with the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information “since they could have resulted intimidating for those linked with that communication firm.” The Inter-American Court also found that the State’s responsibility for the other acts that were alleged had not been proven, but reiterated its doctrine on indirect restrictions to freedom of expression. Finally, the Inter-American Court ordered the State to diligently conduct investigations and criminal proceedings for acts of violence against the journalists and to adopt “the necessary measures to avoid illegal restrictions and direct or indirect impediments to the exercise of the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information.”
* *Case of Perozo et al. v. Venezuela*. Judgment of January 28, 2009. This judgment involved statements by public officials and other alleged hindrances to the exercise of freedom of expression, such as acts of violence by private actors against individuals linked to the Globovisión television station. The Inter-American Court found that statements made by high-level public officials and State authorities’ omissions in terms of their obligation to act with due diligence in investigating acts of violence against journalists constituted violations of the State’s obligation to prevent and investigate the facts. The Inter-American Court found that the State’s responsibility for the other acts that were alleged had not been proven, but reiterated its doctrine on indirect restrictions to freedom of expression. Finally, the Court ordered the State to diligently conduct investigations and criminal proceedings for acts of violence against journalists and to adopt “the necessary measures to prevent the undue restrictions and direct and indirect impediments to the exercise of the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information.”
* *Case of Usón Ramírez v. Venezuela.* Judgment of November 20, 2009. Usón, a retired military officer, was convicted of the crime of “slander against the National Armed Forces,” after appearing on a television program and expressing critical opinions regarding the institution’s reaction in the case of a group of soldiers who had been severely injured while in a military establishment. The Inter-American Court found that the criminal law used to convict Usón did not comply with the principle of legality because it was ambiguous, and concluded that the application of the criminal law in the case was not appropriate, necessary and proportional. The Inter-American Court ordered the State, *inter alia*, to vacate the military justice proceedings against the victim and modify, within a reasonable time, the criminal prevision employed in his case.
* *Case of Manuel Cepeda Vargas v. Colombia*. Judgment dated May 26, 2010. This case refers to the extrajudicial execution of Senator Manuel Cepeda Vargas, who was a national leader of the Colombian Communist Party and a prominent figure in the political party Unión Patriótica. The Court held that, in cases like this one, it is possible to illegally restrict freedom of expression through *de facto* conditions that put the person exercising freedom of expression at risk. The Court found that the State, “must abstain from acting in a way that fosters, promotes, favors or deepens such vulnerability and it has to adopt, whenever appropriate, the measures that are necessary and reasonable to prevent or protect the rights of those who are in that situation.” Likewise, the Court found that effects on the right to life or personal integrity that are attributable to the State can mean a violation of article 16(1) of the Convention when the cause is connected with the legitimate exercise of the victim’s right to freedom of association. In this sense, the Court highlighted that opposition voices are “essential in a democratic society” and indicated that “in a democratic society States must guarantee the effective participation of opposition individuals, groups and political parties by means of appropriate laws, regulations and practices that enable them to have real and effective access to the different deliberative mechanisms on equal terms, but also by the adoption of the required measures to guarantee its full exercise, taking into consideration the situation of vulnerability of the members of some social groups or sectors.” Finally, the Court found that although Senator Cepeda Vargas was able to exercise his political rights, his freedom of expression and freedom of association, “the fact that he continued to exercise them was obviously the reason for his extrajudicial execution,” meaning that the State “did not create either the conditions or the due guarantees for Senator Cepeda [...] to have the real opportunity to exercise the function for which he had been democratically elected; particularly, by promoting the ideological vision he represented through his free participation in public debate, in exercise of his freedom of expression. In the final analysis, the activities of Senator Cepeda Vargas were obstructed by the violence against the political movement to which he belonged and, in this sense, his freedom of association was also violated.”
* *Case of Gomes Lund et. al. v. Brazil.* Judgment dated November 24, 2010.The case addresses the arbitrary detention, torture and forced disappearance of 70 people as the result of operations of the Brazilian army between 1972 and 1975. The purpose of the operations was to eradicate the so-called Araguaia Guerrillas. The operations took place in the context of the Brazilian military dictatorship. The case also addressed the damage to the right to access to information that the family members of the victims suffered. In this respect, the Inter-American Court reiterated its jurisprudence on the right to freedom of thought and expression, which has held that article 13 of the American Convention protects the right of all individuals to request information held by the State, subject to the limitations permitted under the Convention’s regime of exceptions. In addition, the Inter-American Court established that in cases of violations of human rights, State authorities cannot resort to citing State secrecy, the confidentiality of information, or public interest or national security in order to avoid turning over the information required by the judicial or administrative authorities in charge of the investigation. Likewise, the Court held that when the investigation of a crime is at issue, the decision whether to classify the information as secret and refuse to turn it over - or to determine if the documentation even exists - can never depend exclusively on a state body whose members have been accused of committing the illicit act. Finally, the Court concluded that the State cannot resort to the lack of evidence of the existence of the documents requested by the victims or their family members. On the contrary, it must back up its denial of documents by demonstrating that it has taken all available measures to prove that, in effect, the requested information does not exist. In this sense, the Court indicated that in order to guarantee the right to access to information, government authorities must act in good faith and diligently carry out the actions necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the right to freedom of thought and expression, especially when the request for information involves learning the truth of what happened in cases of serious human rights violations like forced disappearance and extrajudicial execution, as was the case here.
* *Case of Fontevecchia and D'Amico v. Argentina*. Judgment of November 29, 2011. The case refers to the civil punishment imposed on Messrs. Jorge Fontevecchia and Hector D'Amico, director and editor, respectively, of the magazine *Noticias*, through judgments issued by Argentine courts as subsequent liability for the publication of two articles, in November of 1995. These publications referred to the existence of an unrecognized son of Carlos Saúl Menem, then President of the Nation, with a congresswoman; the relationship between the President and the congresswoman; and the relationship between the President and his son. The Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation found that the right to privacy of Mr. Menem had been violated by the publications. The Inter-American Court found that the information published was of public interest and that it was already in the public domain. Therefore, there was no arbitrary interference with the right to privacy of Mr. Menem. Thus, the measure of subsequent liability imposed did not comply with the requirement of being necessary in a democratic society, and constituted a violation of article 13 of the American Convention.
* *Case of González Medina and relatives v. Dominican Republic.* Judgment of February 27, 2012. In this judgment, the Court found the Dominican State responsible for violating Narciso González Medina's rights to personal liberty, personal integrity, life, and recognition of juridical personality. In May 1994, the lawyer, professor, and journalist Narciso González Medina was forcibly disappeared, and his whereabouts were still unknown as of the date of the Court's decision. Days before his disappearance, González had published an opinion piece in a magazine called *La Muralla* and had given a speech at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD, in its Spanish acronym), in both of which he had denounced corruption and electoral fraud. The Court was able to establish that the context of González Medina's disappearance was characterized by “an extremely tense political climate owing to the alleged electoral fraud” in the May 1994 elections in the Dominican State; that the country “was almost under military control” at that time; and that “repressive methods were used against those who protested,” as were practices involving “harassment and surveillance of journalists and those who criticized the Government.” Although the Commission alleged that González Medina's exercise of freedom of expression and his forced disappearance were related, the Court did not find the Dominican State responsible for violating article 13 because, according to the Court, it lacked competence *ratione temporis* in this case. The Court found that even though in previous cases “it has recognized that when the purpose of the violation of the rights to life, and to personal liberty or integrity is to impede the legitimate exercise of another right protected by the Convention (…), such as freedom of association (…) [or] freedom of expression, there is also an autonomous violation of these rights,” in this case it was not possible to establish international responsibility because “the beginning of the forced disappearance [had been] prior to the acceptance of the Court's jurisdiction,” and the Dominican Republican had not acquiesced to the facts or acknowledged its responsibility during the process. Thus, the Court “lacks competence *[ratione temporis]* to examine the alleged violation of the freedom of expression of [...] González Medina as an autonomous violation.”
* *Case of Vélez Restrepo and Family v. Colombia*. Judgment of September 3, 2012. The case has to do with the attack perpetrated against journalist Luis Gonzalo “Richard” Vélez Restrepo by soldiers of the Colombian National Army while he was filming a protest demonstration in which soldiers from that institution beat several of the protesters. The case also involves the threats and harassment suffered by the journalist and his family, and the attempted arbitrary deprivation of liberty of the journalist, which occurred as Mr. Vélez tried to advance the judicial proceedings against his attackers. The Inter-American Court found the Colombian State responsible for violating the journalist's right to personal integrity and freedom of expression. It also found the State responsible for not having adequately protected Mr. Vélez, given the threats he had received, and for not having effectively investigated the attack he suffered and the subsequent harassments. The Court noted that “journalism can only be exercised freely when those who carry out this work are not victims or threats or physical, mental or moral attacks or other acts of harassment”; therefore, States “have the obligation to provide measures to protect the life and integrity of the journalists who face [a] special risk.” Among other reparation measures, the Court ordered the State to incorporate into its human rights education programs for the Armed Forces a special module on the protection of the right to freedom of thought and expression and on the work of journalists and media workers.
* *Case of Uzcátegui et al. v. Venezuela*. Judgment of September 3, 2012. In this judgment, the Court found the Venezuelan State responsible for violating, among other things, the right to life of Néstor José Uzcátegui; the rights to personal liberty and personal integrity of the human rights defender Luis Enrique Uzcátegui and Carlos Eduardo Uzcátegui; and the right to freedom of expression of Luis Enrique Uzcátegui. In terms of this last matter, the judgment verifies that, in response to the murder of Néstor Uzcátegui, his brother, Luis Enrique not only reported the facts to the public prosecutor's office; he also asserted through various media outlets that, in his judgment, the General Commander of the State of Falcón Police Armed Forces at the time was responsible for several homicides carried out by “extermination groups” under his command. Upon making such assertions, Uzcátegui was intimidated and harassed. He was also the subject of a criminal complaint for defamation, filed by the police Commander concerned. The Court considered the acts of harassment and threats produced as a result of Uzcátegui's denunciations to have been proven. It also found that the assertions made publicly by Luis Enrique Uzcátegui could and should “be understood as part of a broader public debate on the possible implication of the State security forces in cases involving grave human rights violations.” Taking into account the relevance of such assertions, the Court found that the existence of the criminal proceedings, their duration in time, and the circumstance of the high rank of the person filing the complaint “could have generated a chilling or inhibiting effect on the exercise of freedom of expression, contrary to the State's obligation to guarantee the free and full exercise of this right in a democratic society.” As to the threats and intimidation, taking into account that “it is possible that freedom of expression may be unlawfully restricted by *de facto* conditions that directly or indirectly place those who exercise it at risk or in a situation of increased vulnerability,” the Court found that every State must “abstain from acting in a way that contributes to, stimulates, promotes or increases this vulnerability and must adopt, when pertinent, necessary and reasonable measures to prevent violations and protect the rights of those who find themselves in this situation.” In the case at hand, the Court deemed that the State did not prove that it had “taken sufficient and effective steps to prevent the acts of threats and harassment against Luis Enrique Uzcátegui in the particular context of Falcón state,” and therefore “it did not meet its obligation to adopt necessary and reasonable measures to effectively guarantee [his] rights to personal integrity and to freedom of thought and expression,” under the terms of the American Convention.
  + *Norin Catriman and Others Case (leaders, members and activists of the Mapuche Indigenous People) vs Chile.* Sentence of May 29, 2014. The case refers to criminal proceedings and sentences imposed on eight leaders, members and activists of the Mapuche Indigenous People, as perpetrators of crimes classified as terrorism in the application of Law 18,314 (known as the “Antiterrorist Law” [*Ley Antiterrorista*)], in a context of social protest aimed at recovering the ancestral territories of the Mapuche People and respect for the use and enjoyment of their lands and natural resources. In its ruling, the Court examined the compatibility of accessory penalties imposed in the present case against the victims, leaving them disqualified for 15 years from “making use of a social communications medium or being the director or administrator of one, or performing duties associated with the issuance or dissemination of opinions or information.” The Court determined that the referred-to accessory penalty implies undue restriction of the victims’ exercise of the right to freedom of thought and expression, “not only for having been imposed based on sentences that applied criminal law in violation of the principle of legality and of various procedural guarantees, but also because, in the circumstances of the present case, it is contrary to the principle of proportionality of the penalty.” The Court added that, given that the victims are traditional authorities of the Mapuche Indigenous people who “are responsible for playing a determining role in communicating the interests and in the political, spiritual and social leadership of their respective communities,” the imposition of the referred-to accessory penalty “has restricted the possibility of participating in the dissemination of opinions, ideas and information by carrying out duties in the social communications media, which could limit the sphere of action of their right to freedom of thought and expression in the exercise of their duties as leaders or representatives of their communities. At the same time, this negatively affects the social dimension of the right to freedom of thought and expression, which, as established by the Court in its jurisprudence, implies the right of everyone to know about opinions, narratives and news expressed by third parties.” It also reiterated its jurisprudence regarding the “intimidating effect on the exercise of freedom of expression that can be caused by the fear of being subjected to an unnecessary or disproportionate criminal or civil sanction in a democratic society, which can lead to self-censorship both by those upon whom the sanctions are imposed as well as other members of society.” In the present case, the Tribunal determined “that the way in which the Antiterrorist Law [*Ley Antiterrorista*] was applied to the members of the Mapuche Indigenous People could have caused reasonable fear among other members of that people involved in actions associated with social protest and claims for their territorial rights or who could possibly wish to participate in them.” It therefore determined that the State had violated the right to freedom of expression, in detriment to the victims.
  + *Case of Grainer et al (Radio Caracas Televisión) v. Venezuela*. Judgment of June 22, 2015. In this judgment the Inter-American Court held the State of Venezuela internationally responsible for the violation of certain rights following the closing of the television channel Radio Caracas Televisión (“RCTV”) on May 27, 2007. The closing was due to the State reserving the radio electric spectrum that RCTV had been using and thereafter barring participation in administrative proceedings of a media outlet that was critical of the government. Specifically, the Court decided it was an indirect restriction on the right to freedom of expression of the executives and journalists for that media outlet, as well as a violation of the right to freedom of expression as it relates to the duty of non-discrimination. In this regard, the Inter-American Court considered the restrictions to freedom of expression often materialize through State or individuals’ actions affecting not only the entity that makes up the media outlet but also the plurality of individuals, such as shareholders or the journalists working there reporting through the media outlet and whose rights may also be violated. Likewise the Court recognized the legal authority and need the States have to regulate radio broadcasting, which includes not only the possibility of defining the way concession, renewal or revocation of licenses are granted, but also in the planning and implementation of public policy on said activity; as long as the right to freedom of expression is respected. In addition it found that considering the radio electric spectrum is limited with only a certain number of frequencies, this restricts the number of media outlets that have access to it; therefore it is necessary to ensure that diverse visions, opinions or informational positions are represented in that number of media outlets. The Court noted that plurality of ideas in the media couldn’t be measured by the number of media outlets but rather that the broadcasted ideas and information are effectively diverse and addressed from differing positions and not by one viewpoint. The aforementioned must be considered in procedures used for granting or renewing broadcasting concessions or licenses. In addition, the Court underscored the need for States to regulate the procedures on granting and revoking broadcasting concessions or licenses in a clear and precise manner through objective criteria avoiding partiality. In particular, it considered said regulation cannot be based on “political discrepancies that could generate a government editorial line. As noted earlier, the right to freedom of expression should not only be guaranteed for favorable broadcasting or broadcasts considered inoffensive or indifferent, but should also be specially protected when they are disagreeable to the government or any other sector of the population”. Upon analyzing the instant case the Court concluded the State’s actions “imply abuse of power as a State power was used in order to align a media outlet with the government”. This opinion is based on the fact that “the decision had been made earlier and was founded on the annoyance caused by RCTV’s editorial line, in addition to the context of the deterioration of the protection to freedom of expression that was proven in this case”. The Court affirmed that said abuse of power “impacted the exercise of freedom of expression, not only to RCTV workers and executives, but also in the social dimension of the aforementioned right, in other words, citizens were deprived of access to the RCTV editorial line. In fact the true objective was to silence government criticism which in addition to pluralism, tolerance and spirit of openness are necessary for a democratic debate which is exactly what the right to freedom of expression seeks to protect”. Lastly, the Court found violations of due process and right to be heard in as much as: i) the legal procedure followed for title transformation and concession renewal “was deliberately omitted by the State”, and ii) the victims were unable to intervene directly in the legal proceedings resulting in the seizing of RCTV property and as of June of 2007 no other hearings have been held on the matter.
  + *Case of López Lone et al v. Honduras.* Judgment of October 5, 2015. In the judgment the Court recognized the existing relationship between political rights, freedom of expression, right of assembly and freedom of association and that together all these rights make democracy possible. The relationship between these rights is manifested even more where there is rupture of institutional order after a coup d’état. In this regard the Court also noted that protests and expressions favoring democracy must have the highest level of protection possible and depending on the circumstances these may be tied with some or all of the aforementioned rights. This Court also considered the right to defend democracy constitutes a specific manifestation of the right to participate in public matters and is likewise part of the joint exercise of other rights such as the right to freedom of expression and right of assembly. The Court underscored that the American Convention confers the protection of political rights, freedom of expression, right of assembly and freedom of association to all persons, independent from any other consideration; therefore it cannot be permitted for or restricted from a specific profession or group of people. Nevertheless, it clarified that these rights are not absolute and may be subject to restrictions compatible with the Convention. Regarding persons in the judiciary, it held that due to their duties in the administration of justice, under normal Rule of Law conditions, judges are subject to different restrictions in ways that do not affect other individuals, including other public servants. In this regard it noted that pursuant to the American Convention the restrictions to certain behaviors for judges with the object of protecting independence and impartiality in the execution of justice as a “right or freedom of others”. Nonetheless, it warned that the power the States have to regulate or restrict these rights is not discretional and must be interpreted in a restrictive manner, in such a way that it could not bar judges from participating in all types of political discussions. In this regard, it underscored that there are situations where judges, as regular members of society, may feel the moral obligation to express themselves. In fact the Court noted that when there is a serious democratic crisis, such as the one in this case, regulations restricting the rights of judges from political participation in defense of democratic order are inapplicable. It would run counter to the very power of State branches of government and to international obligations derived from participation in the OAS to disallow judges to voice their opinion against a coup d’état. On the other hand the Court considered that the mere opening of a disciplinary action case against the judges and the appellate court judge (magistrada) for their actions against the coup d’état and in favor of the Rule of Law could have an intimidating effect and therefore constitute an undue restriction on their rights. Specifically regarding the victims in this case the Court noted: i) the disciplinary procedures against Mr. López Lone for participating in a protest against the coup d’état and his subsequent removal, and against Mr. Chévez de la Rocha for his alleged participation and subsequent detention in a protest against the coup d’état and for the comments made to Judiciary colleagues as well as not allowing his return to the bench; were a violation of their freedom of expression, right to assembly and political rights enshrined in articles 13.1, 15 and 23 of the Convention, as related to article 1.1 of the aforementioned; ii) disciplinary action against Ms. Flores Lanza, for availing herself of the amparo recourse, filling a complaint on the comments and actions of other judiciary bodies, as well as her subsequent removal, and the opening of a disciplinary action against Mr. Barrios Maldonado, for a news article wherein his opinion on the coup d’état was summarized, constitute a violation of freedom of expression and political rights, enshrined in articles 13.1 and 23 of the Convention as it pertains to article 1.1 of the aforementioned, and in prejudice thereto.
  + *Case of I.V v Bolivia:* On November 30, 2016 the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (hereinafter “the Inter-American Court”, “the Court” or “the Tribunal”) issued a sentence in which it declared the Plurinational State of Bolivia internationally responsible for violation of the rights to personal integrity, personal freedom, dignity, private and family life, access to information and founding a family, recognized in articles 5.1, 7.1, 11.1, 11.2, 13.1 and 17.2 of the American Convention, in detriment to Mrs. I.V. The central controversy of the present case consisted in determining if the tying of the Fallopian tubes of Mrs. I.V. on July 1, 2000 in Bolivia by a public employee at a state hospital was contrary to the international obligations of the State, in other words, if that procedure was carried out after obtaining the informed consent of the patient, under the parameters established in international law for this type of medical actions at the time of the events. In its ruling, the Court determined that the obligation to obtain informed consent signifies the establishment of limits for medical action and guarantees that these limits are adequate and effective in practice, so that neither the State nor third parties, particularly the medical community, may act in arbitrary ways in the sphere of the personal or private integrity of individuals, particularly in relation to access to health services, and in the case of women, family planning or other services associated with sexual and reproductive health. Also, the informed consent rule is associated with the right of access to information in the field of health, because a patient can only give their informed consent if they have received and understood sufficient information that enables them to make a full decision. That is why, in the health sphere, the Court reiterated the instrumental character of the law for access to information, because it is an essential means for obtaining informed consent and, therefore, the effective realization of the right to autonomy and freedom with respect to reproductive health. The Tribunal emphasized that “in the field of sexual and reproductive health, the obligation for active transparency attributable to the State goes hand-in-hand with the duty of health personnel to provide information that enables people to make free and responsible decisions about their bodies and sexual and reproductive health, which are associated with intimate aspects of their personality and private and family life.”[[10]](#footnote-10)
  + *Case of Lagos del Campo v. Peru:* On August 31, 2017, the Inter-American Court handed down a judgment finding the State of Peru internationally responsible for violating Mr. Alfredo Lagos del Campo’s rights to freedom of expression and to a fair trial. Mr. Lagos del Campo was an elected union representative in Peru’s metallurgical industry, who was fired because of statements he made to the press criticizing his employer. The Inter-American Court recognized that the scope of protection of the right to freedom of expression “is particularly applicable in labor settings such as in the instant case,” and that the State must not only respect but also guarantee this right, “in order for workers or their representatives to also be able to exercise it. Therefore, when there is a general or public interest, an enhanced level of protection of freedom of expression is required, especially with respect to those who hold positions as representatives.” The Inter-American Court observed that the State upheld a restriction on the victim’s right to freedom of expression, through a penalty that was unnecessary in relation to the aim pursued and in the absence of a proper reason. It found that, according to the circumstances of this case, there was no compelling need justifying the victim’s dismissal. In particular, the Inter-American Court held that his freedom of expression was restricted without taking account of the fact that his statements referred to matters of public interest, within the scope of his responsibilities, which were additionally protected by his status as an elected workers’ representative. The Inter-American Court also found that the State violated the victim’s rights to freedom of association and to employment stability and protection.[[11]](#footnote-11)

1. With the preparation and advancement of these cases, the Office of the Special Rapporteur helps make it possible for the Commission and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to establish important case law on the limitations and scope of the right to freedom of thought and expression. The standards achieved lend a greater dynamism to the work of the bodies of the inter-American system and make it possible to take on new challenges in the effort to raise the level of protection for freedom of thought and expression throughout the hemisphere.

**2. Precautionary Measures**

1. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has worked, within its mandate, with the IACHR Protection Group with regard to recommendations on the adoption of precautionary measures in the area of freedom of expression. In this regard, the IACHR has requested on multiple occasions that OAS Member States adopt precautionary measures to protect the right to freedom of expression. It did so, for example, in the cases of (i) Matus Acuña (Chile);[[12]](#footnote-12) (ii) Herrera Ulloa v. Costa Rica;[[13]](#footnote-13) (iii) López Ulacio v. Venezuela;[[14]](#footnote-14) (iv) Peña v. Chile;[[15]](#footnote-15) (v) Globovisión v. Venezuela;[[16]](#footnote-16) (vi) Tristán Donoso v. Panama;[[17]](#footnote-17) (vii) Yáñez Morel v. Chile;[[18]](#footnote-18) (viii) Pelicó Pérez v. Guatemala;[[19]](#footnote-19) and (ix) Rodríguez Castañeda v. Mexico;[[20]](#footnote-20) (x) Leo Valladares Lanza and Daysi Pineda Madrid v. Honduras;[[21]](#footnote-21) (xi) Journalists of La Voz de Zacate Grande (Honduras),[[22]](#footnote-22) y (xii) Lucia Carolina Escobar Mejia, Cledy Lorena Caal Cumes, Gustavo Girón v. Guatemala,[[23]](#footnote-23) (xiii) Emilio Palacio, Carlos Nicolás Pérez Lapentti, Carlos Pérez Barriga and César Pérez Barriga v. Ecuador[[24]](#footnote-24); (xiv) 15 workers of Progreso Radio v. Honduras[[25]](#footnote-25); and (xv) Yoani María Sánchez Cordero v. Cuba[[26]](#footnote-26); José Moisés Sánchez Cerezo (Mexico);[[27]](#footnote-27) Miguel Henrique Otero and others (Venezuela);[[28]](#footnote-28) X and others (Mexico);[[29]](#footnote-29) César Obando Flores Rodríguez (Honduras)[[30]](#footnote-30); Lester Toledo and family (Venezuela)[[31]](#footnote-31); and Braulio Jatar (Venezuela).[[32]](#footnote-32)
2. During 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur collaborated in the study of 34 requests of precautionary measures. The following requests were granted: Members of Party Voluntad Popular regarding Venezuela[[33]](#footnote-33); Lorenzo Mendoza and familly regarding Venezuela[[34]](#footnote-34); Luis Florido regarding Venezuela[[35]](#footnote-35); Henrique Capriles Radonski regarding Venezuela[[36]](#footnote-36); Milagro Sala regarding Argentina[[37]](#footnote-37); and Journalists of the newspaper “*Revista Factum*” regarding El Salvador[[38]](#footnote-38).
3. The granting of the precautionary measures does not constitute a prejudgment on the merits in question. Rather, these measures are adopted out of a need to avert grave, imminent, and irremediable harm to one of the rights protected in the American Convention of Human Rights, or to maintain jurisdiction in the case and so the subject of the action does not disappear.

**3. Public Hearings**

1. The IACHR received various requests for hearings and working meetings on matters involving freedom of expression during its most recent periods of sessions. The Office of the Special Rapporteur participates actively in the hearings on freedom of expression, preparing the reports and handling the corresponding interventions and follow-up.
2. Within the framework of the 161st Period of Sessions of the IACHR that took place from March 15th to 22nd, 2017, various hearings addressed issues related to the right to freedom of expression in the hemisphere. On March 18th, a regional hearing on the right of access to relevant information for the enforceability of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights took place. The hearing was requested by the civil society organizations of Fundación Construir Bolivia; Institute of Legal and Social Studies of Uruguay (ILESUR); Regional Alliance for Free Expression and Information; Article 19 Brazil; Foundation for the Development of Sustainable Policies (FUNDEPS), Civil Association for Equality and Justice (ACIJ); CAinfo and Fundar to inform the IACHR of the need to consolidate standards regarding production and access to information that allows progress towards the effective implementation and enforceability of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights (DESCA). Likewise, on March 18th, a regional hearing requested by civil society organizations, social movements and communities from Nicaragua, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic was held with the support of Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF). The hearing addressed the right of access to information and transparency in environmental management, concession, monitoring and supervision of extractive activities in the Americas. The Office of the Special Rapporteur also participated on in a hearing regarding the situation of the right to freedom of expression in Nicaragua, requested by the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH); the Research Center for Communication (CINCO), the Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation; and the Center for Justice and International Rights (CEJIL). During the hearing, press organizations and civil society denounced to the IACHR the systematic acts of direct and indirect restriction on freedom of expression that have taken place in the country since President Daniel Ortega took office a decade ago. On March 20th, a hearing was held entitled "Reports of repression of protest and unionization in the province of Jujuy, Argentina. This hearing was requested by the union of sugar workers and employees of the Ledesma and La Esperanza Mill, alongside Amnesty International, CEPRODH, lawyers in human rights, social studies in northwestern Argentina and the Center for Legal Studies (CELS). In addition, within the framework of the sessions, the Special Rapporteur held meetings with journalists and visiting civil society organizations, including; Article 19 Mexico, Educating Consumers, Internews El Salvador, and meetings with the regional representative of the United Nations High Commissioner Amerigo Incalcaterra and the lawyer of the case of the Venezuelan journalist, Braulio Jatar.[[39]](#footnote-39)
3. The IACHR held, at the invitation of the Argentine State, its 162nd Extraordinary Period of Sessions in Buenos Aires, from May 22nd to 26th, 2017, in which hearings were held to address issues related to the right to freedom of expression in the Southern Cone. On May 26th, hearings were held on the topics of “Democratization of the Media in Uruguay”, requested by the civil society organization of Coalition for Democratic Communication (CDC), and another on the "Situation of Freedom of Expression and Community Radio in the Southern Cone" requested by AMARC, AMARC International, and OBSERVACOM. The IACHR also convened an ex-officio hearing on protest and human rights in Paraguay on May 26th, with the participation of the State and the Association of Graphic Reporters of Paraguay, as well as the Forum of Paraguayan Journalists (FOPEP, for its initials in Spanish). The IACHR session finished on May 27th with a press conference led by the President of the IACHR, Francisco Jose Eguiguren Praeli, with the participation of the Executive Secretary of the IACHR Paulo Abrão, the Commissioners José de Jesús Orozco Henríquez, Margarette May Macaulay, Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, and Luis Ernesto Vargas Silva, the Deputy Executive Secretary Elizabeth Abi-Mershed, and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression Edison Lanza. The press conference was held in the 'Memory and Human Rights Space', the former Mechanical School of the Navy (exESMA) during the Argentine military civic dictatorship. Former Argentine chancellor Jorge Taiana and Horacio Verbitzky of the Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS) also accompanied the IACHR in the closing ceremony. In the framework of the 162nd session, the Rapporteur held a meeting with the coordinator of the Commission and Director of the National Entity of Communications of Argentina (Enacom), Silvana Giudici.[[40]](#footnote-40)
4. During the 163rd Extraordinary Period of Sessions of the IACHR held in Lima from July 3rd to 7th, 2017, at the invitation of the Peruvian State, two hearings were held addressing issues related to the right to freedom of expression in the Hemisphere. On July 5th, a hearing was held on the situation of the right to freedom of expression in Colombia; requested by the Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP) in order to present before the IACHR the attacks against the press, protection and impunity challenges as current phenomena, and pendings on integral attention in the country. Likewise, a hearing on the right to freedom of expression and democracy in Venezuela requested by Public State Organizations, the Instituto de Libertad y Prensa (IPYS), and the Human Rights Center of the UCAB took place on the 6th. The petitioners denounced before the IACHR a structural pattern of impunity that persists in cases of violence against journalists in the country. During the hearing, the Special Rapporteur referred to hostility, attacks, and threats against journalists by even senior public officials, and recalled that the State of Venezuela has an obligation to prevent, protect, and investigate such cases. Rapporteur Edison Lanza also participated in two working meetings on the precautionary measures of Braulio Jatar and of the Members of the Voluntad Popular party, both regarding Venezuela. To conclude, the IACHR renewed the mandate of Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza for a new period of three years, in accordance with Article 15 of its Rules of Procedure.[[41]](#footnote-41)
5. During the framework of the 164th Period of Session of the IACHR held in Mexico City from September 4th to 8th, 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur participated on September 6th in a hearing on the situation of the right to freedom of expression in Costa Rica. This hearing was requested by the civil society organization Red de Medios y Iniciativas de Comunicación Alternativa (RedMICA Network) and was attended by the Costa Rican State. The objective of the hearing was to advocate the need to adapt the national legal framework regarding broadcasting to the Inter-American standards on freedom of expression and to report on the impact that the current regulation has had on the characteristics of concentration, pluralism and diversity of operators and contents registered by the country today. During the sessions in Mexico, the Special Rapporteur held working meetings with Article 19 Mexico to gather information on the case of murdered journalist Javier Valdez.[[42]](#footnote-42)
6. Within the framework of the 165th Regular Period of Session of the IACHR held from October 23rd to 27th in Montevideo, at the invitation of the Uruguayan State, the Office of the Special Rapporteur participated in several hearings related to the right to freedom of expression in the Hemisphere that took place in the Legislative Palace. With the absence of the Ecuadorian State, on October 23rd the hearing on freedom of expression and reform of the Organic Law of Communication in Ecuador requested by the organizations was held: Andean Foundation for Social Observation and Media Studies (Fundamedios); Ecuadorian Association of Newspaper Publishers (AEDEP); Platform for Democracy and Human Rights in Ecuador; and National Union of Journalists of Ecuador. The Office of the Special Rapporteur also participated on October 24th in the ex-officio hearing convened by the IACHR on violence, citizen security and freedom of expression in Venezuela. The audience included the participation of the Venezuelan State and the following civil society organizations: A Window to Freedom, the Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons, Venezuelan Penal Forum, Public Space, Human Rights Center of the Andrés Bello Catholic University and the Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict. Additionally, within the framework of the session, the Special Rapporteur held a meeting with the Uruguayan Press Association (APU) and a closed work meeting with Deputy Karina Banfi and a group of national commissioners of the freedom of expression commission of Argentina in relation to the situation of the state of freedom of expression in the province of Formosa.[[43]](#footnote-43)
7. During the 166th Extraordinary Period of Sessions of the IACHR held from November 29th to December 7th in Washington DC, the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression held a hearing on December 7th on the right of association, peaceful assembly and freedom of expression in the United States. The hearing was requested by the organizations of CIVICUS; Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) and Charity & Security Network. [[44]](#footnote-44)

**4. Seminars and Workshops with Strategic Actors in the Region**

1. Seminars are a critical tool the Office of the Special Rapporteur uses to promote the inter-American system for the protection of human rights and the right to freedom of expression. In the last twenty (20) years, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has organized seminars throughout the region, in many cases with the cooperation of universities, government institutions, and nongovernmental organizations.
2. Hundreds of journalists, attorneys, members of the Public Prosecutor's Office, university professors, judges, and journalism; and law students among others, have attended the training sessions. These are offered by staff members of the Office of the Special Rapporteur both in country capitals and in more remote regions where there is often no access to information on the guarantees that can be sought to protect the right to freedom of thought and expression.
3. The meetings with those involved open the door for more people to be able to use the inter-American human rights system to present their problems and complaints. The seminars also enable the Office of the Special Rapporteur to expand its network of contacts. In addition, the workshops and working meetings have allowed the Office of the Special Rapporteur to work closely with strategic actors to advance the application of international standards in domestic legal systems.
4. The following is a summary of the principal seminars and workshops held by the Office of the Special Rapporteur during 2017.
5. On January 23rd, human rights specialist of the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR, Tatiana Guasti traveled to Panama City to participate in a regional consultation on communication strategies for UNICEF in Latin America and the Caribbean. The lawyer participated in a seminar about freedom of expression and the role of the media.
6. A team of the Special Rapporteurship composed of Edison Lanza and senior attorney Ona Flores, traveled to San José, Costa Rica to participate in the 117th Regular Session of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. On February 7th, the public hearing of the "Lagos del Campo v. Peru Case" was held, relating to the dismissal of Mr. Alfredo Lagos del Campo on June 26th, 1989, allegedly as a result of certain demonstrations held by the president of the Electoral Committee of the Industrial Community of the Ceper-Pirelli company. The hearing also counted on the participation of Damian Loreti (UBA) as expert witness.
7. On February 23rd, the Office of the Special Rapporteur organized, with the support of the Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI), a meeting with regional experts on social protest and human rights that took place at the offices of the Open Society Foundation in Washington DC. The purpose of the consultation was to discuss a draft thematic report on Protest and Human Rights drafted by the Office of the Special Rapporteur. Over the years, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur have produced important sets of principles and standards related to the exercise of human rights in the context of protest, however, there continues to be regulatory gaps, as well new challenges which have arisen in the region. The report, therefore, seeks to address these challenges and provide better guidance for States on how to implement their international obligations regarding social protest through national laws and practices as well as contributing to the promotion efforts made by civil society organizations. The event was attended by more than 30 international human rights experts, including Gustavo Palmieri (Lanus University); Catalina Botero (University of the Andes); Paula Litvachky (CELS); Jomary Ortegon (CAJAR, Colombia); Sofia Robina (Centro Prodh Mexico); Jocelyn Nieva (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, ICNL); Sandra Coliver (OSJI); Daniel Holder (Committee of the Administration of Justice, CAJ); Jennifer Turner (American Civil Liberties Union Human Rights Program, ACLU); Rob de Luca (Canadian Civil Liberties Association, CCLA); Paula Martins (Article 19 Brazil); Ligia Bolivar (UCAB, Venezuela); Barbora Bukovska (Article 19); Michael Hamilton (University of East Anglia / OSCE); Heidy Rombouts (UN Pacific Meeting and Association); and Maria Luisa Bascur (UN-HR, Mexico). During the consultation, the issues of criminalization of the protest; accountability and facilitation of the protest and was addressed in a plenary discussion the legal framework in the context of social protest were discussed. In addition, the Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS) presented its report "The Latin American States in the Face of Social Protest", collecting the situation of social protest in the region, and Daniel Holder presented a draft of the guidelines developed jointly with OSJI, on the principles of protests and the right to information which focused on the transparency of the police agencies in the management of protests.
8. On February 24th, the workshop on "Concentration, diversity and pluralism in the digital economy" was held at the School of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University (GW). Organized by the Latin American Observatory of Regulation, Media and Convergence (OBSERVACOM), Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza offered welcoming remarks alongside Professor Silvio Waisbord (University of George Washington) and the Director of Observacom, Gustavo Gomez, who highlighted the objectives of the workshop. The workshop counted with the participation of experts: Joao Brant (OBSERVACOM); Joan Barata (former advisor to the OSCE Media Freedom Representative, Spain); Jonathan Levy (Federal Communications Commission-FCC, USA); and Rosana dos S. Alcantara (Ex-CININE, Brazil).
9. On March 6th, the launching of the "Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and "Fake News ", Disinformation and Propaganda," adopted on March 3 by the Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression of the UN, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the African Commission of Human Rights (CADHP) took place in Vienna, Austria. The Rapporteurs explained that state and private sector efforts to confront disinformation and propaganda run the risk of suppressing the free flow of ideas and dissent, in a manner contrary to international human rights law. The Joint Declaration identifies the general principles, standards and good practices that must be respected and promoted by the different actors in the face of disinformation and propaganda. During the launching, the Special Rapporteur expressed his concern that disinformation and propaganda be implemented to confuse the population and interfere with their right to receive varied information and to form their own opinion. The event was attended by the Special Rapporteurs Edison Lanza (IACHR); David Kaye (UN); Dunja Mijatović (OSCE) and Faith Pansy Tlakula (CADHP).
10. From March 3rd to 4th, a team from the Office of the Special Rapporteur composed by Human Rights Specialist Tatiana Guasti and the Regional Monitoring Fellow Tenesha Myrie, made an academic visit to Kingston, Jamaica to issue a workshop on the inter-American system and jurisprudence on freedom of expression to Caribbean civil society organizations. The purpose of the visit was to share information with different actors of civil society on the Inter-American human rights system and to report on the different mechanisms of the IACHR and their use, to which they can access. The meeting took place at the University of the West Indies and was attended by over 20 representatives of different civil society organizations, including: OxFaAM; Civil Rights Commission of Puerto Rico; Eve for Life; Grand Bahama Human Rights Association; Jamaica Coalition for Healthy Society; Missionaries of the Poor Sisters; Jamaicans for Justice; Lawyers' Christian Fellowship Limited (Jamaica); WMW Jamaica and Generation 2000.
11. The academic visit to Jamaica was carried out within the framework of the consultation and preparation of the 2017-2021 Strategic Plan of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) with Caribbean civil society, in which the team of the Special Rapporteurship offered technical support. In this space, civil society actors raised a wide range of concerns regarding human rights. Regarding the right to freedom of expression, the main concerns raised during this consultation included the new 'Cyber ​​Crimes Law' in Jamaica, considered ambiguous in the area of ​​security and human rights, and which raises issues related to limiting of the use of Internet and social networks. With respect to traditional media, the self-censorship to which journalists tend to apply in the region was highlighted. To conclude, the special rapporteurship also held a meeting on March 4th with the President of the Jamaica Press Association, Mrs. Dionne Jackson Miller and it’s the Executive Member, Mr. Milton Walker, to gather information on the general situation of the right to freedom of expression in the Caribbean and the main challenges for journalists in the exercise of this right. It was also important to establish a network of contacts with key actors in the region, since the lack of information is one of the main challenges faced by the IACHR regarding the monitoring of the Caribbean. During the meeting, the journalists provided information on topics such as: violence against journalists, right of access to public information, Jamaica defamation law of 2013 and concentration of media in the region.
12. On March 6th, the Special Rapporteur and the Project Coordinator of the Office of the Special Rapporteur Melissa Cabrera, held various meetings with European Union delegations in Brussels with the objective of publicizing the work undertaken by the OSR in the region. During their stay in the country, the OSR team held meetings with Christian Leffler, Assistant Secretary General for Global and Economic Affairs; Edit Hrdá, Director of the Americas; and a lunch with Manfredo Fanti, Chief of the Regional Affairs Division of the Americas. The Rapporteur presented to different EU delegations the key results of the 2016 annual report of the Office of the Special Rapporteur and a briefing on the current situation of freedom of expression in the continent, with a particular focus on the countries of Venezuela, Ecuador and Cuba. Additionally, the team further had the opportunity to engage in a conversation with Human Rights officials of the DEVCO Commission, in which present were the Deputy Director of the Americas Roland Schaefer and the Deputy Director of Human Resources Marc Giacomini were present at this meeting. Through these meetings the special rapporteur for freedom of expression made the office known and established relationships with possible new donors.
13. From March 7th to 8th, the Special Rapporteur and the human rights specialist Tatiana Guasti participated as experts in the capacity building seminar "Regional Seminar RTA: The public policy of access to information and transparency", which took place in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. The workshop was jointly organized by the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Transparency and Access to Information Network (RTA), and DIGIEG on behalf of the Dominican Republic and as a full member of the RTA. The objective was to provide professionals and public officials from different disciplines with theoretical-practical elements in the field of access to information and transparency, generating skills that develop theoretical and practical elements in relation to the theme of good governance and development of modern democracies. The team of experts was composed of Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza; Mariana Ghioni, (AGESIC, Uruguay); Carolina Maturana (Transparency Council, Chile); the National Government Representative; and the lawyer Tatiana Guasti, who dictated the workshop to people from different sectors (public, NGOs and media) of the country.
14. From March 8th to 10th, the validation meeting of the "Toolbox for Judicial Schools" on freedom of expression, access to public information, transparency and security of journalists was held in Santo Domingo. The meeting was jointly organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Ibero-American Network of Judicial Schools (RIAEJ), with the support of the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Open Society Foundations and the Government of Sweden, who summoned judicial schools in nineteen (19) Ibero-American countries to jointly validate the training toolkit for judges' trainers on freedom of expression. Among the participants were Sergio Palacio, secretary general of the Ibero-American Network of Judicial Schools (RIAEJ); Guilherme Canela, Communication and Information counselor for UNESCO; Edison Lanza, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR; Gervasia Valenzuela Sosa, National Director of the School of the Judiciary (ENJ); and María Mercedes Brito Féliz, General Secretary of the Dominican National Commission for UNESCO. The meeting is an activity enclosed within the UNESCO Regional initiative of institutional strengthening for the promotion and protection of freedom of expression, transparency, access to information and the safety of journalists, in line with the Development Objective 16, of peace, justice and institutions (Agenda 2030). The National School of the Judiciary of the Dominican Republic, in its capacity as host, received during the two days of the meeting representatives of judicial schools of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Spain, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.
15. On March 10th, the Office of the Special Rapporteur organized, with the support of UNESCO, a dialogue with the Schools and Judicial Centers of Central America, the Dominican Republic and Mexico on continuing training in freedom of expression. The working day focused on the next steps towards the development of continuous training within each Judicial Training Unit for the training of operators in terms of standards of freedom of expression. The activity is part of the second phase of the project for the consolidation of judicial systems as key actors in the promotion and protection of freedom of expression in the Latin American region. The objective of the meeting was to strengthen the capacity and knowledge of the operators of the judicial systems of the region on the rights to freedom of expression, access to information and other related rights through on-site and virtual trainings, and the exchange of experiences.
16. On March 10th, a conversation on freedom of expression in Latin America and the Caribbean organized by the Dominican Journalists Association (CDP) was also held in Santo Domingo. The discussion was attended by international experts Edison Lanza (IACHR); Guilherme Canela (UNESCO) and Silvia Chocarro (IFEX Global Advocacy Strategist). The event was presented by the President of the CDP, Olivo De León, who highlighted the importance of freedom of expression for individual and social life, for the preservation and maintenance of democracy, and for the democratic exercise of public liberties.
17. The Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza participated as a panelist in the seminar "Monitoring civic space and civil society participation: Presentation of the CIVICUS Monitor and the Civil Society Participation Mechanism in the Summits of the Americas (PASCA)". The meeting was held on March 22nd at the offices of Freedom House in Washington D.C., with the objective of presenting and positioning the PASCA project and the CIVICUS Monitor tool to strategic actors. The Special Rapporteur intervened alongside Freedom House’s Representative in the panel regarding the challenges for the civic space in Latin America and the participation of civil society. The event counted with the participation of Carlos Ponce, Director of Programs for Latin America of Freedom House; Ines M. Pousadela of CIVICUS; and Gina Romero and Hans Tippenhauer of RedLad.
18. From March 29th to 31st, a delegation of the Office of the Special Rapporteur undertook an academic visit to Guatemala in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for the promotion of inter-American standards in the field of protection to journalists. During his stay in the country, the Special Rapporteur and human rights specialist Viviana Ordoñez, held meetings with government authorities in charge of ensuring the safety of journalists, investigating the crimes against them and guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression. In this context, the Special Rapporteur met with the Public Ministry (MP) in which were present the general secretary of the MP, the director of the judicial school, and the director of the Human Rights Unit, responsible for investigating the murders of journalists where issues related to the fight against impunity in crimes against journalists were addressed, and in particular, the need to continue investigative efforts and training for prosecutors in the country. The rapporteur also held a meeting on the 30th of March with the National Human Rights Ombudsman, Jorge De Leon Duque, to discuss the plan to create a mechanism to protect journalists, investigations of crimes against journalists, the plurality of media and the participation of the community sector in the media, a task that is still pending in the country. Additionally, the team also met with the International Commission against Impunity (CICIG) where the problem of impunity in crimes committed against journalists was addressed, and with the Secretary of Social Communication of the Presidency of the Republic, Mr. Alfredo Brito, to further address issues related to the safety of journalists and the possibility of creating a special protection mechanism.
19. On March 31st, the Special Rapporteurship and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Guatemala, traveled to the city of Mazatenango to present the new report titeled "Silenced Zones: Regions of High Danger to Exercise Freedom of Expression" and dictated a workshop to local journalists on protection and the exercise of freedom of expression. Journalists and local civil society organizations such as CERIGUA, Instituto Demos, UDEFEGUA and Civitas participated in the capacity building workshop. In Mazatenango, the Special Rapporteur met with the Departmental Auxiliary of the Human Rights Ombudsman (PDH) in Suchitepéquez, who explained the main risks to which journalists in the area are exposed as well as the State's responses to said situation.
20. From April 1st to 3rd, the Special Rapporteur traveled to Antigua, Guatemala to participate in the biannual meeting of the Inter-American Press Association (IAPA), which addressed various issues related to the performance of the freedom of press in the Americas. The event was inaugurated by IAPA’s President, Matt Sanders and the President of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales who highlighted in his remarks the importance of freedom of expression and traditional media, despite the continuous rise of technology. On April 1st, the Rapporteur dictated a keynote speech entitled "freedom of expression as a guarantee of democratic stability," were he highlighted the worrying number of murders against journalists in the region, and concluded that 2016 has been one of the most violent periods against the press. The semi-annual meeting of the IAPA summoned in Antigua more than 300 directors, editors and journalists of the American continent. Among those present were Roberto Rock (the Broken Chair); Katie Townsend (Reporters Committee for Freedom of Press); Hector Schamis (El País, Georgetown University); Danilo Arbilla (Search); Sebastian Sposito (Google).
21. The Rapporteur Edison Lanza participated on April 6th via videoconference, in the ninth edition of South School on Internet Governance 2017 "Sustainable Internet Governance". The Special Rapporteur provided remarks in the jurisdiction, national security and human rights panel. Said panel was moderated by Eduardo Caroso of Antel Uruguay and counted with the participation of the prosecutor Neide de Oliveira; Claudio Lopes, State Attorney of Rio de Janeiro; and Fabricio Polido from the University of Minas Gerais.
22. On April 26th, a meeting of experts on the situation of freedom of expression in Cuba was held at the OAS headquarters in Washington DC. The Office of the Special Rapporteur convened a group composed of experts, academics and hemispheric leaders on the subject of freedom of expression with the aim of promoting a space for the exchange of information and reflection on the current situation of freedom of expression in Cuba. Among other topics, the question of the importance of the monitoring carried out by the IACHR on the situation of human rights in Cuba; the different tendencies and problems for the exercise of freedom of expression; the impact of the Internet and new technologies in that situation; the limitations of the exercise of the right to freedom of expression in the country and the follow-up that the inter-American human rights system makes to the situation and the possible spaces for advocacy were addressed. The meeting was attended by representatives of organizations: Human Rights Watch; International Amnesty; Institute of Press and Society (IPYS); Internews; IWPR LAC; Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights; Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ); National Endowment for Democracy; Inter-American Press Association (IAPA); International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and the Executive Secretary of the IACHR. Also, with the support of IWPR, the Office of the Special Rapporteur invited two Cuban journalists from OnCuba and the Pro-Freedom of the Press Association to learn about their experiences in the face of limitations on the right to freedom of expression on the island, and their vision of the challenges for Cuban civil society.
23. On April 28th, the Special Rapporteur participated as an expert in the launch of Freedom House's report on 'Freedom of the Press 2017', which took place in the Newseum of Washington D.C. Edison Lanza participated alongside Garry Kasparov, a human rights activist; Scott Shane, New York Times journalist; and Amberin Zaman, Turkish journalist for Al Monitor, in the "Dark Horizon of Press Freedom" panel, which was moderated by Freedom House president Mike Abramowitz. The event was attended by the correspondents of the White House Jim Acosta (CNN), Mark Landler (New York Times) and Carol Lee (The Wall Street Journal).
24. From May 3rd to 5th, the Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza and human rights specialist Viviana Ordoñez traveled to Asuncion, Paraguay, to participate in the conferences of regional celebration in the framework of World Press Freedom Day. The celebration workshops were organized by the Inter-Institutional Committee on Security of Journalists and Fight against Impunity, composed by: the Supreme Court of Justice; Legislative Power; Public Ministry, Secretariat of Information and Communication (SICOM); Ministry of Education and Culture - CNC UNESCO Paraguay; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Interior; Paraguayan Journalists Forum (FOPEP); Union of Journalists of Paraguay (SPP); and the Association of Graphic Reporters of Paraguay (ARGP). The meeting was also sponsored by the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR and the UNESCO Regional Office of Science, and the support of international experts such as Guilherme Canela (UNESCO), Edison Lanza (IACHR), Gustavo Gomez and Sergio de Cola (OBSERVACOM), Stella Leonor Sanchez Gil (Attorney General of Colombia), and Guilherme Alprende, Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalists (ABRAJI).
25. On May 3rd, the seminar *"Freedom of expression, plurality of media and journalists' security: Essential factors for democracy"*, took place in the Palace of Justice, and was open to judicial magistrates, prosecutors, public defenders, lawyers, as well as journalists, social communicators, and citizens in general. Several foreign and national experts were part of the discussion and analysis panels that composed the seminar, which discussed the guarantees for freedom of expression and the exercise of journalism of the Inter-American standards and experiences. The plurality of media, public information, and democracy was also debated in the event. Additionally, on May 4th, the international seminar *"Freedom of expression, journalists' security and democracy",* was inaugurated by the State Attorney General Javier Díaz Verón, and included welcoming remarks from the President of the Human Rights Commission of the House of Representatives, Deputy Olga Ferreira.
26. During their stay in the country, the Special Rapporteurship held meetings with several government officials, including a meeting with the Attorney General, Dr. Javier Díaz Verón, who reaffirmed his commitment to protecting journalists and fighting impunity. Likewise, the prosecution reiterated the interest in continuing training activities on freedom of expression to prosecutors in the country. The OSR team also met with the journalists of the ABC newspaper and with the Paraguayan journalists’ union. During the meeting, the Silenced Zones report was presented and a dialogue with journalists’ regarding the main challenges of protection and cyber security established.
27. From May 8th to May 9th, the Office of the Special Rapporteur jointly organized an open event titled "Freedom of Expression and Right to Digital Oblivion", in Bogotá, Colombia, with the Faculty of Law of the Los Andes University. The Special Rapporteur participated alongside Catalina Botero (Los Andes University), Carlos Alfonso Souza (Institute of Technology and Society of Rio de Janeiro) and Christopher Bavits (Center for Internet and Society of Harvard University) in the panel on the conceptualization of the right to be forgotten. The event focused on topics such as: what challenges does the right to digital oblivion presents to the freedom of press, possible responsibilities of intermediaries of the Internet, and Latin-American perspectives. Among the attendees were Pedro Vaca (FLIP); Maria Paz Canales (Derechos Digitales); Daphne Keller (Center for Internet and Society Standford); Guilherme Canela (UNESCO); Elena Perotti (WAN-IFRA), and the judges: Maria Eugenia Sandoval (Chile); Francisco de las Carreras (Argentina); Carlos Soto Morales (Mexico); And Alejandro Linares (Colombia). On May 17th, a second closed discussion was held at Los Andes University. Dean Catalina Botero (Los Andes University), Carlos Cortes (Internet expert), Pedro Vaca (FLIP), and Carolina Botero (Karisma Foundation) provided keynote lectures on the challenges on the right to be forgotten as well as possible remedies and solutions.
28. On May 11th, the Special Rapporteur dictated a lecture at the Elliot School of International Affairs at George Washington University titled "*Venezuela: Human Rights, Democracy and the Role of the OAS*." The Special Rapporteur expressed the severe situation that Venezuela is experiencing in the area of freedom of expression and human rights, and explained the position taken of the IACHR and its Special Rapporteurship, as experts, in relation to the events that have taken place in the country in the context of protests. George Washington University and the Venezuelan civil society organization *'Defiende Venezuela'* jointly organized the event, in which over 50 students participated.
29. The Special Rapporteur participated on May 16th, through videoconference, at the annual "Internet Day" event organized by the Legal Commission of the Argentine Chamber of Internet (CABASE). The Rapporteur offered some opening remarks in the panel "initiatives for the development of digital economy", where he discussed the issue of intermediate responsibility and the importance of public policies to foster a framework of innovation and freedom of expression in Argentina. The panel also had the participation of Ady Beitler (Inter-American Development Bank - IDB), Carolina Aguerre (UDESA), Javier Pallero (ACCESS), and Adela Goberna (ALAI).
30. From May 15th to the 18th, the Special Rapporteur traveled to Stockholm, Sweden to participate in the ‘Stockholm Internet Forum (SIF),’ an international forum organized by the Swedish Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The forum brought together policymakers, civil society representatives, activists, business people and representatives of the international technical community to discuss the central issue of the connections between access and power. The aim of the forum was to generate a dialogue to deepen discussions on how a free, open and secure Internet promotes human rights and development at a global level. The Special Rapporteur was the keynote speaker in the international event which gathered more than 4,000 people from 90 countries, to present the importance of internet access for the exercise to freedom of expression and human rights.
31. In the framework of the SIF international forum held in Stockholm, the Rapporteur gave a briefing on the situation of freedom of expression in Latin America, with particular focus on Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico and the Northern Triangle to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) project officers, development actors and organizations working in Latin America. The Rapporteur also held a meeting on May 16th with representatives of the Euro-Latin SIDA department Torgny Svenungsson, Camilla Ottosson and Ulrika Åhmark, in which representatives of the embassies of Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, and Cuba were also present. To finalize, the Special Rapporteur held a meeting on May 17th with the Department of the Americas of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, highlighting the important work of the IACHR and the OAS in the region and presenting the challenges that the Inter-American system faces today regarding the system financing.
32. On May 24th, the public hearing of the case "Herzog and Others v. Brazil" was held at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in San José, Costa Rica. The case relates to the alleged international responsibility of the State of Brazil for the situation of impunity in which the arrest, torture and death of journalist Vladimir Herzog occurred on October 25th, 1975 during the country's military dictatorship. During the hearing, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression Edison Lanza explained the basis of the case on behalf of the IACHR, where he emphasized that the case was part of the military repression at the time and asked the judges to condemn the State and order to clarify the facts. Clarice Herzog, the widow of the journalist, also testified at the hearing. Furthermore, during the course of his stay in Costa Rica, the Special Rapporteur was invited by the Office of the Ombudsman to give an update on the IACHR's criteria for freedom of expression. The Deputy Ombudsman, Mr. Juan Manuel Cordero attended the presentation.
33. From May 29th to 30th, the Rapporteur participated as an expert at the annual meeting of the Ibero-American Telecommunications Organization (OTI), held at the Univision News Center in Miami, Florida. The Rapporteur participated alongside Laura Chinchilla (OTI), Alberto Ibargüen (Knight Foundation) and Matthew Sanders (IAPA) on the panel regarding the situation of freedom of expression in Ibero-America which was moderated by the Secretary-General of the OAS, Luis Almagro. The panelists analyzed the scenario freedom of expression faces in the region, the threats and challenges, and discussed the necessary actions for its strengthening. The event had representatives of 31 OTI member companies, including the presidents of Telemundo, Cesar Conde, of Univision, Randy Falco, of Grupo Clarín, Jorge Carlos Rendo, of Grupo Prisa, Juan Luis Cebrián, of RCN, Gabriel Reyes, of Grupo Caracol, Jorge Martínez de León, of Tv Azteca, Benjamín Salinas, of Grupo Imagen, Olegario Vázquez Aldir, of DirecTV, Jeff McElfresh, and of the Inter American Press Association (IAPA), Matthew Sanders, who reaffirmed their commitment to promote access to connectivity in the region and defend freedom of expression and of press.
34. The Special Rapporteur participated on June 6th in the event "Human Rights and Democracy in Venezuela" organized by the United States Mission to the United Nations and cosponsored by the United Kingdom, in the framework of the 35th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland. In an expert panel with the participation of Alonso Medina Roa (*Foro Penal*), Mercedes de Freitas (*Transparencia Venezuela*), Julio Henriquez (*Foro Penal*), Laura Louza Scognamiglio (Access to Justice), and Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza (IACHR / OAS), moderated by Sarah Cleveland (Columbia Law School), panelists reflected on the current human rights situation in the country in the context of recent protests, including the government's violent crackdown on opposition parties and civil society, in which in the mentioned date the lives of at least 75 people had been claimed, more than 1,000 have been injured, almost 3,000 have been detained, and 331 civilians have been indicted by military courts, during the 82 days of protest. During the meeting, the panelists also evaluated President Maduro's appeal to a constituent assembly to rewrite Venezuela's constitution and the withdrawal from the OAS, and discussed a number of issues relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms. Other topics discussed at the conference included freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association freedoms, political prisoners, arbitrary detention, and arbitrary and illegal deprivation of life, including summary executions and torture.
35. On June 6th, Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza participated via videoconference in the inauguration of the first institutional forum 2017 on freedom of expression, communication and democracy organized by the University of Costa Rica in the Auditorium of the Center for Research and Training in Public Administration (CICAP). Dr. Manuel M. Murillo, Coordinator of the Special Interdisciplinary Commission (IEC), Dr. Henning Jensen Pennington, Rector of the University of Costa Rica, and Dr. Fernando Cruz Castro, Constitutional Court Judge, gave the opening remarks. Participants included a number of academics, journalists, officials from international organizations, and judges of the Supreme Court.
36. On June 13th, the Special Rapporteur was invited by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) to participate via skype at a regional consultation on the project of guidelines on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs, held in Santiago, Chile. Within the framework of Human Rights Council Resolution 33/22 titled *"Equal participation in political and public affairs,"* the first regional consultation for the Americas had as its main objectives the collection of different points of view of the interested parties on the content of the draft guidelines, and to achieve a better understanding of laws, jurisprudence, policies and good practices in the region. The Rapporteur participated alongside Leo Valladares, former Ombudsman of Honduras and current executive director of the Association for Participatory Citizenship (ACI-PARTICIPA), in the session of "Ensuring an enabling environment for the effective exercise of the right to participate in public affairs: previous requirements.
37. On June 14th, the Special Rapporteur participated through a videoconference in a seminar addressed to journalists, judges, and Guatemalan prosecutors that took place at Rafael Landívar University in Guatemala City. The objective of the meeting was to reaffirm the State's obligation in terms of protecting journalists and specifically the role of justice operators in protecting and combating impunity. More than 80 people attended the meeting, as well as university students, the organizations Civitas, UNESCO, Deutsche Welle, *Plaza Pública*, GIZ, UNICAP (MP), and the School of Judicial Studies.
38. From June 18th to 21st, Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza attended the 47th Regular Period of Session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS), held in Cancún, Mexico, where he participated in several open meetings with Member States and Permanent Observers. The Special Rapporteur accompanied the delegation of the IACHR in various efforts before observer countries and visiting organizations to update on the current economic situation of the IACHR. The General Assembly ended its regular term with the approval of a doubling of the regular fund allocated the inter-American human rights system bodies, allowing a gradual increase of 33% per year of each body per year. With this decision, Member States demonstrated their growing commitment to international human rights law and to the assurance of the independence and autonomy of the Inter-American Court and the Commission. Additionally, at the 47th regular session, the Assembly adopted a resolution on the right to freedom of thought and expression and the safety of journalists and workers in the media in the hemisphere. The approved resolution condemns murders, assaults, and other acts of violence against journalists and media workers and urges States to implement comprehensive measures to prevent, protect, investigate, and punish those responsible. The proposal was presented by the delegation of Uruguay and co-sponsored by the delegations of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, and the Dominican Republic.
39. Furthermore, on June 18th during the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur participated in the side event "Conversation with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights", organized by the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL). The meeting generated a space for the exchange of ideas from representatives of civil society organizations who participated in the General Assembly. During his stay in Mexico, the Special Rapporteur held a meeting with Ambassador Bénédict de Cerjat, Head of the Americas Division of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, to discuss the current projects carried out by the Special Rapporteurship.
40. From June 22nd to 24th, a team of the Special Rapporteurship composed of the Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza and the Orlando Sierra Fellow, Pedro Noel, held an academic visit to the cities of Mexico City and Chihuahua. The purpose of the visit was to share information on the IACHR and the IACHR mechanisms related to freedom of expression; collect information on the situation of freedom of expression in the country, its main challenges, and establish a contact network for greater commitment. On the 22nd of June a meeting with the international community was held at the UNHCR's headquarters with the participation of the ambassadors’ from Sweden (Annika Thunborg) and Denmark (Amb. Henirk Hahn), and representatives of the embassies of the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Austria, Canada, Belgium, Switzerland, Finland, the European Union, and UNESCO was held in Mexico City. The team also held a meeting with local journalists and civil society representatives, attended by the newspapers of *Proceso, Istmopress, Changoonga, Lado B.,* and the organizations of *Artículo 19, RSF, Fotoreporteros MX, CIMAC, Propuesta Cívica* and *R3D*. Presented by Maria Luisa Bascur of the High Commissioner's Office, participants shared their concerns regarding journalists' safety in their geographical areas and work topics.
41. Moreover, the Special Rapporteur held a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the Advisory Council of the Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists in Mexico. The members of the advisory council provided the office with up-to-date information and shared their concerns regarding the current status of the mechanism. On the 22nd, a special government meeting of the mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and journalists in Mexico was also convened, on the occasion of the Rapporteur's visit. Present at the meeting were Roberto Campa Cifrián (Secretary of Human Rights, Ministry of the Interior), Ambassador Miguel Ruiz Cabañas Izquierdo (Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Ricardo Cayuela (Prosecutor, Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Journalists- FEADLE), representatives of the Mexican Senate, Federal Police, National Commission of Human Rights (CNDH), and of the Council of the Mechanism of Protection to the Defenders of Human Rights and Journalists’ in Mexico. The Special Rapporteur also held a meeting with the Special Prosecutor of the FEADLE, Ricardo Cayuela, and another meeting with the President of the CNDH, Luis Gonzalez.
42. On the 23rd, Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza traveled to Chihuahua with the Mexico Representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner, Jan Jarab, at the invitation of the Congress of that state to participate in the "*Consultation Forum of the Congress of the State for the analysis of the initiative of the Law for protection of journalists and human rights defenders of the state of Chihuahua* ". During the visit, the team held meetings with local authorities, civil society organizations, and local journalists as well as a meeting with the relatives of the murdered journalist Miroslava Breach. In the afternoon, the Special Rapporteur met with the Governor, the Secretary General of Government, the Human Rights and Justice Adviser, and the General State Attorney, César Augusto Peniche, where they shared information and an analysis on the situation of freedom of expression and access to information in the state of Chihuahua, as well as the advances in the implementation of an early warning.
43. Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza traveled to Geneva, Switzerland to participate in a multilateral consultation on strengthening the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on the safety of journalists and the problem of impunity. Held on June 29th at the UN Palais des Nations, organized by UNESCO and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the meeting brought together UN member states, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, media associations, and academic experts to evaluate in the context of the first five years of the above-mentioned action plan. The consultation offered participants the opportunity to identify the main achievements, gaps, and challenges related to the need to improve the safety of journalists and media workers. The Special Rapporteur participated in the panel on “*Exchange of good practices between member states and regional intergovernmental organizations"*,moderated by Guy Berger, Director of the Division of Freedom of Expression and Media Development of UNESCO.
44. Within the framework of the 163rd period of session of the IACHR celebrated in Peru from July 3rd to 7th, the Special Rapporteur held a closed meeting with Venezuelan civil society actors in Lima on the afternoon of July 6th. The meeting invited Venezuelan journalist Marco Ruiz and representatives of the organizations present at the IACHR's POS: IPYS Peru and IPYS Venezuela, *Espacio Público*, Human Rights Center of the UCAB, Carlos Ayala, and the Union of Journalists, with the objective of collecting key information on the deterioration of freedom of expression in the country. During the meeting, the Special Rapporteur was able to gather information on censorship on the Internet, limitations on protest, use of force, vigilance, direct restrictions on journalism practice, and access to information, among other topics, as well as requesting specific information on how foreign journalists are affected by the latest developments in the country. Likewise, the Rapporteur used the space to communicate the strategies that the office is implementing to denounce continually the limitations to freedom of expression and other human rights in the country.
45. Additionally, the Special Rapporteur participated in a public forum with indigenous leaders, representatives of social movements, and members of civil society organizations dedicated to research, activism, and advocacy on the right to access information and transparency in the management of natural resources. The event titled "*Transparency and access to information in extractive industries as a human right: The cases of Latin America and the Caribbean*" was organized by the Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF) within the framework of the period of sessions, and counted with the participation of representatives of state entities and the Office of the Ombudsman of Peru. Finally, during the sessions, the IACHR renewed the mandate of Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza for a new period of three years, in accordance with Article 15 of its Rules of Procedure.
46. From July 9th to 12th, Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza visited Santiago de Chile, with the purpose of disseminating and presenting the conclusions of the report "Situation of the Right to Freedom of Expression in Chile". The report is the result of the official visit of the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression to Chile carried out from May 31st to June 4th, 2016, at the invitation of the Chilean State to assess the situation of freedom of expression and access to information in the country. At the invitation of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights and the National Human Rights Institute (INDH), the Rapporteur presented the findings and recommendations of the report on July 10th at the Faculty of Law of the University of Chile. The launch of the report was welcomed by the Undersecretary of Human Rights Lorena Fríes and the Director of INDH Branislav Marelic, and ended with a press conference by local media. Also, the Rapporteur Edison Lanza held meetings with representatives of the country's civil society, including AMARC, *Chile Transparente, Fucatel, Derechos Digitales, ECO, Cátedra de Derechos* Humanos of the University of Chile*, Observatorio Ciudadano,* and *Acción A.G y Ciudadano Inteligente*. During his stay in the country, the Special Rapporteur held meetings with the President of the Supreme Court, Minister Hugo Enrique Dolmestch Urra; the Head of the Protection Division, Sebastián Cabezas; the President of the Chamber of the Chamber of Deputies, Deputy Fidel Espinoza; and Foreign Minister Heraldo Muñoz to formally present the report’s conclusions and recommendations.
47. From July 27th to 28th, a team of the Special Rapporteurship, composed by the Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza, Attorney Tatiana Guasti and project assistant Casilda Hevia, traveled to Guatemala City to participate in two (2) standards promotion workshops for national legislators and representatives of community radio stations. On July 27th, the Office of the Special Rapporteur with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Guatemala (OHCHR), organized a seminar on the *incorporation of inter-American standards on freedom of expression into national legislation*. With the Congress of the Republic of Guatemala and its President Oscar Chinchilla as national counterpart, the host country was responsible for identifying and extending invitations to Guatemalan human rights lawmakers. In total, 24 Central American legislators, including key legislators from the Central American countries of Costa Rica (1), El Salvador (2), Honduras (2) and Panama (1), and Nicaragua participated in the workshop. Aimed at legislators, legislative advisers and members of the committees on communication and human rights of the national legislative bodies of the region, the main objective of the seminar was to stimulate the adoption of inter-American standards in the national legal framework of freedom of expression, focusing on current regional issues such as violence against journalists, diversity and pluralism, access to public information, and the Internet. The workshop counted with the participation of experts Maria Pia Matta (AMARC), Carlos Cortés (Internet expert), Hector Morales (UN Office in Guatemala), and the Special Rapporteur, Edison Lanza.
48. On July 28th, the Office of the Special Rapporteur organized a workshop with the support of the *Centro Civitas* and OHCHR on "*Inter-American Standards for Free and Inclusive Broadcasting*", aimed at civil society organizations working with community radio stations in the country. The workshop was inaugurated by Special Rapporteur along with the Representative of the OAS office in Guatemala, Milagro Martínez, and the Representative of the OHCHR, Liliana Valiña. Aimed at 44 participants from different provinces of Guatemala, the main objective of the seminar was to stimulate the adoption of inter-American standards in the national legal framework of freedom of expression, focusing on issues of broadcasting, diversity and pluralism, and community radio. Together with Special Rapporteur, experts Maria Pia Matta (AMARC), Evelyn Blank (CIVITAS),; Ancelmo Xumic (Movimiento Radios Comunitarias), and representatives of Demos and Cultural Survival organizations provided presentations.
49. From July 30th to August 4th, the Rapporteur Edison Lanza and attorney Tatiana Guasti were part of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) delegation who carried out an on-site visit to consult and report on the situation of human rights in Guatemala. The delegation was headed by the President of the IACHR, Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli; the First Vice-President, Margaret May Macaulay; the Second Vice-President, Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, and Commissioners José de Jesús Orozco Henríquez, Paulo Vannuchi, James Cavallaro and Luis Ernesto Vargas Silva. The delegation was composed of the Executive Secretary, Paulo Abrão; the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Edison Lanza; as well as a group of specialists from the Executive Secretariat. During the on-site visit, the IACHR met with state government authorities and met representatives of civil society, autonomous bodies, international organizations, academics, and journalists. Regarding the situation of the right to freedom of expression, the Office of the Special Rapporteur stated that Guatemala is experiencing a context of violence against journalists characterized by murders and threats. The IACHR received information on violence against journalists, as well as on the concentration of media ownership and lack of legal recognition of community broadcasting, realities that hinder free access to information and the consolidation of a culture of respect for human rights.
50. Also, an IACHR team led by Commissioner José de Jesús Orozco and the Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza traveled to Huehuetenango as part the of field observation to gather information on the spoils of communities, the application of the crimes of usurping and an aggravated modality that has been established, as well as the criminalization of members and representatives of peasant and indigenous communities. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has been in charge of preparing the chapter on freedom of expression of the report of the on-site visit of the IACHR to Guatemala.
51. A team from the Office of the Special Rapporteur traveled to San Jose, Costa Rica to participate in two public hearings in the framework of the 119th Regular Session of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. On the 21st, the public hearing of the "Case Fontevecchia and D'Amico vs. Argentina "in which it had determined that the Argentine State violated the right to freedom of expression of two journalists. The hearing was attended by CELS representative organization of the victims, the Argentine State, and Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza. On the 22nd of August, the hearing of "Caso Nelson Carvajal & family vs. Colombia" took place. The hearing was related to the murder of the journalist Nelson Carvajal Carvajal for reasons related to the exercise of his profession. The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA), the Robert F Kennedy Human Rights, the sister of the murdered journalist Judith Carvajal, the expert witness Carlos Lauria, the Special Rapporteur and a delegation of the Colombian State participated in the hearing.
52. The Special Rapporteur and attorney Tatiana Guasti, executed an academic visit to San José on August 23rd and 24th to conduct a capacity building seminar on the incorporation of inter-American standards on ​​freedom of expression in the Judiciary. Directed to 17 Costa Rican judges and prosecutors, the workshop was jointly organized by the Office of the Special Rapporteur and the Training School of Costa Rica. Additionally, the Special Rapporteur was invited to participate in the panel on "Surveillance, privacy and freedom on the Internet in a world of open data." The Regional Open Data Conference (ConDatos), held in San Jose, brought together experts from public institutions, the private sector and civil society to present, discuss, discuss and propose key aspects of policy open data, open government, civic innovation, public challenges, privacy and new ways of working in the region. The conference was organized by the Government of the Republic of Costa Rica, Open Government and Opening Data Costa Rica.
53. On August 31st, the national conference on Journalist Security and Fight against Impunity was held in San Salvador. Organized by the San José UNESCO Office, with the support of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security through the Vice Ministry of Justice of El Salvador and the Association of Journalists of El Salvador (APES), the objective of the meeting was to develop a national plan strategic to protect journalists. The Special Rapporteur participated via skype, at the opening of the national conference alongside Frank La Rue (UNESCO); Yanira Argueta (Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women - ISDEMU); Raúl López (Vice Minister of Justice); Delila Arriaza (APES) and Christian Salazar (United Nations System).
54. Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza participated as a lecturer in the Hector Fix-Zamudio Training Diploma in the Inter-American Human Rights System, organized by the Institute of Legal Research of the Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). On September 7th, the Special Rapporteur delivered a class entitled "Internet and the Right to Freedom of Expression" to academics, students, members of civil society organizations and public officials, including judges of the diploma course. Also, in the framework of the 164th Extraordinary Period of Sessions of the IACHR held in Mexico City from September 2th to 9th, the Special Rapporteur held meetings with the new delegation of the Inter-American Court, Mexican civil society organizations and a meeting with the Deputy Brenda Velázquez, President of the Special Commission for Monitoring Attacks on Journalists and the Media and the deputies members of that commission.
55. On September 13th, a local event of the "Internet Governance Forum" (IGF) was held in Montevideo, Uruguay and jointly organized by the Agency for Electronic Government and the Information and Knowledge Society (AGESIC); Internet Society - Chapter Uruguay; Observatory of Information and Communication Technologies (OBERVATIC); Catholic University of Uruguay; and the Technological University (UTEC). The Rapporteur participated via videoconference in the panel on "Internet Rights: Privacy and Freedom of Expression".
56. On September 21st, the regional capacity building seminar on strategic litigation "Regional Project on Human Rights and Democracy in the countries of the Northern Triangle of Central America and Nicaragua" was held. Jointly organized by the IACHR and the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF), the workshop was aimed at members of civil society. The Special Rapporteur was in charge of the panel on "Inter-American Standards: Right to freedom of expression and access to information."
57. Special Rapporteur traveled on September 27th to Buenos Aires, Argentina, to participate in the Conference on Internet and Human Rights held at the Legislative Palace. Jointly organized by the Observatory of Human Rights of the Nation’s Senate (ODDHH) and the Center for Studies on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information (CELE, for its initials in Spanish), the Rapporteur participated alongside Valeria Milanés (ADC), Norma Morandini (ODDHH), Agustina del Campo (CELE), and Eleonora Rabinovich (COOGLE) in the debate addressing the new challenges posed by the development of regulations related to the internet, as well as the role of the legislative body in the promotion of a free, open and inclusive Internet.
58. On September 27th, the seminar "Connectivity and Freedom of Expression in the Americas" organized by the Organization of American States (OAS), was held in the organization’s headquarters Washington DC. The senior attorney of the Office of the Special Rapporteur, Ona Flores, moderated the panel on connectivity and freedom of expression. The seminar counted with the participation of regional and international experts from: academia, government, consultancy and the private sector.
59. From September 28th to 29th, the Special Rapporteur traveled to Montevideo, Uruguay to participate in the seminar "Access to Information as a facilitator of the three pillars of the 2030 Agenda: Democracy, Development and Human Rights", organized by the Unit of Access to Public Information (UAIP), Agesic, the Presidency of the Republic of Uruguay and UNESCO. The objective of the forum was to strengthen the spaces for dialogue and define the recommendations that allow resolving the challenges related to the laws of access to information in the region. The Rapporteur also participated on the 29th in the "Dialogue table on freedom of expression: Are there limits to freedom of expression? -Situation in Uruguay and the region”. Organized by the Uruguayan Press Association (APU), the event aimed to present the situation of freedom of expression in the context of the region and make recommendations for Uruguay to deepen its commitment to protect freedom of expression and include in it a human rights perspective. Among the experts were Nelson Villareal (Human Rights Secretary of the Presidency); Gustavo Gomez (OBSERVACOM); Victoria Alfaro (APU); José Peralta (IFEX) and Daniel Lema (CAinfo).
60. During his stay in Montevideo, the Special Rapporteur held a meeting with the Office of the Prosecutor and the Attorney General of the Nation, Jorge Díaz to discuss the possibility of establishing a training agreement for prosecutors on freedom of expression and criminal law. Also, on the occasion of the meeting of experts on access to information, the Resident Representative of the World Bank Group, Matilde Bordón organized a dinner for the access to information participants.
61. From September 25th to 29th, the "XI Edition of the Yatchay Program" of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP) was held. Organized by the PUCP Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (IDEHPUCP), with the support of the Rector's Office, the University's Master's Degree in Human Rights and the support of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the course aims to promote the study of human rights and their systems of protection in students of law and contribute to the dissemination of the standards of protection of human rights established by the Inter-American Human Rights System. The Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza elaborated jointly with human rights specialist Ramiro Ugarte, the hypothetical case related ‘new technologies and human rights’ for the participants of the program.
62. From October 2nd to 4th, the Special Rapporteur undertook an academic visit to Lima, Peru to participate in the international seminar "Freedom of Expression, Media and Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents: Prioritizing Legal Frameworks and Public Policies”, jointly organized by Red Andi Latin America and the Radio and Television Advisory Council (CONCORTV). The Special Rapporteur presented alongside IACHR Commissioner and Rapporteur on the Rights of the Child, Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, the thematic report elaborated by the IACHR in the panel "Freedom of Expression, Media and Rights of Children and Adolescents: Priority Issues for the Agenda of Multilateral Organizations". The seminar’s objective was to analyze the main problems and challenges facing the protection of the rights of children in the media and their role as agents of change. The seminar was attended by international speakers including: Frank La Rue (UNESCO); María Cristina Perceval (UNICEF); Corina Leguizamon (Institute of Public Policies in Human Rights of Mercosur); Joan Barata (international expert); Rosa Cañete Alonso (OXFAM, Spain); Paula Baleato (Red Andi) and various specialists from the countries of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Spain, the United States, France, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.
63. From October 9th to 10th, a team of the Special Rapporteurship traveled to Panama City to conduct the sub-regional capacity building workshop on Inter-American standards on freedom of expression. Jointly organized by the Judicial Branch of the Republic of Panama, UENSCO and the Office of the Special Rapporteur, the objective of the workshop was to strengthen the incorporation of Inter-American standards on freedom of expression and human rights in judicial decisions. The group of international facilitators during both days of the workshop was composed by the Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza (IACHR), Carlos Cortes (regional expert), Guilherme Canela (UNESCO, Montevideo) and from Panama, the Magistrate of the Superior Court of Appeals, Mauricio Marín; and the OISPA coordinator of the Public Prosecutor's Office, Delia De Castro. Themes addressed during the capacity building workshop varied from restrictions on the right to freedom of expression; Internet; the role of the judiciary in the investigation and prosecution of crimes against freedom of expression; the rights of access to information and the toolbox on freedom of expression. Participants included judges, magistrates, public defenders, prosecutors and other judicial servants from the countries of Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Mexico.
64. Within the framework of the 165th regular session of the IACHR held in Montevideo at the invitation of the Uruguayan State from October 23rd to 27th 2017, a team of the Office of the Special Rapporteur composed of Edison Lanza and Ona Flores traveled to Montevideo to participate in hearings related to the right to freedom of expression and parallel academic events. On October 20th, the Special Rapporteur participated in the event organized by the civil society organization Article 19, entitled "Agenda of the meeting on the Mechanisms for the Protection of Latin America Human Right Defenders and Media Workers” ​​and held at the headquarters of the Association of the Uruguayan Press (APU). The Rapporteur gave a lecture on the role of the Inter-American system and focused on the different protection mechanisms available at the IACHR. The Special Rapporteur also participated as a panelist in the event paying tribute to Mexican journalists organized by APU, Cotidiano Mujer, Feminist Articulation MARCOSUR, Network of Women Journalists and supported by the Municipality of Montevideo. Along with Guilherme Canela (UNESCO); Daniel Méndez (Mayor of Montevideo); Patricia González (Counseling for Gender Equality); Victoria Alfaro (APU); and Lilian Celiberti (Cotidiano Mujer, AFM), the Special Rapporteur participated in the panel regarding the illustrious visitor's statement to the Mexican journalist Marcela Turati.
65. During his stay in the country, the Rapporteur also participated on the 24th in the International Forum "Media Concentration, Democracy, and Freedom of Expression" organized by OBSERVACOM, UNESCO, FESUR (Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Uruguay) and sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Uruguay. The public activity took place at the Solís Theater in Montevideo with the purpose of discussing the perspectives and relations between media concentration, democracy and freedom of expression in Latin America. The event featured opening remarks by Lidia Brito, Director of UNESCO Montevideo, Sebastian Sperling, Director of FESUR, and Victoria Alfaro, President of the APU. Additionally, among the panelists were: Ricardo Pérez Manrique, former President of the Supreme Court of Justice of Uruguay; Edison Lanza, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR; Gustavo Gómez (OBSERVACOM), Facundo Franco, Nicolás Thevenet and Fernando Gelves, Martín Becerra and João Brant (OBSERVACOM). Furthermore, team of the special rapporteurship participated on October 26th in the meeting consultation on the right to protest and civic space in Latin America, organized by CaInfo and Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI). The aim of the meeting was to share information and discuss litigation strategies in the context of ​​protest rights, and identify possible cases to promote before national and international justice systems. The consultation was a joint effort of OSJI and the Office of the Special Rapporteur, which sought to facilitate the space for discussion of the work carried out by organizations and human rights defenders working in the Latin American region and to envision the possibilities of collaboration between these entities. Among the specialists were among others. Edison Lanza (IACHR); Ona Flores (IACHR); Daniela Ikawa (OSJI); Mariana Mass (Open Society) Daniel Holder (CAJ); Gabriela Kletzel (CELS); Paula Martins (Article 19); and Jomary Ortegon (CAJAR).
66. From November 1st to 4th, Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza traveled to Bogotá, Colombia to participate in the events organized as part of the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Special Rapporteurship for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR. The Office of the Special Rapporteur organized, together with the University of the Andes, the Center for Studies on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information (CELE) and the support of the Foundation for Freedom of the Press (FLIP), the international conference entitled, "Freedom of expression before the democratic challenges of the hemisphere”. The activity took place on November 2nd at the Universidad de los Andes, to commemorate the creation of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) office in 1997. The event addressed issues related to violence against journalists and media workers and impunity in the hemisphere; freedom of expression, journalism and democracy; regional perspectives on the challenges to guarantee and protect freedom of expression and human rights on the internet; and the declaration of principles on the freedom of expression of the IACHR and its validity in light of the changes produced by the digital age. The activity brought together regional experts in the field, including: Jineth Bedoya (El Tiempo, Colombia); Carlos Dada, (El Faro, El Salvador); Marianela Balbi (IFEX - ALC / IPYS Venezuela); Ana Ruelas (Article 19 Mexico); Rachael Kay (IFEX); César Ricaurte (Fundamedios, Ecuador); Carlos Ayala (former president of the IACHR); Damian Loreti (UCAB); Toby Mendel (Center for Law and Democracy) and Agustina del Campo (CELE, Argentina). The event served as a public platform to address the hemispheric agenda’s pressing issues for the defense of freedom of expression such as violence and security of journalists; internet and privacy; and freedom of expression and democracy, and it further provided an opportunity to analyze the regional advances in the matter. In addition, the five special rapporteurs to date, Santiago Cantón (1998-2002), Eduardo Bertoni (2002-2005), Ignacio Álvarez (2006-2008), Catalina Botero (2008-2014) and Edison Lanza (in office since 2014) gave presentations and participated in an open dialogue throughout the event.
67. On November 3rd, the special rapporteurs and a group of experts participated in a closed session to analyze the work of the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression and its strategic vision based on three previously prepared documents. The meeting’s objective was to discuss the impact of the office, its strengthening and to outline a thematic agenda establishing the priorities for the next 5 years. The essays discussed were prepared by Alejandra Umpiérrez (regional expert), Michael Camilleri (Inter-American Dialogue) on the crisis of democratic institutions in the hemisphere and the fight against corruption, as a context for the exercise of freedom of expression in the hemisphere; and Agustina del Campo (CELE) on the trends and possible priorities for the thematic agenda of the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression. The five Special Rapporteurs and the experts Pedro Vaca (FLIP, Colombia); Luis Fernando Garcia (CR3D, Mexico); Viviana Krsticevic (CEJIL); Carlos Correa (Public Space, Venezuela) Juan Carlos Lara (Digital Rights, Chile) among others. Also, as part of the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the office, the Ambassador of Switzerland, Mr. Kurt Kunz, invited international experts to a reception on November 1st held at the ambassador’s residence in Colombia. The reception also counted with the presence of ambassadors, media directors and members of the Colombian government.
68. From November 13th to 15th, the course on freedom of expression, access to public information and violence against journalists was held at the headquarters of the Federal Judicial Institute in Mexico City. Organized by the Foundation for Freedom of the Press (FLIP); UNESCO; the Federal Judiciary Institute of the Judicial School and the Office of the Special Rapporteur; the seminar was aimed at federal judges who were trained in freedom of expression and access to information. The human rights specialist of the Office of the Special Rapporteur, Tania Da Rosa, dictated on November 15th the courses on access to information. Magistrate Salvador Mondragon Reyes (Director, Federal Judicial Institute); Guilherme Canela (Communication Advisor, UNESCO, Katitza Rodriguez (Director of Law, Electronic Foundation -EFF) and Sebastian Salamanca (FLIP, Colombia) participated as experts.
69. The Special Rapporteur participated in his expert capacity in the event "Corruption, Internet Freedom and Privacy on-line", organized on November 15th by the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington D.C. The panel gathered experts: Catalina Botero, Dean of the Law School of the Universidad de los Andes, Colombia; Romina Mella, Journalist and Founding Member of IDL-Reporters; José Luis Piñar, Professor of Administrative Law at the San Pablo CEU University, and former director of the Spanish Agency for Data Protection (AEDP); and Michael Camilleri, Director of the Peter D. Bell Rule of Law Program - Inter-American Dialogue, to analyze the recently published report by the center on freedom of expression and the concept of the right to be forgotten. Moderated by the President of the Inter-American Dialogue, Michael Shifter, the debate centered on the right to be forgotten and its implications online, with regards to the problems of corruption, impunity, freedom of press and historical erasure faced in Latin America.
70. On November 15th, the Special Rapporteur attended the twenty-seven international press freedom awards organized by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in New York. The event was organized by Christiane Amanpour, CNN international correspondent and CPJ's senior adviser, and the chairman of the dinner was Mr. David Rhodes, president of CBS News. Among the honorees were Ahmed Abba from Cameroon; Patricia Mayorga of Mexico, Pravit Rojanaphruk of Thailand and Afrah Nasser of Yemen.
71. On November 17th, Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza and senior attorney Ona Flores attended a working lunch organized by the Ambassador of Uruguay to the OAS, Hugo Cayrus Maurin. Present were the Ambassadors of the Missions of Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Chile, Mexico, Panama, Peru and the interim representative of the United States before the OAS. The meeting offered a space to present the challenges and opportunities for the thematic agenda of the special rapporteur for freedom of expression within the framework of the celebration of its 20th anniversary in Bogotá. The team’s presentation compiled all the work done by the office since its creation and concluded with possible scenarios for the expansion of a new defined agenda of freedom of expression in the hemisphere.
72. From November 27th to December 4th, a delegation of the Special Rapporteurship for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR held a joint visit to Mexico with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, per invitation of the Government of Mexico. The delegation was led by Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza (IACHR) and Special Rapporteur David Kaye (UN), and composed by the specialists, Ona Flores (IACHR); Azin Tadjdini (UN); Maria Luisa Bascur (UN-DH, Mexico); and Ricardo Neves (UN-DH, Mexico), with the aim of evaluating the situation of freedom of expression in the country, and in particular to analyze the situation regarding the safety of journalists. The joint visit also aimed to follow up on the recommendations presented by Frank La Rue and Catalina Botero (former special rapporteurs), after their joint country visit in 2010. The official visit included an intense work agenda in which the Rapporteurs held meetings with high level representatives of the Federal Government, the Legislative and Judicial Powers, as well as Secretaries General of Government, Prosecutors and Attorneys of the states of Guerrero, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Veracruz and Mexico City. Also, during their stay in the country, they met with authorities of the National Commission of Human Rights and of state human rights commissions; and held meetings with over 250 journalists and representatives of civil society from 21 states. The special rapporteurs further met with relatives of the victims who provided them with detailed information and testimonies on the situation of freedom of expression in the country. As a result of these meetings, the Rapporteurs recognized the violence-ridden environment that is going through Mexican journalists every day and urged the Government to increase the resources available for the mechanisms that have been established to provide protection and transparency.
73. Finally, in the closing session held on December 4th, the Undersecretary of Human Rights of the Ministry of the Interior, Roberto Campa, reiterated the firm commitment that the Mexican State maintains with human rights and welcomed the recommendations presented by the Special Rapporteurs of the UN and the IACHR to strengthen all actions in order to benefit the work of journalists in the country. The Special Rapporteurs lamented how violence against those who practice journalism in Mexico has been a crisis for over a decade and despite the creation by the government of protection and persecution mechanisms, impunity and insecurity continue to characterize this situation throughout the country. In their preliminary observations, the international experts condemned the aggressions, murders, disappearances and espionage against the communicators of the country and provided a series of recommendations, among them: the strengthening of the Mechanism for the Protection of Journalists and the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Journalists (FEADLE, for its initials in Spanish), the implementation of a national law and the creation of a council of international experts to provide advice on the lines of investigation.

**5. Annual Report and Development of Expert Knowledge**

1. One of the main tasks of the Office of the Special Rapporteur is the preparation of the annual report on the state of freedom of expression in the hemisphere. Every year, this report analyzes the state of enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression in the States of the hemisphere, which includes noting the main threats to the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and the progress that has been made in this area.
2. Besides its annual reports, the Office of the Special Rapporteur periodically produces specific reports on particular countries. For example, it has prepared and published special reports on the situation regarding the right to freedom of expression in Paraguay (2001), Panama (2003), Haiti (2003), Guatemala (2004), Venezuela (2004), Colombia (2005), Honduras (2009, 2010 and 2015), Venezuela (2009 and 2010) and Mexico (2010 and 2015).

**6. Special Statements and Declarations**

1. Through the daily monitoring of the state of freedom of expression in the region—conducted by means of an extensive network of contacts and sources—the Office of the Special Rapporteur issues statements such as press releases, reports, and opinions on specific cases or situations that are relevant to the exercise of this fundamental right. Press releases issued by the Office of the Special Rapporteur receive wide coverage and constitute one of its most important work mechanisms.
2. The Office of the Special Rapporteur receives an average of 1,000 e-mails per month. Of these, 75 per cent refer to alerts, press releases, or requests for information and consultations on freedom of expression in the region, and receive a timely response; 10 per cent refer to formal petitions to the IACHR’s individual case system; and the remaining 15 per cent have to do with issues that do not fall within its area of competence. The Office of the Special Rapporteur reviews, culls, and sorts the information it receives to determine the course of action to take.
3. In addition, since its creation the Office of the Special Rapporteur has participated in the drafting of joint declarations with the other regional rapporteurs and the UN rapporteur for freedom of expression. These joint statements are generally signed by the UN Special Rapporteur; the Representative on Freedom of the Media of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); the Special Rapporteur of the OAS; and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights. When the issues are regional in nature, the declarations are signed by the Rapporteurs for the UN and the OAS.
4. The joint declarations constitute an important tool for the work of the Office of the Special Rapporteur. In previous years, these statements have covered such subjects as: the importance of freedom of expression (1999); murders of journalists and defamation laws (2000); challenges to freedom of expression in the new century in areas such as terrorism, the Internet, and radio (2001); freedom of expression and the administration of justice, commercialization and freedom of expression, and criminal defamation (2002); media regulation, restrictions on journalists, and investigations into corruption (2003); access to information and secrecy legislation (2004); the Internet and anti-terrorism measures (2005); publication of confidential information, openness of national and international entities, freedom of expression and cultural and religious tensions, and impunity in cases of attacks against journalists (2006); diversity in access, ownership, and content of the media, particularly radio and television (2007); the defamation of religions and anti-terrorist and anti-extremist legislation (2008); media and elections (2009); ten key challenges to freedom of expression in the next decade (2010); Wikileaks (2010); freedom of speech on the Internet (2011); crimes against freedom of expression (2012); the universality and the right to freedom of expression (2014); the obligations of states to protect journalists who cover armed conflicts (2015); and freedom of expression and the fight against violent extremism (2016).[[45]](#footnote-45)
5. On March 3rd, 2017, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Organization of American States (OAS) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, approved a joint declaration on freedom of expression and “fake news”, disinformation and propaganda (2017).[[46]](#footnote-46)
6. During 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur issued thirty-one (31) press communiqués[[47]](#footnote-47) to call attention to incidents associated with freedom of thought and expression. These pronouncements emphasized events of particular concern along with the best local practices, and explain the respective regional standards. The press communiqués issued in 2017 may be consulted at the website of the Office of the Special Rapporteur, available at: [http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion.](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/artListCat.asp?catID=1&lID=2)
7. On February 23rd, 2017 the Inter- American Commission on Human Rights, it’s Special Rapporteurship for Freedom of Expression and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras published a joint press release expressing concern over adopted reforms in the Honduran penal code, retrogressive for human rights and freedom of expression in the country.[[48]](#footnote-48)
8. On March 23rd the international organizations: UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women Office in Mexico (UN Women), the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico expressed their strong condemnation for the murder of Mexican Journalist Miroslava Breach in Chihuahua, Chihuahua.[[49]](#footnote-49)
9. On April 26th, two experts on freedom of expression of the United Nations and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights published a joint press release condemning the practice of censorship and internet blocking in Venezuela, as well as the detention, attacks and stigmatization of journalists and media workers covering the recent protests in the country.[[50]](#footnote-50)
10. On May 18th, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR, Edison Lanza, along with the Special Rapporteur of United Nations on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, David Kaye, published a joint press release condemning the murder of Mexican journalist and writer Javier Valdez Cárdenas, an urged immediate actions to end the cycle of violence against journalists[[51]](#footnote-51).
11. On December 4th, the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Edison Lanza and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression of the UN, David Kaye published a joint press release urging Mexico to redouble efforts to protect journalists.[[52]](#footnote-52)
12. **Funding**
13. The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression was created by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in October 1997, during its 97th session. The IACHR deemed it essential to create this office, considering the role that the right to freedom of expression plays in consolidating and developing the democratic system and in denouncing and protecting other human rights. As was explained at the beginning of this chapter, the creation of the Office of the Special Rapporteur as a permanent office found full support among the OAS Member States.[[53]](#footnote-53)
14. In March 1998, during its 98th session, the IACHR defined the characteristics and functions of the Office of the Special Rapporteur. Given the lack of resources, the IACHR—with the support of certain States such as Brazil and Argentina—established a separate, voluntary fund that would allow the office to operate without causing financial problems for the Commission itself. The voluntary assistance fund has, in fact, been an essential mechanism for not increasing the expenses of the Commission or imposing on it the burden of seeking resources to fund the operations of the Office of the Special Rapporteur. Thus, this office does not receive resources from the regular fund of the OAS or from the IACHR, nor does it impose on the IACHR Executive Secretariat the task of finding the resources it needs to operate. That being the case, since its creation the Office of the Special Rapporteur has relied wholly on the funds it obtains through donations from States that—like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, the United States, Mexico, Peru or Uruguay —have contributed to the voluntary fund, or through its participation in processes to compete for international cooperation funds.
15. In terms of international cooperation projects, it is important to mention that the Office of the Special Rapporteur develops them in strict adherence to the agenda or work plan that has been approved by the IACHR. Based on that work plan, the Office of the Special Rapporteur develops specific projects that are subject to rigorous procedures within the OAS so that they meet the approval of the Project Evaluation Committee (CEP) and the office of legal affairs and the financial office, among others. Once a project has successfully undergone these procedures, it is presented for the open, public competitions held by cooperation agencies. This process ensures that the cooperation funding exactly matches the Office of the Special Rapporteur's own priorities. Through this technical mechanism for obtaining funds, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has managed to increase its income by more than 50 per cent in recent years. On this same subject, it is pertinent to add that 12 per cent of the funds obtained by the Office of the Special Rapporteur (13.6 per cent of all funds executed by the office) must be designated for central administration of the OAS as indirect cost recovery or ICR.[[54]](#footnote-54)
16. The Office of the Special Rapporteur would like to express very special thanks for the contributions it has received from OAS Member States, observer countries, and international cooperation agencies. In 2017, the Office of the Rapporteur calls attention to the projects that have been carried out satisfactorily thanks to the financial contributions made by the States of Chile, Costa Rica, France, Kingdom of the Netherlands, the United States of America, Peru, Uruguay, as well as the Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation, the Swiss Confederation, Google Inc, Open Society Foundations, and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). This funding has allowed the Office of the Special Rapporteur to fulfill its mandate and continue its work of promoting and defending the right to freedom of expression. Once the OAS has released the official figures on the resources received and executed by this office, they will be published in the audited financial statements available on the webpage of the organization.[[55]](#footnote-55)
17. **Staff**
18. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has worked under the coordination of the Special Rapporteur, with a team of two or three lawyers who are experts in subjects related to freedom of expression, a journalist in charge of monitoring the situation of freedom of expression in the region, and a person who performs administrative assistance tasks. Since July of 2009, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has had a person in charge of managing projects and mobilizing resources. Any additional resources that have been obtained have served to provide greater stability and better working conditions for the members of this team. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has also benefited from the presence of interns who have been an essential part of the team. At different times in 2017, Laura Cristina Dib Ayesta (Venezuela), and Ignacio Odriozola (Argentina) contributed their work and enthusiasm very constructively to the Office of the Special Rapporteur. The Rapporteurship has also counted with the work of fellows, Pedro Noel (Fellowship Orlando Sierra, 2017), Tenesha Myrie (Regional Monitoring Fellowship, 2017) and Lisa Theodore (Regional Monitoring Fellowship, 2017).

**CHAPTER II: EVALUATION OF THE STATE OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN THE HEMISPHERE**

1. **Introduction and Methodology**
2. This chapter describes some of the most important aspects of the situation of freedom of expression in the hemisphere during 2015. Its objective is to foster a constructive dialogue with the Member States of the OAS, calling attention to the reported advances as well as the problems and challenges that have required action during this year. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has confidence in the will of the OAS Member States to promote resolutely the right to freedom of expression and, to that end, publicizes their best practices, reports some serious problems observed, and offers viable and practical recommendations rooted in the Declaration of Principles.
3. As in previous annual reports, this chapter notes those aspects of the right to freedom of expression that most merit attention and that have been reported to the Office of the Special Rapporteur during the year. Following the methodology of previous annual reports, this chapter is based on information received by the Office of the Special Rapporteur from various States, intergovernmental and non-governmental sources. The Office of the Special Rapporteur takes particular interest in the information provided by States, presented during the hearings held by the IACHR, submitted by non-governmental organizations in the region and contained in alerts sent by media outlets and media workers. In all cases, the information is contrasted and verified. The Office presents only that information which it thinks will help the States identify worrisome problems or tendencies that could eventually cause irreparable effects if not addressed.
4. The information in this report is presented in an orderly and systematic manner that takes note of the advances, setbacks, and challenges regarding various aspects of the exercise of the right to freedom of expression. Thus, this chapter includes progress made in legal, administrative or legislative matters, as well as the most serious problems that arose throughout the year. The latter include murders, threats and attacks against journalists exercising their profession; subsequent findings of disproportionate liability; and progress toward as well as challenges to the right of access to information, among others.
5. The cases selected in each topic serve as examples in relation to the respect and exercise of freedom of expression. Sources are cited in all cases. In some instances, the Office of the Special Rapporteur received information that it could not confirm and such information is not included. Such omissions should be considered in that context. In the majority of cases, the Office of the Special Rapporteur identifies the direct source, citing the address of the corresponding Web site. When the information is not published directly by the source, the report cites the date the Office of the Special Rapporteur received the information in its electronic mailbox. This report does not include information submitted to the Office of the Special Rapporteur through requests for precautionary measures, or other information which has not yet been made public.
6. In preparing this chapter of its 2017 Annual Report, the Office of the Special Rapporteur generally took into account information received until December 15, 2017. Information regarding incidents that occurred after the date the 2017 Annual Report went to press is available in the press release section of the websites of the Office of the Special Rapporteur (<http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/expression/index.asp>) and the IACHR (<http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/expression/index.asp>).
7. Finally, the Office of the Special Rapporteur acknowledges the collaboration of the OAS Member States and the civil society organizations that, following existing practice, contributed information about the situation of the exercise of freedom of expression in the hemisphere. As it does every year, the Office of the Special Rapporteur encourages the continuation of such practice, which are indispensable to the value of future reports.
8. **Evaluation of the State of Freedom of Expression in the Member States**
9. **ANTIGUA & BARBUDA**
10. **Indirect censorship**
11. On January 19, the Executive Director of *Observer Media Group*, Darren Derrick, denounced the intention of the Labor Party, in power since the 2014 general elections, to use state institutions to silence their media. In this regard, it would have explained that the Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA) refused an agreement established with *Observer* since 2013, where the payment of debts was reconciled, and claimed the sum of EC$1 million 586 thousand 98 (approximately US$587 thousand). Derrick considered that it would be an attack to restrict freedom of the press of the "only independent media" in Antigua and Barbuda. However, the Minister of Information, Melford Nicholas, reportedly pointed out that President Gastón Browne does not intend to intervene in the trade agreement, as it is foreign to government issues[[56]](#footnote-56).
12. According to Principle 5 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression “Prior censorship, direct or indirect interference in or pressure exerted upon any expression, opinion or information transmitted through any means of oral, written, artistic, visual or electronic communication must be prohibited by law. Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression.
13. **ARGENTINA**
14. The climate of political polarization that persists in the country affects the practice of journalism in Argentina. Broad sectors, both those who support the government and the opposition, continue to observe the media and journalists as actors aligned to one or the other side of the political spectrum, which contributes to questioning the credibility of journalism and its role in democracy.
15. Throughout 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur also received information regarding attacks and intimidation against journalists, both in the context of investigations into organized crime and corruption, and in situations of social protest or linked to political mobilizations. Likewise, indigenous communities and educational associations mobilizations were dispersed by security forces and, according to civil society organizations, they would have abused the use of force.
16. The decrease in the support provided by the State through the allocation of government advertising to various media and the cancellation of some programs in the public media caused journalistic voices to go off the air and led to accusations about possible political pressures behind of these measures. The authorities affirmed that their decisions are based on the application of a more equitable and transparent distribution of government advertising and that they respect the work of critical journalists.
17. **Progress**
18. On October 3, the Argentine Supreme Court dismissed an extraordinary appeal filed by the Ministry of Education and upheld the November 2016 judgment of the Federal Court for the Judicial Review of Administrative Action [*Cámara en lo Contencioso Administrativo Federal*] that ordered the government to produce information on the educational history of students with disabilities. The case originated with a joint petition for a constitutional remedy [*amparo colectivo*] filed in 2015 by the organizations *Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia* (ACIJ), *Asociación por los Derechos Civiles* (ADC), *Asociación Síndrome de Down de la República Argentina* (ASDRA) and *Red por los Derechos de las Personas con Discapacidad* (REDI), with the support of *Grupo Artículo 24 por la Educación Inclusiva*. The Court found that the State had omitted to comply fully with its internationally assumed obligations, and ordered it to take “the necessary administrative steps and actions, within the framework of its responsibilities, to ensure the production of the information requested” about the educational background of disabled persons.[[57]](#footnote-57)
19. **Attacks, Threats, and Intimidation of Journalists and Media Workers**
20. According to the information received by the Office of the Special Rapporteur, various journalists were assaulted or threatened, and various media outlets were attacked during 2017 in Argentina. One of the most serious cases took place on June 26, when journalist Jesús Báez do Nacimento, owner of the radio station *FM Carretera 101* of San Antonio, Misiones, was shot four times by two unknown individuals traveling on a motorbike. The attack took place outside the journalist’s home, which also housed the radio station’s broadcasting studio. He had to undergo surgery and was able to recover from the attack. On his radio program, Báez do Nacimento had condemned smuggling and drug trafficking, and the alleged involvement of the provincial police in those activities.[[58]](#footnote-58)
21. Other attacks and assaults reported during the year are detailed below.
22. On December 26, 2016, *TN* journalists Javier Fabracci and Ignacio González Prieto were assaulted by alleged soccer hooligans while covering a protest at a police station in Flores over the murder of a 14-year-old boy who had been hit by a stray bullet fired by criminals fleeing the scene of a robbery. Fabracci sustained severe injuries to his eyesight.[[59]](#footnote-59) On December 29, journalist Samuel Zamorano of *Radio 10* in the city of Mar del Plata was reportedly punched and kicked by fans of the Alvarado Soccer Club and leaders of the Bus Drivers’ Union [*Unión de Tranviarios Automotores*] (UTA).[[60]](#footnote-60)
23. On the night of January 29 and in the early morning hours of January 30, individuals reportedly staged a picket line at the *Clarín* printing plant that interrupted the normal distribution of the newspapers *Clarín* and *Olé*. The measure was taken to protest the closure of the Artes Gráficas Rioplatenses (AGR) workshop, owned by Grupo Clarín.[[61]](#footnote-61) On February 23, the facilities of Kollor Press were attacked by a group of some 20 to 30 people claiming to be former AGR employees, who reportedly destroyed printing equipment and burned some printed material. According to the owner of the print shop, the group of assailants threatened the factory operators, telling them “not to print any more material for Grupo Clarín,” in reference to print work that had previously been done at AGR and that Kollor Press had taken over.[[62]](#footnote-62)
24. On February 17, in the town of El Bolsón in Río Negro Province, journalist Alejandro Pairone’s car was attacked while he was investigating a controversial real estate project slated to be developed in a nature reserve.[[63]](#footnote-63) Pairone is a contributor to the magazine *Noticias*.
25. On March 7, *Canal 2* cameraman Alejandro Muñoz was reportedly seriously injured while covering a state employees’ march in San Salvador de Jujuy, Jujuy Province.[[64]](#footnote-64) Also on March 7, journalist Mercedes Ninci of *Radio Mitre* was reportedly assaulted and harassed by persons said to be pro-Kirshner activists while she was waiting to interview trade union leader Luis D’Elía at the federal court headquarters in Comodoro Py, where former president Cristina Kirchner was appearing in a case investigating allegations of criminal conspiracy.[[65]](#footnote-65) The activists also reportedly surrounded *CNN* journalist Iván Pérez Sarmenti during an on-air broadcast. Later, while covering a demonstration on Avenida de Mayo, the journalist was assaulted by activists, who damaged the news team’s video camera.[[66]](#footnote-66)
26. Journalists from the outlets *América 24*, *Todo Noticias*, *Canal 26*, and *C5N* were reportedly assaulted while covering the March 8 International Women's Day march in the city of Buenos Aires. The vehicles belonging to those channels were also reportedly damaged.[[67]](#footnote-67)
27. On March 20, journalists from the news channel *Crónica TV* and other media outlets were assaulted and threatened while covering a traffic accident in the city of Buenos Aires.[[68]](#footnote-68) Three journalists from *Radio Nacional*, *Misiones Online* and *Telefé Noticias* were reportedly threatened or intimidated on other occasions by unidentified persons, including individuals presumably with ties to drug trafficking; individuals with political motivations; a defendant in a domestic violence case, and trade union organizations taking part in a demonstration.[[69]](#footnote-69) In addition, at least six journalists from *Clarín*, *El Tribuno,* and *Telefé Noticias* reportedly suffered physical assaults or harm to their work equipment by police officers, public servants, and trade unions during demonstrations, and in another case by a group of people attending a music recital that turned violent.[[70]](#footnote-70)
28. On April 15, journalist Juan de la Cruz Velázquez, host of the program “*Hechos Policiales*” on radio *FM 95.3* in the city of Goya, Corrientes, received an anonymous letter containing a death threat at the radio station after reporting on issues related to drug trafficking in the region. The Office of the Public Prosecutor provided protection measures the journalist, who received a 24-hour police escort.[[71]](#footnote-71)
29. On May 30, José Allende, a provincial congressman from the *Partido Justicialista* party representing Entre Ríos, reportedly threatened Martín Carbone of the news portal *Noticiauno*. The congressman allegedly warned Carbone to put a stop to the reports about provincial Health Minister Ariel de la Rosa, or “some thug” would take “measures like Yabrán’s thugs did,” alluding to the murder of José Luis Cabezas, a photographer for the magazine *Noticias*. The threat was made after the website published an article about judicial investigations into alleged irregularities in the Ministry’s contracts.[[72]](#footnote-72)
30. On June 2, two journalists were reportedly assaulted and arrested by police officers while covering a ceremony in which Governor María Eugenia Vidal of Buenos Aires Province and Security Minister Cristian Ritondo were taking part in the city of Bahía Blanca.[[73]](#footnote-73) On June 5, journalists Andrés Ferreyra and Mauro Ceschín of *Canal 12*, Leonardo Guevara of *Mitre Córdoba*, Ignacio Cadario of *Continental Córdoba*, and photographer Daniel Cáceres were assaulted by transportation workers while covering a strike by members of the Bus Drivers’ Union (UTA) in the city of Córdoba.[[74]](#footnote-74)
31. During a press conference held on June 6, Governor Ricardo Colombi of the Province of Corrientes insulted *Radio Sudamericana* journalist Gonzalo Romero when he asked a question about the candidates in the upcoming provincial elections.[[75]](#footnote-75)
32. Journalist Luciano Mascali of *Radio Ideal* and *FM Conquista* in the city of Reconquista, Santa Fe, and his partner, attorney Luciana González, reportedly continued to be the victims of constant threats and attacks. In July 2016, the journalist filed a complaint with the Office of the Public Prosecutor alleging that he and his partner had received threats. The Office of the Public Prosecutor provided protection for the journalist and his partner while it investigated the complaint.[[76]](#footnote-76) Nevertheless, the couple was the target of new threats and attacks during 2017. In April, someone reportedly shot out the windshield of Mascali’s car. In May, both of their cars were doused with fuel. Also in March, unknown persons reportedly tried to break into their home, despite the fact that they had police protection. In view of these new incidents, the Ministry of National Security reportedly decided to reinforce the security detail assigned to the couple. The Argentine Journalism Forum [*Foro de Periodismo Argentino*] (FOPEA) expressed its concern over the case and noted that, despite the judicial investigation and the persistence of the threats, their origin remains uncertain.[[77]](#footnote-77)
33. Mónica Reviglio, a journalist with the National University of Córdoba’s Radio and Television Services and member of the feminist group #*Ni una menos*, was reportedly harassed on social media by a persons who had been convicted of gender-based violence. The harassment took place after she reported on the case. In July, the provincial court sentenced the perpetrator for using Facebook to insult and threaten the journalist and other members of the group, and imposed a fine and a restraining order against him.[[78]](#footnote-78)
34. On June 19, journalist Alejandro García of *FM Radio Gonnet* in La Plata was reportedly intimidated with a firearm by a police officer—a member of the Patrol Command of the Gonnet district of Buenos Aires—when they had an encounter on a public bus. The threat reportedly stemmed from articles the journalist had published about alleged irregularities at one of the town’s police stations.[[79]](#footnote-79)
35. In the early morning hours of August 3, a vehicle belonging to the newspaper *Jornada* of Chubut was struck by a Molotov cocktail while parked outside the paper’s building in the city of Trelew. The newspaper’s directors were of the opinion that the attack could be related to the demonstrations held in various towns in Patagonia to protest the arrest of Mapuche leader Facundo Jones Huala, since pamphlets from the group *Resistencia Ancestral Mapuche* [Mapuche Ancestral Resistance] were found around the vehicle. The newspaper reported that this was the third attack against the company in a week—a few days earlier, unknown persons had painted the front of its building with slogans expressing support for Jones Huala; and in Puerto Madryn, unknown persons had cut the guy wires on *FM Tiempo’s* radio antenna, which kept the station from broadcasting.[[80]](#footnote-80)
36. On August 7, journalist Gonzalo Aziz and cameraman Daniel Raichijk of *TN* were assaulted while covering a demonstration in the Plaza de Mayo.[[81]](#footnote-81)
37. On October 11, persons allegedly tied to the drug trafficking group known as “Los Monos” burst into the presentation of a book about the group’s activities and threatened the authors, journalists Germán de los Santos of *La Nación*, and Hernán Lascano of *La Capital*. The presentation, given at the National University of Rosario, had to be suspended following the incident.[[82]](#footnote-82)
38. On December 8, the Norwegian journalist and activist, Petter Titland, would have been banned from entering the country and then deported to Brazil by authorities of the National Migration Directorate [*Dirección Nacional de Migraciones*] (DNM) of Argentina. According to the information available, Titland, who is a member of the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and for Citizen Action [*Asociación por la Tasación de Transacciones Financieras y por la Acción Ciudadana*] (ATTAC), was allegedly included in a list of 64 activists whose entry into the country was not authorized by those responsible of the areas that assess security, even though all would have been accredited by the WTO. As a result, the Government of Norway issued a statement to the Argentine Foreign Ministry clarifying that Titland "has not been in violent actions [and] has not incited others to commit them either". Finally, on December 10 the journalist would have been authorized to enter the country.[[83]](#footnote-83)
39. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
40. **Social Protest**
41. On January 10 and 11, in the Department of Cushamen, Province of Chubut, members of the National Police [Gendarmería Nacional] and the provincial police reportedly violently evicted the indigenous Mapuche community of Cushamen, who, years earlier, had reclaimed ancestral ownership of lands awarded to the Italian firm Benetton. The Mapuche families were evicted pursuant to a court order because, as a form of protest, they had cut off several routes to prevent a tourist train from traveling through the area. The Mapuches reported that the operation was carried out by more than 200 police officers, who damaged their homes and fired rubber bullets. At least two members of the community were seriously injured. Emilio Jones was hit by a rubber bullet in the jaw, and had to undergo reconstructive surgery. Fausto Jones Huala was transported to the hospital and admitted to the intensive care unit with multiple head injuries after having been shot in the head with rubber bullets. Several members of the community were also arrested. [[84]](#footnote-84)
42. On April 9, the Buenos Aires Police prevented teachers to set up a tent outside Congress, where they intended to operate an itinerant school in the midst of a wage dispute with the government. According to various print media sources, the police used tear gas, pepper spray, and beatings to repress the action, alleging that the teachers’ unions did not have permission to set up a tent in a public space. At least four demonstrators were reportedly arrested for assault and resisting arrest. The itinerant schools were part of the measures taken by the teachers’ unions, which had been holding demonstrations and strikes to demand salary increases since March.[[85]](#footnote-85)
43. On July 13, National Police and Buenos Aires Police officers forcibly removed several workers from the PepsiCo plant in Florida, Vicente López. The workers had occupied the plant to protest layoffs in connection with the June 20 factory closing. Several people were reportedly arrested and injured during the police operation. The workers alleged an inordinate use of tear gas, pepper spray, and beatings against those who resisted the eviction. In addition, various police officers were reportedly injured by rocks and other blunt objects thrown by the workers.[[86]](#footnote-86) A number of news teams were also reportedly affected by the actions of the security forces while covering the eviction. Aldo Romano, an assistant working for *Crónica TV*, was reportedly beaten and kicked by police officers, and cameraman Fabio Soria of *La Nación+* was allegedly hit with a baton. In addition, several other journalists, camerapersons, photographers, and technical assistants from different media outlets were reportedly affected by the pepper spray and tear gas that was used against the demonstrators.[[87]](#footnote-87)
44. According to information of public knowledge, on August 1, in the Vuelta del Río area, department of Cushamen, Province of Chubut, agents of the National Police [*Gendarmería Nacional*] would have dispersed, with an excessive use of force, a demonstration carried out by members of the mapuche community Pu Lof. In the context of the dispersal of the protest, demonstrators indicate that Santiago Maldonado, a young artisan who would be supporting the claim of the aforementioned community, was allegedly detained by National Police personnel. After several days without news of Maldonado, the intervening federal judge would have classified the case as "forced disappearance of a person". As a result of this situation, massive marches would have taken place to demand the authorities to search for him. On October 17, after several raids in the area of ​​the events, divers from the Naval Prefecture [*Prefectura Naval*] found a lifeless body in the Chubut River, which was later confirmed to be that of Santiago Maldonado.[[88]](#footnote-88) According to a preliminary report from the Prefecture, Maldonado could have drowned in the Chubut river.[[89]](#footnote-89) Previously, on August 22, the Inter-American Commission granted precautionary measures for the protection of the rights of Santiago Maldonado, and requested the Argentine State to adopt the necessary measures to determine his situation and whereabouts, in order to protect his rights to life. and personal integrity; as well as to report on the actions taken in order to investigate the alleged facts that led to the adoption of such precautionary measure.[[90]](#footnote-90)
45. During a demonstration held on September 1 in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires to protest the August 1 disappearance and subsequent death of a young activist, Santiago Maldonado, several people were injured and 31 were arrested by city police. Two press workers from *TV Pública* and a reporter from *TN* were reportedly pepper sprayed in the face; a photographer from *Colectiva Fotografía a Pedal* was hit by a rubber bullet in the neck, and a reporter from *Agencia de Noticias Redacción* (ANRed) was hit by several rubber bullets and pepper sprayed. In addition, four community journalists were among the group of people arrested: Juan Pablo Mourenza and Ezequiel Hugo Medone, of *Red Nacional de Medios Alternativos*, and photographers Daniel Lara and Daniel Castro Marín. The detainees were reportedly held incommunicado on charges of “public intimidation, assault on a law enforcement officer, and resisting arrest.”[[91]](#footnote-91) They claimed that they had been arrested without cause, as they had been covering the events, were far from the protest, or had not taken part in the disturbances.[[92]](#footnote-92) On the night of September 3, Judge Marcelo Martínez De Giorgi ordered the release of all the detainees.[[93]](#footnote-93) Photographer Mourenza reported that when his personal items were returned to him, the memory card—containing all the photographic material from the protest—was missing from his camera.[[94]](#footnote-94)
46. On November 25, in the town of Villa Mascardi, Province of Río Negro, a confrontation took place between members of the Mapuche indigenous community, who occupied private lands, but under the consideration that they are ancestral, and agents of the Argentine Naval Prefecture [*Prefectura Naval Argentina*] (PNA). During the eviction, firearms would have been used and in this context Rafael Nahuel, a young man from the Mapuche community Lof Laken Winkul Mapu died; at least two people were injured. According to the information available, Nahuel would have died after being shot in the back, allegedly while fleeing the PNA. Relatives and individuals close to Rafael Nahuel have criticized the actions of the Federal Court of Bariloche, given that the acting judge allegedly declared the case as "uncertain death" and allowed the PNA officials to return to their posts in the Province of Buenos Aires. For its part, the Ministry of Security of the Nation, regarding the events, assured that "It was not a group of protester or of vindication but of a methodology of armed violence, contrary to democracy and the Rule of Law".[[95]](#footnote-95)
47. Journalists were reportedly attacked again during other protests held on September 30, also in connection with Santiago Maldonado’s death. According to various media reports, journalists from *América*, *Crónica TV*, *C5N* and *Clarín* were assaulted in the city of Buenos Aires*.* In the town of El Bolsón, Río Negro, a team from *TN* and journalists from local media outlets were reportedly attacked. In Río Gallegos, Santa Cruz, various reporters were allegedly subjected to insults.[[96]](#footnote-96)
48. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[97]](#footnote-97) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[98]](#footnote-98)
49. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[99]](#footnote-99)
50. **Subsequent Liability**
51. On February 14 of this year, the Argentine Supreme Court denied the request of the Human Rights Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion for a final judgment handed down by the Court be set aside pursuant to the Inter-American Court’s decision in the case of *Fontevecchia and D’Amico v. Argentina*. The Supreme Court held that the Inter-American Court cannot overturn judgments.[[100]](#footnote-100) The majority opinion was issued by Justices Ricardo Lorenzetti, Elena Highton de Nolasco, Carlos Rosenkrantz, and Horacio Rosatti (the latter wrote a concurring opinion, and Justice Juan Carlos Maqueda dissented). According to the judgment, granting the request would mean turning the Inter-American Court into a “fourth instance” for the review of national court decisions, contrary to the structure of the inter-American human rights system and the principles of public law enshrined in the Argentine Constitution. Moreover, the Court found that overturning its own final judgment—based on the *Fontevecchia* decision of the Inter-American Court—would entail depriving itself of its own character as the supreme body of the Argentine Judiciary and replacing it with an international tribunal, in violation of Articles 27 and 108 of the Constitution.[[101]](#footnote-101) In 2011, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights handed down its judgment in the case of *Fontevecchia and D’Amico v. Argentina*, ordering the State to aside the 2001 judgment of the Argentine Supreme Court that found journalists Jorge Fontevecchia and Héctor D’Amico liable for damages to former Argentine President Carlos Menem based on the publication of reports that Menem had an unacknowledged son. The Inter-American Court held that the judgment was a violation of the right to freedom of expression enshrined in the American Convention on Human Rights (art. 13).
52. Emiliano Yacobitti, president of the *Unión Cívica Radical* [Radical Civic Union] of the Federal Capital and Secretary of the Treasury and Administration of the University of Buenos Aires, filed a lawsuit for damages in December 2016 against *C5N* journalist Alejandro Bercovich, because of what he considered to be “systematic persecution on social media.” The politician reportedly accused the journalist of “going beyond his role as a journalist” and sought damages in the amount of ARS$ 75,000. Bercovich took part in a 2015 journalistic investigation that linked Yacobitti to alleged corrupt acts between the university and the Clinical Hospital. The Twitter posts that Yacobitti considered defamatory were related to those events.[[102]](#footnote-102) At a hearing held on June 6, 2017 Bercovich argued that his statements were protected by his constitutional right to free expression, that they referred to Yacobitti as a public figure, and that they were not intended to affect his private or personal life. Yacobitti subsequently declared that he was satisfied and withdrew his complaint.[[103]](#footnote-103)
53. On March 23, Division D of the National Court of Appeals for Civil Matters [*Sala D de la Cámara Nacional de Apelaciones en lo Civil*] affirmed a lower court’s judgment against the satirical magazine *Barcelona*, and increased the amount of “non-pecuniary damages” awarded to Cecilia Pando, president of the Association of Relatives and Friends of Argentine Political Prisoners [*Asociación de Familiares y Amigos de los Presos Políticos de la Argentina*] (an organization that defends former members of the military prosecuted for human rights violations).[[104]](#footnote-104) The lawsuit against the magazine stemmed from the August 2010 publication of an image in which Pando’s face was photoshopped onto the body of a naked woman in chains, as a satirical representation of a demonstration where she and other members of the association chained themselves outside the Ministry of Defense to protest the situation of various members of the military prosecuted for human rights violations committed during the last Argentine dictatorship. Pando sought compensation for damages, alleging that the publication adversely affected her “honor.” The magazine defended itself by arguing that “all it did was reflect the news using satire and parody, in no way intending to harm the plaintiff’s honor and reputation, let alone humiliate her.” On April 29, 2016, Chief Judge Susana Novile of Civil Court No. 108 ordered the magazine to pay Pando ARS$ 40,000.[[105]](#footnote-105) The judge, citing the case law of the Argentine Supreme Court, held that “the exercise of the right to express ideas or opinions cannot be extended to the detriment of necessary harmony with all other constitutional rights, including the individual rights to moral integrity, honor, and privacy (…). She found that, “even though the magazine is satirical, the photo and text in question go beyond a sarcastic and mocking tone and make an exaggerated display of the plaintiff,” and concluded that the plaintiff had demonstrated that her “honor was tarnished.”
54. The Court of Appeals increased the amount of the damages to ARS$ 70,000 (approximately US$ 4,000). Its judgment affirmed that, although freedom of expression is “a fundamental pillar in the consolidation of a republican system—even in its satirical form—and this is manifested through every person’s right to express any thought, idea, belief, value judgment, or opinion through any medium; nevertheless, this exercise is not absolute, and it is confronted by other, similarly fundamental rights, such as honor, privacy, and one’s own image.” In this regard, the Court held that, “At times, the satirical manipulation of a photograph may reflect intentions that do not enjoy sufficient constitutional relevance to justify the harm to the right to one’s image.” Thus, “The right to one’s image only yields to a general interest related to educational, scientific, or cultural aims; that is, the lack of a legitimizing aim, the anti-functional nature of the act, is sufficient to give rise to compensable damages caused to the party affected by the information (…). In other words, insofar as those interests are inconsistent, parody or caricature cannot be understood as the exercise of social or political criticism through satire and humor.”[[106]](#footnote-106) On April 11, the magazine’s director, Ingrid Beck, tweeted that the magazine had filed an extraordinary appeal of the judgment in order to have the case heard by the Supreme Court.[[107]](#footnote-107)
55. The judgment was cause for concern among journalistic organizations and defenders of freedom of expression, who maintained that political satire and humor is speech protected by the right to free expression, especially when it refers to public figures.[[108]](#footnote-108) In addition, the financial penalty imposed against the magazine jeopardizes its survival, according to its director, who cautioned that the weekly publication will have to close if forced to pay the damages.[[109]](#footnote-109)
56. A group of congressional representatives from the “*Cambiemos*” sector who are members of the Freedom of Expression Committee of the House of Representatives filed an *amicus curiae* brief with the Superior Court of Formosa [*Superior Tribunal de Justicia de Formosa*] in the case involving journalist Gabriel Hernández and six others who were ordered to pay $ 2 million to Gildo Insfrán, the governor of the Province of Formosa, after the governor sued for “damages.” The representatives asserted that the reporter’s situation “is just one example of what is happening in Formosa, where citizens censor themselves out of fear of government retaliation.”[[110]](#footnote-110)
57. The case against Hernández and six other journalists, media owners, and executives, arose from an incident that took place on January 21, 2013, when an anonymous listener called the journalist’s radio program, “Mano a Mano” on *Radio Fantasía*, and implicated the governor of Formosa in his own son’s death, 10 years earlier. The governor brought a legal action against Hernández, Andrea Cóspito, and radio announcers César and Alicia Orué, of *Radio Fantasía*, and María de los Ángeles López, the owner of the radio station; as well as Julián González, director of the newspaper *La Opinión Ciudadana*, and Carlos Varela, director of the digital news outlet *La Corneta Noticias*, for repeating the listener’s statements. On June 23, 2016 the On June 23, the Civil and Commercial Chamber [*Cámara Civil y Comercial*] of Formosa upheld the judgment of the 1st Civil and Commercial Court [*Juzgado Civil y Comercial No. 1*] of Formosa. The appellate court’s decision was appealed to the Superior Court of Formosa, and was pending at the time of this writing.[[111]](#footnote-111)
58. Simultaneously, Hernández and journalist Leonardo Fernández Acosta were reportedly criminally investigated pursuant to a complaint filed on October 28, 2016 by provincial prosecutor Stella Maris Zabala de Copes, based on their Facebook posts about a power outage that prevented *Radio Nacional Formosa*—on which both journalists host a program—from going on air. The prosecutor reportedly requested the investigation of “the reckless speech and/or conduct” of the journalists, “bearing in mind that they work as journalists who shape public opinion and have an influence on young people.” She reportedly asked for “the maximum sentence” for the alleged crime.[[112]](#footnote-112) The prosecutor later filed a brief with the court to clarify that the complaint was not against the journalists who made the statements on Facebook, but rather against whomever may have intentionally interrupted the broadcast of the radio program. In August 2017, at the request of the Public Ministry, substitute federal Judge Juan Carlos Vallejos ordered the investigation shelved.[[113]](#footnote-113)
59. During the 165th Session of the IACHR, held in Montevideo, Uruguay, the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression met with journalist Gabriel Hernández and a delegation of Argentine lawmakers who provided updates on the lawsuits against the journalist and condemned the widespread harassment of independent journalists in the Province of Formosa.
60. On October 3, the Supreme Court unanimously affirmed the judgment against journalist Samuel Gelblung, finding him liable for “damages” arising from the dissemination of allegedly false information on a television program in connection with the case of a teenager who was found suffocated to death.[[114]](#footnote-114) In May 2000, the program “*Memoria*,” hosted by Gelblung, aired a report linking the alleged lover of the young woman’s mother to the murder. In their report, the journalists did not cite a specific source, and mentioned the alleged perpetrator’s surname and profession. The persons mentioned in the report sued for damages. In the judgment, which upheld the decisions of the trial court and the appellate court, the Supreme Court stated that freedom of expression “has a preeminent place” within the framework of constitutional freedoms, because of “its central importance to the preservation of a democratic republic.” Nevertheless, the Court stated, this “does not mean that it has been established as an absolute right, or that there are not specific circumstances in which those who disseminate information should be held civilly liable for harm caused.” In this case, the Court found that the doctrine developed in the “Campillay” case—which protects those who attribute the information to an identifiable source, use speech that is merely speculative, or keep confidential the identity of persons implicated by the information—was not applicable because the journalists’ statements “were not attributed to any source” and made a “vague and general reference.” Consequently, “the defendant cannot be exempt from liability in light of the ‘Campillay’ doctrine, as it does not protect the media outlet when it stops being a simple disseminator of information that comes from some other source, and instead becomes the author of harmful or aggravating information.” The Court held that the doctrine of “actual malice” does not apply in this case, either, and that “simple negligence is sufficient to attribute civil liability to the defendants.” The journalist was ordered to pay damages in the amount of ARS$ 40,000.[[115]](#footnote-115)
61. The Inter-American Court has also established, as regards possible civil liability, that civil judgments in freedom of expression cases must be strictly proportionate so as not to have an inhibitory effect on that freedom, as “the fear of a civil penalty, considering the claim […] for a very steep civil reparation, may be, in any case, equally or more intimidating and inhibiting for the exercise of freedom of expression than a criminal punishment, since it has the potential to attain the personal and family life of an individual who accuses a public official, with the evident and very negative result of self-censorship both in the affected party and in other potential critics of the actions taken by a public official.”[[116]](#footnote-116)
62. The Inter-American Commission and the Inter-American Court have established that in a democratic society those in public office should have a higher threshold of tolerance for criticism, [[117]](#footnote-117) because “they have voluntarily exposed themselves to a stricter scrutiny and because they have an enormous capacity to call information into question through its convening power.”[[118]](#footnote-118) In this regard, the Inter-American Commission stated that “[t]his kind of political debate encouraged by the right to freedom of expression will inevitably generate some critical speeches or even offensive to those who hold public office or are intimately involved in the formation of public policy.”[[119]](#footnote-119) Therefore, as stated in Principle 10 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression adopted by the Inter-American Commission in 2000, “[t]he protection to reputation should only be guaranteed through civil sanctions in those cases which the person offended is a public official.” That is, the use of criminal mechanisms to punish speech on matters of public interest, and especially public officials or politicians does not respond to a pressing social need that justifies it, is unnecessary and disproportionate and it can be a means of indirect censorship given its chilling effect of the debate on matters of public interest.
63. Principle 11 of the IACHR´s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states: “[p]ublic officials are subject to greater scrutiny by society. Laws that penalize offensive expressions directed at public officials, generally known as "*desacato* laws," restrict freedom of expression and the right to information.” Furthermore, the IACHR has held repeatedly that the application of criminal law to sanction expressions about public officials is disproportionate when dealing with protected speech, such as information or expression regarding matters of public interest, and infringes the right to freedom of expression.[[120]](#footnote-120)

1. **Direct and Indirect Censorship**
2. The newspaper *El Libertador* of the city of Corrientes reportedly imposed a policy on its journalists barring them from publishing information about judges, public servants, and members of congress without the express authorization of the paper’s directors. Based on this measure, police news reporter Santiago Angarola was apparently suspended for having reprinted a cable from the news agency Noticias Argentinas reporting on a drug trafficking case that allegedly involved employees of the Federal Judiciary. Although they were not identified by name, the journalist was reportedly subjected to disciplinary sanctions for not requesting the proper authorization. The argentine journalism forum [*Foro de Periodismo Argentino*] (FOPEA) wrote a letter to the newspaper’s directors demanding that they end the censorship mechanism and asking them to set aside the disciplinary measure against the journalist. [[121]](#footnote-121)
3. On July 5, the State-owned airline Aerolíneas Argentinas reportedly issued an order for its planes not to transport copies of the newspaper *Página 12*, with which it had a business agreement for distribution of the paper in the provinces. The airline reportedly took the measure because of a discrepancy in the business agreement, but the newspaper complained that it was a unilateral decision made by the company, and that it constituted an act of censorship because of its critical stance toward the government.[[122]](#footnote-122)
4. According to Principle 5 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression “Prior censorship, direct or indirect interference in or pressure exerted upon any expression, opinion or information transmitted through any means of oral, written, artistic, visual or electronic communication must be prohibited by law. Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression.
5. **Access to Public Information**
6. On March 27, the government signed Decree 206/2017 regulating Law No. 27.275 on Access to Public Information, which was passed by Congress on September 14, 2016. The decree, which entered into force on September 29, 2017 and only regulates some articles of the law, specifies, among other things, that the Agency for Access to Public Information—the entity created to enforce the law—will act within the purview of the Office of the Chief of the Cabinet of Ministers, and that the head of that body “will issue the explanatory and supplemental rules pertinent to the enforcement” of the law. It provides that entities subject to the law will be required to disclose information completely free of charge, “except in those cases where it is expressly authorized by current law to charge a fee or its equivalent as consideration for the service provided.” The text states that, in the event that entities subject to the law “have an electronic version of the information requested, they should send or make it available to the requester free of charge.” “If no electronic version exists, they may duplicate the requested information in the form of uncertified copies, magnetic, optical, sound, visual, holographic, or other means,” and “the costs of the reproduction will be borne by the requester.” The decree also provides that “The restricted, confidential, or secret nature of information classified for reasons pertaining to defense, foreign policy, or national security must be set forth in provisions regulating the exercise of the activity and by the reasoned action of the respective competent authorities, prior to the request for information. In the absence of any provision to the contrary, information classified as restricted, confidential, or secret will remain so for ten years from the time of its production, after which time the entity subject to the law must perform a new analysis on the feasibility of declassifying the information for purposes of making it public.” It further establishes that “financial secrecy,” as defined under national law, “is specifically protected.” In addition, the exceptions provided to the public disclosure of information will not be applicable “in court cases in which grave human rights violations, genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity are investigated and tried.”[[123]](#footnote-123)
7. On September 25, the Executive Branch adopted Decree of Necessity and Urgency 746/2017, amending provisions of Law 27.275. The Agency for Access to Public Information now reports to the Office of the Chief of the Cabinet of Ministers, which will have the power to approve its organizational structure. In addition, the decree also transferred to the agency the power to act as the Enforcement Authority for Personal Data Protection Law No. 25.326, which had previously been the responsibility of the National Personal Data Protection Office [*Dirección Nacional de Protección de Datos Personales*] of the Ministry of Justice.[[124]](#footnote-124)
8. Various civil society organizations, including the Argentine Journalism Forum, the *Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia*, *Poder Ciudadano*, and the Inter American Press Association, expressed concern over the amendments, especially because they were passed through an exceptional “necessity and urgency” mechanism rather than through the regular legislative procedure. They also called into question the subordination of the agency responsible for implementing the law to the authority of the Office of the Chief of the Cabinet of Ministers, on the grounds that takes away its functional autonomy.[[125]](#footnote-125) In turn, *Asociación por los Derechos Civiles* (ADC) expressed in a statement that the measure “raises serious problems from a constitutional perspective, while also giving rise to unavoidable questions about the new body’s ability to perform its duties efficiently.” First, the ADC called into question the use of a Decree of Necessity and Urgency to make the amendments, given that “it can only be justified when there are ‘exceptional circumstances [that] make it impossible to follow the regular procedures” for the approval of laws. Second, the organization stated that the provision “affects the functional autonomy of the Agency for Access to Public Information, by providing that the structure proposed by the director must be approved by the Chief of the Cabinet of Ministers.” That provision “runs counter to the legislature’s objective of having an independent oversight body to monitor potential interference by the Executive Branch,” suggested the organization. In that regard, it maintained that “Any attempt to reform the agency should be debated previously in Congress so that the legislature is the branch responsible for authorizing changes to the provisions that the legislature established.” Third, the ADC raised objections to the concentration of responsibilities for access to public information and the protection of personal data in a single body. Although the ADC is of the opinion that this concentration “is not a problem in and of itself,” it asserted that “Because both rights enjoy the same status, it is essential that the body is provided with similar institutional capacities for it to perform its duties with regard to both.”[[126]](#footnote-126)
9. Principle 4 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression which states that “[a]ccess to information held by the state is a fundamental right of every individual. States have the obligation to guarantee the full exercise of this right. This principle allows only exceptional limitations that must be previously established by law in case of a real and imminent danger that threatens national security in democratic societies.” Additionally, with regard to the principle of maximum disclosure the law must guarantee the effective and broadest possible access to public information, and any exceptions must not become the general rule in practice. Also, the exceptions regime should be interpreted restrictively and all doubts should be resolved in favor of transparency and access.
10. **Internet and Freedom of Expression**
11. On December 28, 2016, the 2nd Federal Civil and Commercial Court [*Juzgado en lo Civil y Comercial Federal N° 2*] ordered the social network Twitter to eliminate “all comments and photomontages” insulting model Victoria Vanucci, who brought legal action against the network after various users made offensive posts about her upon the release of photographs in which she and her husband could be seen hunting animals in South Africa. Judge Horacio Alfonso ordered Twitter to delete content referring to Vanucci as a “murderer,” “whore,” “Jew,” “scourge,” “non grata,” “cockroach,” “bitch,” “shit”; accusing her of being a drug addict, wishing her “death,” “suffering,” and “pain,” or expressing “hatred.”[[127]](#footnote-127)
12. On January 25, the news website *Adelanto 24* suffered a cyberattack that knocked it offline for some 32 hours. According to its own investigation, the attack was provoked by members of the army who were supposedly upset about the publication of an article that revealed internal conflicts within the institution related to a salary dispute.[[128]](#footnote-128) On March 3, the digital media outlet *Edición Límite* suffered two cyberattacks that took it offline for several days, allegedly in connection with the publication of articles about public servants and persons with ties to the government. The Provincial Minister of Santa Fe, Pablo Farías, committed on his behalf and on behalf of the Ministry of Security to assist in determining what occurred.[[129]](#footnote-129)
13. On March 27, the website of *El Litoral* of Santa Fe was the target of a cyberattack in which hackers published an intimidating anonymous message on the website against the media outlet and against a prosecutor. According to the paper’s directors, the hacking also took the website offline for several hours, which prevented access to its content.[[130]](#footnote-130)
14. In April, the Second Division of the Court of Appeals for Criminal Offenses and Misdemeanors [*Sala II de la Cámara de Apelaciones en lo Penal, Contravencional y de Faltas*] of Buenos Aires upheld the preventive blocking of the digital platforms used to access Uber car service. Judges Marcela De Langhe, Fernando Bosch, and Pablo Bacigalupo affirmed the lower court’s decision, handed down in January by Judge María Fernanda Botana at the request of the Buenos Aires Office of the Public Prosecutor, to preventively block “the digital platforms, apps, and other technological resources that make it possible to hire and/or use the passenger transportation services offered by the company Uber Argentina,” until such time as the reasons for the preventive measure cease to exist. The judges specified that “The lower court judge ruled to extend the preventive shutdown/blocking [of Uber] to the entire country,” since it had been proven that “the company in question is engaged in a lucrative activity without authorization and therefore, there is *prima facie* evidence of a crime.” They explained, “Despite numerous decisions aimed at putting a stop to the conduct at issue in this case—with measures that were narrower in scope—it has not been possible to accomplish that aim. This jeopardizes the objective of the protective measures, which is to ensure the effectiveness of the decision ultimately rendered in the case.” The judges added that, “In that scenario, the preventive shutdown/block [of Uber] must be upheld” throughout the country, because “at this point in the proceedings that is the only way in which to implement the measure ordered.”[[131]](#footnote-131)
15. In June, the Court upheld a protective measure imposed by trial court Judge Claudia Alvaro to block the use of credit cards to pay for Uber services. The judges unanimously upheld the April 28 ruling ordering credit card service provider companies Prisma Medio de Pago SA, American Express Argentina SA, First Data Cono Sur SRL, Banco Comafi (Diners), Mastercard Cono Sur SRL, and Citibank NA in Argentina “to abstain from authorizing points of sale of UBER TECHNOLOGIES INC and/or UBER and/or UBER B.V. and/or UBER ARGENTINA SRL and/or RAISER OPERATIONS BV and/or to conduct any activity that allows and/or facilities the company to complete its transactions, limiting it to those transactions made within the city of Buenos Aires.”[[132]](#footnote-132) In April, in light of a similar appeal, the same Court ruled against the use of third-party payment processors such as Zap Zap, Ecopays, Wirex, and Skrill, to pay for Uber services.[[133]](#footnote-133)
16. **Diversity, Pluralism, and Community Broadcasting**
17. On December 30, 2016, the government adopted Decree 1340/2016, authorizing telecommunications companies to provide convergent services, known as “quadruple play” (a single company provides landline and mobile telephone service, cable television, and Internet service).[[134]](#footnote-134) The measure, signed by President Mauricio Macri, aims to “attain a higher degree of network and service convergence under competitive conditions, promoting the deployment of next generation networks and broadband Internet penetration throughout Argentina.” According to the decree, the authorization date is January 1, 2018 for the city of Buenos Aires, greater Buenos Aires, and the cities of Rosario and Córdoba; the start date for the rest of the country will be determined by the National Communications Agency [*Ente Nacional de Comunicaciones*] (Enacom). The decree would thus enable the mobile telephone companies Telefónica, Telecom, and Claro to offer cable television, while the cable companies, such as Cablevisión/Nextel, will be able to provide cell phone service. In addition, the decree granted Enacom the power to reassign radio spectrum frequencies, “establishing compensation, and deployment and coverage obligations.”[[135]](#footnote-135) A number of academic, journalistic, and civil society organizations criticized the measure on the grounds that it encourages the consolidation of an oligopoly market and favors the main telecommunications corporations, intensifying media concentration.[[136]](#footnote-136) As a consequence, the merger between the largest cable and Internet company in Argentina, Cablevisión (Grupo Clarín), and one of the main landline and mobile telephone companies, Telecom Argentina (Fintech), was announced on June 30. With this merger, the first “quadruple play” (Internet, cable TV, mobile telephone, and landline services) convergent operator in the country was established. According to the specialized press, the new operator will control 55% of the broadband business, 40% of the paid television market, 35% of mobile telephony, and 44% of landline telephony.[[137]](#footnote-137) Experts also noted that the merger could lead to market dominance by the new operator in some Argentine provinces. For instance, in Córdoba, Cablevisión/Telecom could end up with 95% of the province’s broadband market.[[138]](#footnote-138)
18. On December 29, 2016, the National Communications Agency (Enacom) adopted Resolution 10090 - E/2016 for purposes or reorganizing “the allocation of digital channels of the free-to-air digital television services of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area to authorized parties, licensees, and licensee applications pending adjudication.” The redistribution of the lineup involved the inclusion of new channels, such as *Perfil* (*Perfil TV*), the news channel *QM* (of the city of La Plata), the government signals of the city of Buenos Aires and the Province of Buenos Aires, and the Catholic Church’s signal. The measure further provided for the inclusion in the lineup of frequencies granted to the University of Buenos Aires, and to different foundations, cooperatives, and civil associations, as well as the channels *El Trece*, *Telefe*, *El Nueve* and *América.*[[139]](#footnote-139)
19. On March 28, the Ministry of Communications postponed—for the second time—the introduction of the draft Regulatory Framework Law for Telecommunications and Audiovisual Communication Services.[[140]](#footnote-140) Through Resolution 601-E/2017, the ministry granted a 180-day deadline extension to the Committee in charge of drafting the bill. In October 2016, the ministry had already delayed the bill’s introduction by 180 days.[[141]](#footnote-141) According to the resolution passed in March, 78 civil society organizations, specialists, academics, and citizens have made contributions to the draft law thus far, within the framework of a participatory consultation process. Nevertheless, the resolution indicates that a significant number of organizations and citizens “requested new rounds of consultation to ensure the absolute openness of the process,” and therefore it provided for “the initiation and development of a process for new consultations.”
20. On April 25, pursuant to a search warrant issued by Judge Jorge Ernesto Rodríguez of the 2nd Federal Court for Criminal and Correctional Matters [*Criminal y Correccional No 2*] of Morón, employees of the National Communications Agency (Enacom) and Federal Police reportedly conducted a search and seized the equipment of community broadcast stations *Radio M* of Virrey del Pino, and *FM Fórmula* of the town of Merlo. The operation was reportedly carried out because the stations were interfering in the air communications of the Ezeiza Airport. In addition, the police reportedly took the owner of radio *FM Fórmula*, Ariel Montes, and two journalists from the station into custody as detainees [“*demorados*”] for their alleged interference in aviation radio frequencies. A criminal case was reportedly brought against Montes, based on an infraction report prepared in February for the alleged interference caused by the radio station. The Union of Audiovisual and Associated Journalists of La Matanza [*Unión de Comunicadores Audiovisuales y Afines de la Matanza*] (Ucaya) expressed its repudiation of “the seizures carried out” against the community radio stations and condemned “the unprecedented violence and arbitrary nature” with which the officials acted.[[142]](#footnote-142)

1. The community channel *Barricada TV* of Buenos Aires began broadcasting on June 28 on free-to-air digital television [*Televisión Digital Abierta*] (TDA) channel 32.1. The station is one of the first in the non-profit sector to obtain a license to provide audiovisual communication services. The broadcast began as a test, given that it is still awaiting final authorization from the National Communications Agency (Enacom).[[143]](#footnote-143) The community media outlets *Urbana TV* of Buenos Aires, *Pares TV* of Luján, and *Comarca Si* of Florida also began to air on channel 32. The four media outlets that participated in the competitive bidding process in 2015 and in November of that year obtained licenses to operate on channels 33 and 19, but during 2016 they experienced problems with interference in their broadcasts. In the case of *Barricada TV* and *Urbana TV*, the interference was due to the fact that the commercial channel *El Trece* continued operating on channel 33, despite the fact that its authorized test period had ended.[[144]](#footnote-144) The community media outlets lodged several complaints with the authorities and with the courts, and organized demonstrations outside Enacom headquarters to demand that the situation be corrected. In December 2016, Enacom decided to reassign the four community outlets to channel 32.[[145]](#footnote-145) The channels, joined together as the National Coordinating Body of Alternative Television Networks [*Coordinadora Nacional de Televisoras Alternativas*] (CONTA), maintained that “The measure immediately resolves the interference created by Canal 13,” but also “suspends the reorganization of the TDA channel lineup that required that station—among others—to move to a different channel once the competitive bidding processes have been conducted.” They maintained that the agency’s decision to relocate the community media “means that the ‘mirror’ signals of the commercial channels have consolidated their position and continue to broadcast on the test frequencies.”[[146]](#footnote-146)
2. Additionally, in February, Enacom reportedly ordered community radio station *FM Ocupas* of Moreno to go off air because it allegedly interfered with signals from the Mariano Moreno Airport.[[147]](#footnote-147)
3. According to estimates by InterRedes cited in a study conducted by researchers from five Argentine universities, as of April 2017 Enacom owed payments to over 200 projects awarded by the Competitive Development Fund for Audiovisual Media [*Fondo de Fomento Concursable para Medios de Comunicación Audiovisual - Fomeca*] in 2015, totaling over ARS$ 25 million. The government has made some partial payments since then, according to the investigation.[[148]](#footnote-148) In November 2016, the National Communications Agency (Enacom) announced the opening of five new lines of credit for non-profit entities, community media outlets, producers, native peoples, and licensed owners of broadcasting services. These lines of credit were opened under the umbrella of theFomeca), a tool created in 2009 in tandem with the Audiovisual Communication Services Law to strengthen community media and independent productions. The fund facilitates the redistribution of resources collected through fines and taxes from audiovisual media outlets in order to promote community media.[[149]](#footnote-149) During 2016, after the arrival of the new administration that amended some of the legal provisions, many community projects that had been approved in 2015 and had already begun to be carried out reportedly stopped receiving support, and the mechanism ceased to operate. Moreover, the calls for proposals corresponding to the 2016 budget were reportedly not issued. Enacom authorities suggested that the standstill was due to the fact that the process by which the subsidies were granted was under audit.[[150]](#footnote-150) The community media outlets held demonstrations and lodged complaints to demand payment of the funds owed and the restoration of the development mechanism. In August 2016, Enacom officials met with representatives of InterRedes, a network of various community media organizations, and agreed to resume the pending payments and to announce the new calls for proposals so that funding would be available as soon as possible.[[151]](#footnote-151)
4. On August 3, the head of Argentina’s Office of the Ombudsperson for Audiovisual Communication Services [*Defensoría del Público de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual*], María José Guembe, sent a letter to the Office of the Special Rapporteur to provide relevant information about human rights and audiovisual media in the country. According to the Ombudsperson’s Office, Argentina is currently the scene of “a process of unprecedented media concentration,” which reportedly began with the adoption of Decree of Necessity and Urgency No. 267/2016 by the incoming government of Mauricio Macri. The decree amended the Audiovisual Communication Services Law and implemented measures that have reportedly intensified media concentration, such as dismantling anti-trust oversight mechanisms and approving the merger of powerful players in the telecommunications markets. In addition, the Office of the Ombudsperson noted that its position has been “weakened, because the National Congress failed to activate the mechanisms provided for the appointment of the Ombudsperson.”[[152]](#footnote-152)
5. On various occasions, the IACHR and the Office of the Special Rapporteur have recognized that community media in our region fulfill a fundamental function for the exercise by diverse sectors of society of freedom of expression and access to information.[[153]](#footnote-153) In that sense, it is necessary for the states to legally recognize community media and to consider fair spectrum reserves for this type of media, along with adequate conditions of access to licenses that would take into account the circumstances. Similarly, community media must benefit from fair and simple procedures for obtaining licenses, must not have to comply with technological or other types of requirements that involve disproportionate barriers for access to licenses, and in their operation must not be the target of differentiated treatments that are not adequately justified.[[154]](#footnote-154)
6. Principle 12 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression establishes that “monopolies or oligopolies in the ownership and control of the communication media must be subject to anti-trust laws, as they conspire against democracy by limiting the plurality and diversity which ensure the full exercise of people’s right to information. In no case should such laws apply exclusively to the media. The concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies should take into account democratic criteria that provide equal opportunity of access for all individuals.”
7. **Government Advertising**
8. According to an investigation conducted jointly by the Argentine Journalism Forum and the *Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia* (ACIJ) based on a complaint filed by *Ciudadanos Libres por la Calidad Institucional* with the Anti-Corruption Office, President Mauricio Macri’s government reportedly invested at least ARS$ 389 million government advertising in 2016, in violation of the Public Ethics Act. That amount would be equivalent to roughly 16% of the total amount spent by the government on advertising during 2016 (ARS$ 2.4 billion). The information emerged from an analysis of the databases on government advertising produced by the Secretariat of Public Communications [*Secretaría de Comunicación Pública*] and published by the Ministry of Modernization [*Ministerio de Modernización*]. The researchers examined in particular the ten most expensive government advertising campaigns during 2016, and found that at least three of those campaigns—*Juntos, Empezar*, and *Jubilados*—“centered around a series of videos that featured Macri speaking to the camera at the end or as part of the advertising spots.” According to the coordinator of the ACIJ’s Department for the Strengthening of Democratic Institutions, Fernando Bracaccini, “The appearance of the president’s image is a violation of Article 42 of the Public Ethics Act since it entails the personal promotion of a public servant, something that is expressly prohibited.” Officials from the Secretariat of Public Communications consulted by the organizations about the possible violation of the act maintained that, in their opinion, “The president’s appearance in the advertising campaigns does not violate the Public Ethics Act” because they are “institutional messages like any other.[[155]](#footnote-155)
9. Among other critical statements about local media, Raúl García Goyena, the Secretary of Communication and Open Government of Jujuy, reportedly said that he made the owners of a local media outlet “get down on their knees” when he refused to pay them ARS$ 1 millon that they were seeking for government advertising. The remarks were made during an informal conversation with a producer from *Radio Universidad* that was secretly recorded and shared on social media.[[156]](#footnote-156) When questioned by the Argentine Journalism Forum (FOPEA), the official expressed his regret for what he said, and clarified that they were not public statements.[[157]](#footnote-157)
10. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that article 13.3 of the American Convention establishes that “[t]he right of expression may not be restricted by indirect methods or means, such as the abuse of government or private controls over newsprint, radio broadcasting frequencies, or equipment used in the dissemination of information, or by any other means tending to impede the communication and circulation of ideas and opinions.” Similarly, Principle 13 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights states that “The exercise of power and the use of public funds by the state, the granting of customs duty privileges, the arbitrary and discriminatory placement of official advertising and government loans; the concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies, among others, with the intent to put pressure on and punish or reward and provide privileges to social communicators and communications media because of the opinions they express threaten freedom of expression, and must be explicitly prohibited by law.”
11. **Other relevant situations**
12. On September 18, the journalist Roberto Navarro was dismissed by the authorities of channel *C5N*, where he held the Sunday program "*Economía Política*". According to the information available, the dismissal would have occurred after the communicator argued via Twitter with one of the managers of the channel, because they would not have allowed him to air a report on a senator candidate of the ruling party or address some allegations that would implicate the Vice President, Gabriela Michetti. The journalist would have indicated that the decision was the result of "government pressure". For his part, in a public act held on the day following the dismissal of Navarro, President Mauricio Macri said "we have to respect those who think differently".[[158]](#footnote-158)
13. On November 17, journalist Víctor Hugo Morales informed via Twitter that he was fired from the *C5N* channel, where he hosted the evening program "*El Diario*". According to the information available, Morales' dismissal would have occurred after the channel was acquired by the OP Investments group. As reported by the journlaist, commonly linked to the party led by the former president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, when they announced his dismissal they would have indicated that his presence "was incompatible with the channel’s new line."[[159]](#footnote-159)
14. **BAHAMAS**
15. **Progress**
16. In 2017 The Bahamas enacted the Freedom of Information Act. This law provides a general right of access to records held by public authorities and is aimed at giving effect to certain fundamental principles underlying the system of constitutional democracy, namely, governmental accountability, transparency, and public participation in national decision making. A general right of access is given to Bahamian citizens, permanent residents, body incorporated or registered under the laws of The Bahamas, partnership or other unincorporated association formed under the laws of The Bahamas and persons whom maintain the Bahamas, an office, branch or agency through which he carries on any business activity. Other persons may be granted a right of access through the respective Minister at the direction of the Cabinet.
17. Certain records are protected from disclosure in specified circumstances. These records include those concerned with security, defence, international relations, law enforcement, legal privilege, national economy, commercial affairs, and documents concerning the operations of public authorities. Also included records revealing Government deliberative processes, records where their disclosure would prejudice effective conduct of public affairs, records relating to commercial interests, heritage sites, sensitive personal data, and records where their disclosure are likely to endanger health and safety. Decisions by public authorities to refuse, limit or defer grant of access to a record are subjected to internal review. Measures to promote openness in respect of the implementation of this law include the appointment of an information manager, protection for whistle-blowers, publication of a code on minimum standards and best practices, maintenance of records, duty to report obligations, and training of officials regarding the right to information and the effective implementation of the law.[[160]](#footnote-160)
18. **Subsequent Liability**
19. On 11 April 2017, attorney Maria Daxon filed a constitutional motion in the Supreme Court of the Bahamas challenging the criminal libel laws. Among the relief sought is a declaration that the laying of the charge against her, her prosecution, trial and liability to conviction and sentence to a fine and or imprisonment for up to 2 years for the offence of Intentional Libel contrary to section 315(2) of the Penal Code Cap 84 (“the Criminal Libel Proceedings”) are void, illegal and of no effect, in that they are a breach of her constitutional right to freedom of expression guaranteed by article 23 (1) of the Constitution. The motion further challenged the constitutionality of section 315(2) of the Penal Code Cap 84 (“the Criminal Libel Proceedings”).[[161]](#footnote-161) Daxon’s constitutional motion stems from her arrest and charge in December 2016 for intentional libel concerning alleged statements. It is alleged that between August 26 and August 30, 2016, Daxon wrote defamatory statements about Commissioner Greenslade and Senior ACP Bethell, which were likely “to injure and expose” the officers to “general hatred, contempt or ridicule.”[[162]](#footnote-162)The constitutionality of the country’s criminal libel laws have also been challenged by Omar Archer via constitutional motion which was filed on April 12, 2017.[[163]](#footnote-163)
20. In accordance with Principle 10 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression, “privacy laws should not inhibit or restrict investigation and dissemination of information of public interest. The protection of a person’s reputation should only be guaranteed through civil sanctions in those cases in which the person offended is a public official, a public person or a private person who has voluntarily become involved in matters of public interest. In addition, in these cases, it must be proven that in disseminating the news, the social communicator had the specific intent to inflict harm, was fully aware that false news was disseminated, or acted with gross negligence in efforts to determine the truth or falsity of such news.”
21. Principle 11 of the IACHR´s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states: “[p]ublic officials are subject to greater scrutiny by society. Laws that penalize offensive expressions directed at public officials, generally known as "*desacato* laws," restrict freedom of expression and the right to information.” Furthermore, the IACHR has held repeatedly that the application of criminal law to sanction expressions about public officials is disproportionate when dealing with protected speech, such as information or expression regarding matters of public interest, and infringes the right to freedom of expression.[[164]](#footnote-164)
22. **BARBADOS**
23. **Stigmatizing statements**
24. On July 22, the Acting Deputy Commissioner of Police (ADCP), Oral Williams, warned agents of the Royal Barbados Police Force (RBPF) to be wary of the media, in a speech he gave during the closing ceremony of the course on "Maritime Operations and Planning".
25. In this regard, Williams would have indicated to the agents that "they should be careful and aware of what they say and what they do when they carry out operations", since the evidence of "a well done video can be admitted in a court". In addition, he would have added that this kind of recordings usually last a few seconds, and commonly do not show what happened before or after. According to the information available, Williams' statements are framed in a context of strong criticism directed against police officers due to the repeated reports of mistreatment that the civilian population claims to suffer and, in particular, since the publication of a video where allegedly a policeman is seen beating a man lying on the ground.[[165]](#footnote-165)
26. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that public servants have the duty to ensure that their statements do not infringe upon the rights of those who contribute to public deliberation through the expression and dissemination of their thoughts, such as journalists, media outlets, and human rights defense organizations. They must be mindful of the context in which they express themselves in order to ensure that their statements do not constitute, in the words of the Court, “forms of direct or indirect interference or harmful pressure on the rights of those who seek to contribute with public deliberation through the expression and diffusion of their thoughts.”[[166]](#footnote-166)
27. **BELIZE**
28. **Attacks, threats, and intimidation against journalists and the media**
29. On September 6, in the city of Orange Walk, the editor and journalist of *KREM Radio and Television*, Marisol Amaya, would have been assaulted by agents of the Special Patrol Unit while she was about to interview a political leader of the People's United Party. According to the information available, Amaya would have been caught from behind and separated from the group of journalists who were there.[[167]](#footnote-167) According to the information released, on October 5, the Commissioner of Police (COP), Allen Whylie, indicated that he would begin investigating these events.[[168]](#footnote-168)
30. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
31. The Office of the Special Rapporteur notes that “violence committed against female journalist as a result of their work has a particular characteristics streaming from the social constructs of gender and discrimination.”[[169]](#footnote-169) The United Nations Special Rapporteur in the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Opinion and Expression stated in his report on the protection of journalist and media that a “gender-sensitive approach is therefore needed when considering measures to address the issue of violence against journalists.”[[170]](#footnote-170) The Office of the Special Rapporteur reiterates that States have a reinforced obligation to act with due diligence to prevent violence against female journalists.[[171]](#footnote-171)
32. **Social Protest**
33. On September 6, in the city of Orange Walk, a group of people supporting the People's United Party would have blocked access to the Toll Bridge and in response to this, police agents would have thrown tear gas bombs to disperse the protest. Likewise, a contingent of buses and cars that were heading towards the location of the demonstration would have been intercepted by police forces in their attempt to arrive at the location.[[172]](#footnote-172) On October 5, the Commissioner of Police (COP), Allen Whylie, said he would begin to investigate these events .[[173]](#footnote-173)
34. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[174]](#footnote-174) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[175]](#footnote-175)
35. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[176]](#footnote-176)
36. **BOLIVIA**
37. The remarks of high authorities of the national and local government towards the press continued, although they decreased in intensity with respect to those registered in 2016. Journalists from various media were attacked by demonstrators and police authorities during various forms of protest. The Office of the Special Rapporteur welcomes the exclusion of journalists and journalism in general from a criminal reform being studied by Parliament aimed at accountability of professional malpractice.
38. **Progress**
39. On May 30, the Telecommunications and Transportation Regulatory and Inspection Authority [*Autoridad de Regulación y Fiscalización de Telecomunicaciones y Transportes* ] (ATT) announced that the government would start an analog blackout beginning in 2019, a process to deactivate analogue TV broadcasts, starting with the metropolitan areas of the departments of La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz, which will end in 2024. ATT's telecommunications director Juan Carlos Machicao also announced that in March 2018 the first private digital channels will be on the air. According to Decree 3152, which regulates the implementation of digital television in the country, the allocation of digital channels will be up to 33 percent to the State, up to 33 percent to the commercial sector, up to 17 percent to the community sector, and up to 17 percent to Native Peasant Indigenous Peoples and Intercultural and Afro-Bolivian communities.[[177]](#footnote-177)
40. **Attacks, threats, and intimidation of journalists and the media**
41. The Office of the Special Rapporteur notes with concern the repeated attacks, intimidation, and harassment of journalists by the current mayor of Santa Cruz, Percy Fernández. This Office has been reporting on actions of this nature by Fernández since its annual report of 2012.[[178]](#footnote-178) On March 23, in a string of insults against the journalist Adolfo Loayaza of *Red ATB,* in the framework of the commemorative events for World Oceans Day, after the journalist had asked about an issue of municipal relevance, the aforementioned official said "I get angry because I feel like it. And why don’t you get angry? Because you’re a frog! Jackass! (...) I do not want to talk to you, you are idiots!” The mayor offered his public apologies later.[[179]](#footnote-179)
42. On April 5, a journalist from *El Periódico* was verbally abused when she was classified as "bad professional" and "sold-out journalist" when she asked a question to leaders of the Civic Committee [*Comité Cívico*] of the Department of Cochabamba in the framework of the march to support the Direct Transfer of Resource Act [*Ley de Transferencias Directas de Recursos]* for the eight municipalities of the Department of Cochabamba.[[180]](#footnote-180) On March 16, the president of the same committee, Juan Flores, aggressively disqualified a journalist from *Bolivia TV* during a press conference. "When the *MASistas* of the municipality march, nobody notices them (sic). (...) You are also officials who owe yourselves to the Cochabamba people, to the Bolivian people, and not to the *MAS*!" On these facts, the Federation of Unions of the Press of Cochabamba [*Federación Sindical de Trabajadores de la Prensa de Cochabamba*] expressed their rejection, also bringing up a gender perspective, and demanding that Flores makes a public apology, apology that was made days later.[[181]](#footnote-181)
43. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has received information on various incidents of harassment and restriction of press coverage in the region of the Indigenous Territory of Isiboro Sécure Natural Park [*Territorio Indígena del Parque Natural Isiboro Sécure]* (TIPNIS), within the framework of a national controversy over the construction of a highway in that protected area, under the supervision of the Bolivian Highway Administration [*Administradora Boliviana de Carreteras*] (ABC). On August 23, the Association of Journalists of La Paz [*Asociación de Periodistas de La Paz*] (APLP) denounced said actions in TIPNIS. Previously, the Bolivian National Press Association [*Asociación Nacional de Prensa de Bolivia*] (ANP), publicly demanded the government transparency on information regarding the construction work carried out in the national park. Members of the *Página Siete* team, Beatriz Layme and Álvaro Valero, would have been threatened and persecuted between August 13 and 16 when covering the area, allegedly by settlers who support the construction of the highway. The journalist from *Opinión* Melissa Revollo would have reported that on August 9, self-identified indigenous people banned the use of journalistic equipment during a meeting of the Southern Indigenous Council [*Consejo Indígena del Sur*] (Conisur). On August 3, Roger Medina of *Los Tiempos*, along with a photographer and a driver, would have been intimidated and expelled from the area, also by settlers, while performing their journalistic work.[[182]](#footnote-182)
44. On May 5, a press team of a mobile unit of *Unitel* Tarija would have been robbed with a firearm on the outskirts of Tarija, Department of Tarija, by criminals who would have stolen their camcorder and broken one of the windows of the vehicle. The Union Federation of Press Workers of Tarija [*Federación Sindical de Trabajadores de la Prensa de Tarija*], the Union Confederation of Workers of the Press of Bolivia [*Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de la Prensa de Bolivia*] (CSTPB), the National Association of Journalists of Bolivia [*Asociación Nacional de Periodistas de Bolivia*] (ANPB) and the Association of Journalists of La Paz [*Asociación de Periodistas de La Paz*] (ALPL) have publicly repudiated the incident.[[183]](#footnote-183)
45. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
46. **Social protest**
47. On March 8, President Evo Morales enacted General Law 906 on Coca [*Ley 906 General de la Coca*], a law that repeals the ban on the production and conservation of coca plants and seeds in the country established by Law 1008 on Coca and Controlled Substances Regime [*Ley 1008 del Régimen de la Coca y Sustancias Controladas*]. Unlike its predecessor, the new law would recognize the coca plant as a Bolivian cultural heritage and establishes that the Ministry of Rural Development and Lands [*Ministerio de Desarrollo Rural y Tierras*] will regulate, authorize, accredit, and supervise the circulation, transportation, and commercialization of the plant’s leaf.[[184]](#footnote-184)
48. The coca sector has carried out several protests in order to regularize more extensive cultivable areas or the inclusion of areas that were not initially contemplated by the Law, both during the negotiation process and after its entry into force. As part of the protests held in February by *cocaleros* (coca farmers) from Los Yungas in La Paz, on July 21, journalist Ángel Blanco of *Radio Alternativa* was detained while covering a clash between demonstrators and the police in the capital, and was transferred to the Special Task Force on Fight against Crime [*Fuerza Especial de Lucha contra el Crimen*] together with 148 *cocaleros.*[[185]](#footnote-185) On July 18, during the protests held in Colomi, Cochabamba state, Samuel Vallejos, a mechanic who was in the vicinity, was killed. While the coca sector blames the police of shooting him with a firearm during the dissolution of the protest, the Cochabamba Ombudsman, Nelson Cox, has stated that the autopsy dismisses this possibility, and instead indicates that "the death was due to hypovolemic shock (bleeding out) from an injury that was not a result of a bullet from a firearm." Also, the Minister of Government, Carlos Romero, declared that the use of lethal weapons in the operation was not authorized.[[186]](#footnote-186)
49. On February 15, as part of the protests carried out by the population of Achacachi, Department of Laz Paz, during February, 4 journalists were reportedly wounded by demonstrators. Edwin Huanca, from Achacachi's *Radio de los Pueblos Originarios* (RPO)**,** the journalist Ana Apaza and photo-journalist Álvaro Valero, from *Página Siete*, were attacked. The photographer of the *APG* agency, Javier Mamani, also reported attacks against him and indicated that his work equipment was stolen by people participating in the protests[[187]](#footnote-187).
50. In August, during protests, street traders allegedly harassed the staff of a *Página Siete* agency for three days, allegedly in retaliation for publishing information on the collection of contributions of union members between 2013 and 2015. According to available information, on August 24, during a protest of the unionists in La Paz, journalist Kattya Valdés of *La Razón* would have been harassed and intimidated by female demonstrators. Also, on August 22, the journalist of red de televisión *ATB*Victor Mendizábal, the cameraman Cristian Merino, and a mobile unit technician, Carlos Viricochea, were allegedly attacked while covering a demonstration by unionists in the capital.[[188]](#footnote-188)
51. On August 29, journalist Agustín Mamani of *Radio del Valle* would have been detained by police officers while walking down the street after covering a protest in La Paz, in the zone of Obrajes. Available information indicates police officers would have asked to see his journalist's credentials and because he did not have it on him, Mamani would have been detained and his camera seized. On August 31, the journalist was charged, among others, with crimes of destruction and deterioration of state property, along with 40 demonstrators, and sentenced to house arrest.[[189]](#footnote-189)
52. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[190]](#footnote-190) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[191]](#footnote-191)
53. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[192]](#footnote-192)
54. Stigmatizing statements
55. The polarization of the media scenario through stigmatizing statements by State authorities has been a constant concern of this Office.
56. On December 14, 2016 the Bolivian government presented the documentary titled "*Cartel de la Mentira*" (Cartel of lies), an initiative of the Ministry of the Presidency. The documentary is based on the supposed destabilizing power that the critical press has in the country, within the context of the referendum held in Bolivia in February of that year. The documentary focuses on how the media treated the case of the alleged son of President Evo Morales, and in particular refers to the journalist Raul Peñaranda, editor of *Agencia de Noticias Fides*, calling him one of the main responsible for supposedly orchestrating a defamation campaign against the President. The documentary has been rejected by various civil society organizations, who consider that he himself has an objective to silence critical communicative activity in the country.[[193]](#footnote-193)
57. In the context of the territorial dispute between Bolivia and Chile, on July 1 President Evo Morales declared on Twitter that "The antipatriotic group of pro-Chilean deserves the highest censorship by the Bolivian people. (...) This pro Chilean group is the same that more than 130 years ago complemented the stabbing in the back our country suffered. (...) This group, which supports the Chilean geophagus oligarchic, is supported in the dark pages of the native servile media." The President would have made such statements after that some opposition politicians announced that they would request an internal investigation of the nine Bolivian individuals arrested in March by Chilean officials in the border area between the two countries allegedly carrying out illicit activities. Regarding this event, the National Customs [*Aduana Nacional*] has issued a press release presenting information on the detainees, and affirming that there was "a reporter’s version spread in a media of Santa Cruz de la Sierra which maliciously pretends to alter the reality."[[194]](#footnote-194)
58. President Evo Morales also made denigrating statements to the media on May 4, stating in his official Twitter account that the "Media who does not receive official advertisement from the State, are the ones who lie, insult, defame and discredit authorities. Are they being paid off?" The statement of the Head of State was issued in the framework of World Press Freedom Day, as a criticism to an alleged partial coverage of the facts by the country's media following the State policies on placement of official advertising. The same day, in a public ceremony in Cochabamba, the president would have affirmed that "of course they all demand the allocation of official advertising, they are thousands and thousands of media, its’s impossible grant placements to every media outlet, and because we don’t place official advertising with them, the media says that we are the ones who limit information, and since they don’t receive some of the State media, they begin to lie, to defame, to accuse".[[195]](#footnote-195)
59. In August, during an interview in the show ‘*Consentimiento Latinoamericano’* of the *ERBOL* channel, the former secretary general of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of America [*Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de América*] (ALBA), David Choquehuanca, would have declared that "we must be careful with the media, the opposition is the media" and that "these external forces are the ones who want to blind our people". The statements would have been contextualized by Choquehuanca when referring to the results of the referendum that denied Evo Morales the possibility to run again as president, and to the lack of power of the ruling groups to mobilize people nowadays.[[196]](#footnote-196)
60. On November 12, President Evo Morales publicly accused the *Pagina Siete* newspaper of being a "liar" when referring to the number of followers he has on Twitter, in relation to the leader of the opposition, Carlos Mesa. Likewise, referring to a cover published by the same newspaper, he would have accused them of "lying" about the Coca Law and of "misrepresenting" the concept of "communal democracy." In addition, he would have indicated that "This newspaper says that the Plurinational Constitutional Court fails against Yungas and legalizes coca of Chapare The worst lie. The newspaper owner should defend himself, he should come and debate with me, let's see how he lies".[[197]](#footnote-197)
61. As a result, the National Association of the Bolivian Press [*Asociación Nacional de la Prensa Boliviana*] (ANP), which groups the country's main newspapers, publicly expressed its solidarity with the newspaper *Página Siete* after the alleged statements of President Evo Morales, and demanded respect for the constitutional rights of citizens and journalists of the printed media. [[198]](#footnote-198)
62. On November 22, the general manager of the state-owned company *Empresa Azucarera de San Buenaventura* (EASBA), Ramiro Lizondo Vargas, published a column under the header "To the scoundrel press…", where he indicated that the newspaper *El Diario* is in "the ranks of the anti-homeland [and] has been led to a coma and near disappearance." He also allegedly launched threats against the press that questioned the investment and results of the industry financed with public resources, while accusing journalists of "lying and defamation". In this regard, the National Press Association of Bolivia [*Asociación Nacional de la Prensa de Bolivia*] (ANP), in addition to their solidarity with the media, would have warned that this kind of statements are aimed at silencing the voice of a newspaper and journalists that "under existing constitutional rights are free to issue studies and opinions in relation to a topic of public interest.”[[199]](#footnote-199)
63. A context of marked confrontation in which journalists are constantly insulted and stigmatized creates a climate that prevents the reasonable and plural deliberation of public issues. Tension between the press and the government is a normal phenomenon that arises from the natural function of the press and occurs in many States. However, sharp polarization shuts down opportunities for calm debate and helps neither the authorities nor the press to better fulfill their respective roles in a vigorous, deliberate, and open democracy. In such cases, given its national and international responsibilities, it is the State’s job to help create a climate of greater tolerance and respect for the ideas of others, including when those ideas are offensive or disturbing.[[200]](#footnote-200)
64. **Legal reforms**
65. On October 10, the presidents of the House of Representatives, Gabriela Montaño, and Senators, José Alberto Gonzales, reached an agreement with the National Association of Journalists of Bolivia [*Asociación nacional de Periodistas de Bolivia*] (ANPB), the Association of Journalists of La Paz [*Asociación de Periodistas de La Paz*] (APLP), the Union Confederation of Bolivian Press Workers [*Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de la Prensa de Bolivia*] (CSTPB), and the Independent Press Association of Santa Cruz [*Asociación de la Prensa Independiente de Santa Cruz*] to exclude media professionals from an amendment proposal to the criminal code discussed in the legislative chambers, which would criminalize professional malpractice. [[201]](#footnote-201)
66. According to available information, in paragraph 2 of the text it was included that "It shall not constitute a criminal offense when the exercise of the profession does not imply a position of guarantor regarding health or physical integrity". The issue became relevant after the leaders of the lower and upper chambers met with the medical professionals sector and decided to include a broader spectrum of professions under the definition of the crime of professional negligence, which would include journalistic activity. With the aforementioned amendment, the wording of article 200 of the Criminal Code Code Bill was approved by the House of Representatives on October 17.[[202]](#footnote-202)
67. **Further Responsibilities**
68. According to available information, on October 3, the Amautas Departmental Confederation [*Confederación Departamental de Amautas*] would have filed a complaint with the Vice minister of Decolonization Felix Cardenas for discrimination and incitement to racism against *Red Uno*, the Archdiocesan Lay Council [*Consejo Arquidiocesano de Laicos*], and the Civic Committee [*Comité Cívico]* of the city of Santa Cruz. The last two organizations would have performed Christian prayers and songs, and symbolically purified the location in the main square of the city of Santa Cruz where a week before an Andean ritual had been performed. [[203]](#footnote-203)
69. The incident would have been presented as an act of confrontation and redress towards the indigenous people of the Amautas, and the media would have been included in the complaint for having reproduced and covered the event. In the case of a ruling against them, *Red Uno* would be the fourth case where the media is prosecuted under article 281 of the Law against Racism and all forms of Discrimination [*Ley contra el Racismo y toda forma de Discriminación*], which criminalizes the dissemination and incitement to racism or discrimination in the country, since the law came into force in October 2010.[[204]](#footnote-204)
70. In accordance with Principle 1 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression, “Freedom of expression in all its forms and manifestations is a fundamental and inalienable right of all individuals. Additionally, it is an indispensable requirement for the very existence of a democratic society.”
71. **Access to public Information**
72. In March, civil society organizations reported that the demand of the rector of the *Universidad Mayor de San Simón* (UMSS) that the Documentation and Information Center Bolivia [*Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia*] (Cedib) vacates its office in 48 hours, would be a detrimental act to the Bolivian documentary memory and of inhibition of the public debate in the country. They also stated that "this action [by the university] is a worrying sign of the reduction of civic space in Bolivia and could mean the loss of valuable documentation on human rights in the country." As reported, Cedib has been declared as documentary heritage of Cochabamba.[[205]](#footnote-205)
73. Principle 4 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression which states that “[a]ccess to information held by the state is a fundamental right of every individual. States have the obligation to guarantee the full exercise of this right. This principle allows only exceptional limitations that must be previously established by law in case of a real and imminent danger that threatens national security in democratic societies.” Additionally, with regard to the principle of maximum disclosure the law must guarantee the effective and broadest possible access to public information, and any exceptions must not become the general rule in practice. Also, the exceptions regime should be interpreted restrictively and all doubts should be resolved in favor of transparency and access.
74. **Internet and freedom of expression**
75. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has received concerning information on incidents of cyber-attacks against media infrastructures in Bolivia. In 2017, *Sol de Pando*, *Agencia de Noticias Fides,* *La Razón* and *Página Siete* media have suffered attacks on their respective websites, rendering them unavailable.[[206]](#footnote-206)
76. **Other relevant situations**
77. On March 24, 2017, Erick Condorena and Sandra Mariscal, Bolivian journalists from the *Bolivia TV* channel, were detained upon arrival from Bolivia to the Iquique airport. According to the available information, the customs authority requested a work visa for them to enter the country as journalists. Likewise, on March 28, 2017, nine Bolivian journalists from the various media participating in the inaugural flight of the Chilean-Brazilian airline LaTAM, would have been detained at the Santiago de Chile airport and would only have been authorized to enter the country under the condition that they signed a document by which they committed themselves, among other things, to not affect the internal and external security, sovereignty, and public order of Chile. In the first incident, the journalists would have been warned that in order to pursue their professional activity in Chile they should be previously accredited in a state office in Santiago de Chile. Also, the journalists involved in the two incidents mentioned expressed that they would have been held incommunicado for several hours and would have been intimidated by officials of the Chilean customs authority. Regarding the incidents, civil society organizations, the media, and the Bolivian state expressed their rejection before the Chilean government for the alleged incidents of harassment and restriction of journalistic coverage towards Bolivian journalists.[[207]](#footnote-207)
78. **BRAZIL**
79. During 2017, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression have continued to document cases of attacks against journalists and social media workers due to the exercise of their work, although in this year there has been no record of a murder of journalists. The Office of the Special Rapporteur observes with concern the cases of violence and excessive use of force against journalists and demonstrators in the context of the various protests and social demonstrations that took place throughout the country, as a result of the instability of the Brazilian political scene that led to the destitution of Dilma Rousseff as President of the Republic through a political process of impeachment, and the takeover of Michel Temer as President of the Republic. In particular, the social and labor security reform proposed by the federal government caused strong opposition and protests that were met with excessive use of force. The main perpetrators of these attacks were members of the Military Police.
80. **Progress**
81. On February 1, journalists Tatiana Merlino, Débora Prado, and Pedro Pomar, were acquitted by the 1st Criminal Chamber of the Pinheiros Forum [*1ª Vara Criminal do Fórum de Pinheiros*] in the criminal action filed by the former Secretary of Health of São Paulo, Giovanni Guido Cerri. Guido Cerri would accuse the journalists of the crime of defamation due to the report "Entrepreneur of the sector, Secretary of Health 'gives the letters' in two OSS" [*Empresário do setor, secretário da Saúde “dá as cartas” em duas OSS*], published in the May 2013 edition of the Journal of the Association of Teachers of the University of Sao Paulo [*Associação dos Docentes da Universidade de São Paulo*] (Adusp).[[208]](#footnote-208)
82. On June 21, the 4th Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice [*4ª Turma do Superior Tribunal de Justiça*] (STJ) authorized the website *'Falha de S. Paulo'*, to operate again. The website, which would be a parody to the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, would have been with its access suspended since 2010, due to a judicial determination in the framework of the process filed by the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper. The newspaper would argue that the website would violate its brand by using similar typology, which could cause confusion among its readers. However, the Court understood that the prohibition would mean an act of censorship, and that the authors right authorizes parody and protects the right to irreverence of the right to entertainment.[[209]](#footnote-209)
83. **Assaults, detentions, threats, and harassment against journalists and the media**
84. The attacks on journalists and social media workers in Brazil were allegedly perpetrated mainly by police agents. In this regard, on January 31, photojournalist, Léo Pinhero, was arrested in São Paulo on charges of "obstruction of police work" while attempting to document a search action by the Metropolitan Civil Guard [*Guarda Civil Metropolitana*] (GCM), despite having identified himself as a journalist.[[210]](#footnote-210) In addition, on February 23, two photojournalists would have been shot with a firearm while covering a conflict in the region known as "Cracolândia" in São Paulo. An investigation would have been initiated to identify and punish the perpetrator of the shooting.[[211]](#footnote-211) Similarly, an investigation would have been initiated into the conduct of a military policeman in the city of Urânia, state of São Paulo, who threw to the ground a reporter's cell phone while filming the arrival of a defendant for a hearing on August 1, after preventing the cameraman from taking shots of the arrival of the Police vehicle.[[212]](#footnote-212)
85. For its part, on July 10, reporter Vinícius Arruda, of the *Metro* newspaper, would have been detained in Vitória, in the state of Espirito Santo, after allegedly reporting a police approach to suspects in a neighborhood of the city. According to the information, the journalist would have been carrying his professional identification at the time of the events. As reported, at first, the journalist would have been taken to the police station as a witness to the events. However, once there, where he would have stayed for at least seven hours, he would have been told that he was being held for "disobedience". The government of the state would have published a note of repudiation "of any intimidating action against journalists in the exercise of their journalistic work."[[213]](#footnote-213) Likewise, on July 24, Mauro Silva, a reporter for the newspaper *O Estado de Mato Grosso do Sul*, was reportedly arrested by the police when he tried to record a discussion between the police and a civilian. According to the information received, the reporter would have been released after an hour and a half.[[214]](#footnote-214)
86. For their part, on September 12 military police would have attacked journalists Douglas Freitas and Isadora Neumann while they were covering the protest for the closure of the Queermuseu exhibition in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul state.[[215]](#footnote-215) In the same month a Military Police officer would have pointed a gun to the head of journalist Wellington Macedo when he was in front of the Santa Casa de Sobral Hospital, Ceará state, while he was waiting for the arrival of the victims of a traffic accident.[[216]](#footnote-216) In the same state and month, the presenter Patrícia Calderon, would have been notified to declare in the Comptroller General of Discipline [*Controladoria Geral de Disciplina*] (CGD) after a complaint [*representação*] filled by a Chief of Police. According to the information, Calderon would have been notified to declare for having presented a report about the death of an inspector who died after a testimony in the CGD that would have gone wrong.[[217]](#footnote-217)
87. The reporter and columnist of *O Globo,* Míriam Leitão, would have been harassed before and during a flight between Brasilia and Rio de Janeiro, on June 3. According to the information received, in the flight that she boarded, there would have also been 20 delegates from a Brazilian political party, who would have screamed at her threats, harassments, and offenses because they considered the journalist to be an "enemy of the party".[[218]](#footnote-218) In addition, on June 16, film reporter Walfran Leão, of *TV Em Tempo* and Laila Pereira of *Rede Amazônica*, were allegedly beaten by security men during a political party convention in Manaus, Amazonas state.[[219]](#footnote-219)
88. On the other hand, the National Association of Journalist [*Associação Nacional de Jornais*] (ANJ) and the Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) reported that in 2017 there would have been a decrease in attacks against press freedom. According to these organizations, this decrease would be partly a reflection of the decrease of demonstrations that had been happening in recent years in the country, in which journalists ended up being victims of both demonstrators and the police.[[220]](#footnote-220)
89. Civil society organizations have stated in various reports that most of the attacks and crimes against journalists that have occurred in recent years in the country would go unpunished. As reported, in most of the 12 cases of murders of journalists that would have occurred between 2012 and 2014, and that still would not have been resolved, the suspected masterminds would be Police or political agents.[[221]](#footnote-221) Likewise, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Brazil would be one of the countries in which the impunity score increased in the highest proportion during the decade that the organization has published the Global Impunity Index, rising by 177 per cent. In addition, the CPJ indicated that since 2015 no one accused of murdering a journalist in the country had been convicted.[[222]](#footnote-222)
90. Amidst this situation, In August the Civil Police of Paraíba would have detained five people, including three former police officers, suspected of participating in the murder of radio journalist Ivanildo Viana., Viana was murder on February 27, 2015, in João Pessoa, Paraíba state. The motive of the crime, nor its intellectual author, still would not have been identified.[[223]](#footnote-223) Also, in September, the mayor of Santa Luzia, in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais state, was arrested on suspicion of being involved in the murder of Mauricio Campos Rosa, a journalist for the newspaper *O Grito*, on August 17, 2016. In October, the Supreme Court of Justice [*Superior Tribunal de Justiça*] (STJ) ordered house arrest.[[224]](#footnote-224)
91. Principle 9 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression of the IACHR, approved in the year 2000, establishes that "[t]he murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation."
92. **Social protest**
93. The Office of the Special Rapporteur observes with concern the cases of violence and excessive use of force against journalists and protesters in the context of the protests and social demonstrations that took place throughout the country during the year. In this regard, on April 11, a 19-year-old boy died after being shot by a rubber bullet on March 17 while participating in a demonstration against violence in the city of Itambé, in the state of Pernambuco.[[225]](#footnote-225)
94. According to information of public knowledge, on April 17 photographers André Lucas and Gustavo Ferreira de Oliveira were arrested after a demonstration of the *Movimento Passe Livre* in São Paulo. After the photographers recorded a blockade with burned tires, they would have been arrested under the accusation of being the authors of the fire and taken to the police station.[[226]](#footnote-226) In addition, on April 28, in the city of Goiânia, state of Goiás, a military police officer would have physically attacked the student Mateus Ferreira da Silva while he was participating in a demonstration against the reforms proposed by the federal government, suffering a brain injury and multiple fractures.[[227]](#footnote-227)
95. The Office of the Special Rapporteur was informed that on March 13 the Office of the Attorney General of the State of São Paulo [*Ministério Público do Estado de São Paulo*] (PM-SP) issued a list with 11 recommendations to the Military Police so that it will guarantee the free and safe exercise of media workers in the context of protests and social demonstrations in the country. According to the information, the Military Police would have 90 days to inform the Office of the Attorney General of the adoption of the measures. Said recommendations would be the result of a civil investigation [*inquérito civil*] of the MP-SP, through which it would have identified human rights violations against press professionals and against the right to freedom of expression by agents of the State, especially the Military Police.[[228]](#footnote-228)
96. In the manifestations of April 28 in different regions of the country, and on May 24 at the Esplanade of Ministries in Brasilia, several cases were reported of arrests of demonstrators, use of tear gas bombs, beatings by batons, and use rubber bullets to disperse the protesters, as well as cases of journalists and protesters assaulted. According to available information, at least one person would have been wounded with a firearm during the protests in Brasilia.[[229]](#footnote-229) The Ministry of Public Security of the Federal District Government [*Secretaria da Segurança Pública e da Paz Social do Distrito Federal*] (SSP-DF) reported that an investigation had started against the two policemen who allegedly shot at the demonstrators in the May 24 protest.[[230]](#footnote-230)
97. In this context it is worrisome that in response to the protests of May 24, the Government issued a Decree authorizing the use of the Armed Forces to guarantee law and order in the Federal District between 24 and 31 of May. This decree was revoked on May 25, 2017, after criticism from human rights organizations and experts at the national and international level. The IACHR and the South America Regional Office of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued a joint press release condemning the excessive use of force by the police in the demonstrations.[[231]](#footnote-231)
98. According to information of public knowledge, on November 17 during the protests requesting the preventive detention of deputies in the city of Rio de Janeiro, police officers would have used tear gas bombs and rubber bullets against the demonstrators. A young man would have been injured in the head by a rubber bullet and a public servant would have been injured by a moral effect bomb.[[232]](#footnote-232)
99. Regarding the protection of assembly and manifestation rights, in February, the São Paulo Court of Justice [*Tribunal de Justiça de São Paulo*] (TJ-SP) ratified the November 2016 decision authorizing the use of rubber bullets and tear gas bomb by the Military Police in public demonstrations in São Paulo.[[233]](#footnote-233) Earlier, in October 2016, a judge of the 10th Public Treasury Chamber of São Paulo [*10ª Vara de Fazenda Pública de São Paulo*], sentenced the State of São Paulo to pay compensation for Police violence during the protests of 2013, and banned, among other things, the use of rubber bullets and tear gas in demonstrations. According to the judgement, "the element that caused the violence in the protests was the lack of preparation of the Military Police." [[234]](#footnote-234)
100. This Office observes with concern the use of judicial actions, such as the *Interdito Proibitório*[[235]](#footnote-235), to limit protests and social demonstrations in the country. In this regard, on May 5, a decision of the 5th Court of the Public Treasury of Curitiba [*5ª Vara da Fazenda Pública de Curitiba*] would have granted an injunction in an *Interdito Proibitório* action filed by the Mayor's Office of the city of Curitiba with the object of preventing, among others, activists of the Landless Rural Workers' Movement [*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*] (MST), as well as other movements, from approaching the Federal Justice building during the testimony of former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. According to the Mayor's office, in the event of occupation of the premises near the Federal Justice building, the safety of the population of this region would be compromised "once there is threat of imminent violence."[[236]](#footnote-236)
101. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[237]](#footnote-237) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[238]](#footnote-238)
102. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[239]](#footnote-239)
103. **Stigmatizing statements**
104. According to the information available on May 6, former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva declared at a Congress of the Workers Party [*Partidos dos Trabalhadores*] (PT) that "The media covers said that the PT was over and that Lula will be arrested. I've been listening to it for two years. If they do not arrest me soon, maybe I'll arrest them for the lies they tell".[[240]](#footnote-240)
105. On May 16, federal representative Jair Bolsonaro broadcasted a video on Youtube where he verbally aggravates the *Folha de São Paulo* media and calls it "fake news" while speaking on the phone to one of its journalists. On October 6, the councilor of Rio de Janeiro, Carlos Bolsonaro, posted on his official Twitter account an image qualifying *Revista Veja* as "fake news"; On November 13 he referred to some media as "Fake news and scoundrels" on Twitter; on September 22 he tweeted "The #fakenews are certain that the Brazilian people are fools [*otário*]"; On October 3, he posted on Twitter that "The fake news saga against Jair Messias Bolsonaro continues".[[241]](#footnote-241)
106. On September 4, federal representative Jair Bolsonaro responded to a comment by journalist Glenn Greenwald on Twitter making pejorative allusions towards his homosexual orientation.[[242]](#footnote-242)
107. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that public servants have the duty to ensure that their statements do not infringe upon the rights of those who contribute to public deliberation through the expression and dissemination of their thoughts, such as journalists, media outlets, and human rights defense organizations. They must be mindful of the context in which they express themselves in order to ensure that their statements do not constitute, in the words of the Court, “forms of direct or indirect interference or harmful pressure on the rights of those who seek to contribute with public deliberation through the expression and diffusion of their thoughts.”[[243]](#footnote-243)
108. **Subsequent liability**
109. The IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur have maintained that the rules on *desacato* are incompatible with the inter-American human rights system, as they lend themselves to " to abuse as a means to silence unpopular ideas and opinions, thereby repressing the debate that is critical to the effective functioning of democratic institutions." [[244]](#footnote-244) In this regard, the Office of the Special Rapporteur received with concern the information that in May the 3rd Section of the STJ decided that contempt [*desacato]* remains a crime in Brazil after meeting with its two Criminal Law Chambers to resolve the issue definitively. Previously, in December 2016, the Fifth Chamber of the STJ had decided that the offense of contempt [*desacato]* contravened Article 13 of the American Convention.[[245]](#footnote-245)
110. Principle 11 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression of the IACHR states that "public officials are subject to greater scrutiny by society. Laws that penalize offensive expressions directed at public officials, generally known as “desacato laws,” restrict freedom of expression and the right to information.”
111. In August, the judge of the Third Civil Chamber of the Teresina Countyn [*Tercera Sala Civil de la Comarca de Teresina*] would have granted a precautionary measure that would prohibit the *180graus* news site and the journalists Apoliana Oliveira and Aquiles Nairó, from publishing news about the construction company Caxé - constructora that would be investigated along with another 12 companies in the of the Court of Accounts of the state of Piauí. According to this precautionary decision, the site would also be required to take down all the news about Caxé from its website. If it did not comply with the judicial decision, the court would have determined a daily fine of R$1,000, approximately US$312. However, on September 19 the Supreme Court of Brazil [*Supremo Tribunal Federal]* (STF) suspended the measure. According to Minister Edson Fachin, the restriction to the *180graus* site "clearly embodies an act of censorship (...) to the fundamental precepts that constitute freedom of the press." Likewise, on October 26, the STF would also have granted a precautionary decision to suspend the decision of the courts of the state of São Paulo that would have determined the withdrawal of journalistic material from the *Exame Magazine* and the abstention of disclosure of information with regards to the judicial recovery of the company Agropecuária Tuiuti S/A. According to Minister Luiz Fux, such a measure would establish prior censorship "in possible violation of the authority of the STF decision that declared the Press Law (Law 5,250 / 1967) not aligned to the Federal Constitution of 1998."[[246]](#footnote-246)
112. The Office of the Special Rapporteur welcomes the announcement made in May by the President of STF, Minister Carmen Lucia, on the establishment of a National Executive Commission in the National Forum of Judiciary and Freedom of the Press [*Fórum Nacional do Poder Judiciário e Liberdade de Imprensa]*, of the National Council of Justice [*Conselho Nacional de Justiça*] (CNJ) to investigate possible restrictions on freedom of the press in the judicial sphere.[[247]](#footnote-247) The Forum will analyze cases of alleged censorship, prosecution of journalists, and other restrictions to journalistic work in which the judiciary can act to guarantee the right to information and freedom of the press in the country. In August, the CNJ requested that Brazilian television, newspaper, and radio associations submit a list of judicial proceedings related to the issue of freedom of the press in Brazil, in order to identify the involvement of the judiciary and conflicts related to the press.[[248]](#footnote-248)
113. **Direct censorship**
114. On March 8, through a precautionary decision, the judge of the Third Criminal Chamber of Maceió [*3ª vara Criminal de Maceió]* would have banned journalist Davi Soares and *Diario do Poder* from publishing articles on a congress representative, who, moreover, a judge ordered his name could not be mentioned in the future publications of the newspaper. In addition, the judge would have ordered the withdrawal of all materials published on said representative. The precautionary measure would have been granted within the framework of a process for the crimes of insult, slander, and defamation that would have been filed by said representative against journalist Davi Soares and *Diario del Poder.*[[249]](#footnote-249)
115. According to Principle 5 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression “Prior censorship, direct or indirect interference in or pressure exerted upon any expression, opinion or information transmitted through any means of oral, written, artistic, visual or electronic communication must be prohibited by law. Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression.
116. **Confidentiality of sources**
117. In March, in the context of an investigation into violation of professional secrecy [*inquérito que investiga violação de sigilo functional*], the judge of the 13th Federal Court of Curitiba [*13ª Vara Federal de Curitiba*] ordered the confiscation of documents, computers, hard disks, cellphones, among other things Eduardo Guimarães, in order to discover his sources of information. Likewise, the judge would have ordered a telephone confidentiality breach [*quebra de sigilo telefónico*] of the journalist and issued a court order so that Guimarães was led to testify by force. Later, the judge would have reversed his decision and ordered the exclusion in the investigation [*inquérito*] of "any evidence related to the identification of the source of information." These decisions were made within the framework of the investigation into civil servants who would be leaking confidential information to the press about the inquiries in the *Lava Jato* investigation. According to the information, in March 2016, in his *Blog da Cidadania*, the journalist reported that former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva would be cited as a witness by *Lava Jato* investigators, which would have occurred only a few weeks after publication.[[250]](#footnote-250)
118. The Inter-American Commission recalls that Principle 8 of the IACHR's Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that "[e]very social communicator has the right to keep his/her source of information, notes, personal and professional archives confidential."
119. **Access to Public Information**
120. This year marks the fifth anniversary of the Access to Information Act [*Lei de Acesso à Informação*] (LAI) in Brazil.[[251]](#footnote-251) Despite significant progress in this area the country still faces challenges in the exercise of this right, especially with respect to information related to the Military Police. Likewise, the requirement that the applicant identify and report an identity document at the time of requesting the information, would be another challenge in the country to the exercise of this right, especially for activists and journalists seeking information of great public interest.
121. On April 10, the 1st Public Treasury Court of the São Paulo Court [*1ª Vara da Fazenda Pública do Tribunal de Justiça de São Paulo*] rejected the request for precautionary measure [*liminar*] filed by the NGO *Artículo 19* to have access to the document prepared by the Military Police of the state of São Paulo on rules of procedure on the collection and storage of images made by police during demonstrations in the streets. The organization filed a Security Mandate [*mandado de segurança[[252]](#footnote-252)*] before the court requesting this information after having four requests for access to the information rejected in 2016. According to the organization there would be allegations of the creation of databases of demonstrators and intimidation against people recorded.[[253]](#footnote-253)
122. In June, the Ministry of Transparency and the Comptroller General [*Ministério da Transparência e Controladoria-Geral da União*] (CGU), publicly reviewed the five years of the LAI, and reported that on June 1 they would have reached more than 500 thousand requests for access to public information in the country. These numbers would have been recorded from May 2012 to June 1, 2017. According to the information published, more than 495 thousand applications were answered. Of these, 75.3 per cent were "fully answered", and 43.2 thousand were denied because they were, among other reasons, classified information, personal data, generic or incomprehensible requests. Additionally, it was reported that the average response time would be around 13 days, which would be less than half of the maximum period established by the Law, which would be 30 days.[[254]](#footnote-254)
123. On September 28, Brazilian civil society organizations published a joint statement with recommendations to the Brazilian State to promote the strengthening of the Access to Information Law in Brazil, such as the creation of a constitutionally autonomous Transparency Body. In addition to some noted progress, such as expanding the volume and quality of public information available to citizens, said letter indicated some challenges that would still exist on the subject. In this sense, they affirmed that there would be "considerable deficits [*lacunas*] in the implementation and compliance of the LAI in the entire Brazilian State, especially at the state and municipal levels."[[255]](#footnote-255)
124. On November 8, *Estadão* published an investigation based on audio documents, in which it denounced that, during a meeting of the Municipal Commission on Access to Information [*Comissão Municipal de Acesso à Informação*] (CMAI) of Sao Paulo, Lucas Tavares, chief of staff of the Special Communication Ministry of Sao Paulo [*Secretaria Especial de Comunicação de São Paulo*], affirmed that they would difficult the compilation and delivery of information requested by journalists to the CMAI.[[256]](#footnote-256)
125. Principle 4 of the Declaration of Principles of the IACHR establishes that "[a]ccess to information held by the state is a fundamental right of every individual. States have the obligation to guarantee the full exercise of this right. This principle allows only exceptional limitations that must be previously established by law in case of a real and imminent danger that threatens national security in democratic societies." Likewise, in accordance with the principle of maximum disclosure, the law must guarantee that access to public information is effective and as wide as possible; and in case of exceptions, these should not become the general rule. In addition, the regime of exceptions must be interpreted restrictively, and any doubt must be resolved in favor of transparency and access.
126. **Diversity and pluralism**
127. On March 28 President Michel Temer sanctioned Provisional Measure 747 of 2016 [*Medida Provisória – MP 747*] that would simplify the rules regarding renewal of licences of radio and television stations. According to the information, among other things, the approved text would simplify the term of renewal of the grant and implement the possibility of contractual changes without the need for prior consent of the executive. [[257]](#footnote-257)
128. Principle 12 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression establishes that “monopolies or oligopolies in the ownership and control of the communication media must be subject to anti-trust laws, as they conspire against democracy by limiting the plurality and diversity which ensure the full exercise of people’s right to information. In no case should such laws apply exclusively to the media. The concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies should take into account democratic criteria that provide equal opportunity of access for all individuals.”
129. **Internet and public media**
130. According to data from the project *Ctrl+X,* which maps judicial actions requesting the withdrawal of content from the Internet, judicial decisions that would prevent the disclosure of information have become more frequent in the country. According to project data, up to November 2017, 121 orders to remove comments from social networks, Google searches, as well as complete reports from web sites processes, were documented. Two types of processes would be highlighted: those of prior censorship and those that would request the complete removal of the media.[[258]](#footnote-258)
131. In accordance with Principle 5 of the IACHR's Declaration of Principles, "[p]rior censorship, direct or indirect interference in or pressure exerted upon any expression, opinion or information transmitted through any means of oral, written, artistic, visual or electronic communication must be prohibited by law. Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression."
132. In October, it was announced that journalists threatened or persecuted through social networks may file a complaint with the Office of the General Attorney of São Paulo [*Ministério Público do Estado de São Paulo*] (MP-SP), which promised to investigate the cases through the Nucleus to Combat Cybercrime [*Núcleo de Combate a Crimes Cibernéticos*] of the MP-SP created in 2016. This decision would have been made after the MP-SP would have alerted the police due to the case of the sports journalist Mauro Cezar Pereira, who would be frequently threatened and harassed through social networks.[[259]](#footnote-259)
133. In addition, the Office of the Special Rapporteur notes with concern the information that Brazil Communications Company [*Empresa Brasil de Comunicação]* (EBC) - responsible for public communication in the country - would be subject to interventions by the Government with respect to their administrative autonomy and editorial freedom. On this matter, in August, the Unions of Journalists and Broadcasters of the Federal District, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo, as well as the Commission of the workers of the EBC denounced the "systematic disrespect" of the management of Brazil Communications Company with regards to their workers, and "the attempt, day after day, to dismantle national public communication". They indicate, among others, that since the amendment of the Law of the EBC through a Provisional Measure, the federal public communication would suffer "daily setbacks". In this regard, they claim that several programs of the *TV Brazil* and *Radio Nacional* have been removed from the air, while programs in favor of the Government would have been created.[[260]](#footnote-260)
134. As the Office of the Special Rapporteur noted in its report on "Freedom of Expression Standards for Free and Inclusive Broadcasting," public media can (and should) play an essential part in ensuring the plurality and diversity of voices necessary in a democratic society. Its role is essential when providing high-quality content that is not necessarily commercial, and that reflects the informational, educational, and cultural needs of the people. However, for public media really to be able to perform their role, they must be independent of the executive branch; truly pluralistic; universally accessible; with funding adequate to the mandate provided for by law; and they must provide community participation and accountability mechanisms at the different levels of content production, distribution, and receipt.[[261]](#footnote-261)
135. **Government Advertising**
136. On November 3, President Michel Temer sanctioned a Provisional Measure that would have restructured the Government Ministries.[[262]](#footnote-262) According to this measure, the Minister of the Secretary-General would inter alia "coordinate, standardize, supervise, and control the publicity and sponsorship of the organs and entities of the federal public administration, direct and indirect, and companies under the control of the Union”.[[263]](#footnote-263)
137. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that article 13.3 of the American Convention establishes that “[t]he right of expression may not be restricted by indirect methods or means, such as the abuse of government or private controls over newsprint, radio broadcasting frequencies, or equipment used in the dissemination of information, or by any other means tending to impede the communication and circulation of ideas and opinions.” Similarly, Principle 13 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights states that “The exercise of power and the use of public funds by the state, the granting of customs duty privileges, the arbitrary and discriminatory placement of official advertising and government loans; the concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies, among others, with the intent to put pressure on and punish or reward and provide privileges to social communicators and communications media because of the opinions they express threaten freedom of expression, and must be explicitly prohibited by law.”
138. **Other relevant situations**
139. On February 20, the mayor of Sao Paulo, João Doria, enacted Bill 56/2005 approved by the local legislative chamber on February 14. In its article 4, the law imposes pecuniary sanctions against those who paint in spaces or public patrimonies. Likewise, the law establishes that the practice of graffiti must always be carried out with the authorization of the competent bodies responsible for the preservation and conservation of the historical and artistic heritage; it amends Law 13.478, typifying as punishable administrative offense"sticking posters on trees of public buildings, bleachers, parapets, canals and tunnels, poles, traffic signs, hydrants, public telephones, mail boxes, fire alarm and waste queues, curbs, walks and coatings of public buildings, stairs of public or private buildings, statues, monuments, columns, walls, public or private buildings, and other urban equipment”. On September 13, the Special Body of the Court of Justice of São Paulo [*Órgão Especial do Tribunal de Justiça de São Paulo*] considered unconstitutional articles 8 of the Rules of Procedure, which established that graffiti writers could not be hired by the municipal administration in the future, and 9, which provided for collaboration agreements between the government and private companies for the "repair of the urban landscape" in exchange for publicity.[[264]](#footnote-264)
140. Within the framework of the hearing on the Independence of Justice Operators in Brazil held on May 24 during the 162 Period of Sessions, the participating organizations said that the country is currently experiencing a situation in which judges who work to enforce domestic laws and inter-American standards are targets of acts of reprisal. They indicated that these judges see their independence and freedom of expression severed, as they are subject to disciplinary measures, investigative proceedings, and warnings, and are singled out publicly over the decisions they make. For its part, the State reported that the 1988 Constitution established a highly sophisticated democratic system which created an autonomous and independent judiciary. In addition, the representatives of the State indicated that Brazil safeguards the judiciary’s guarantees of impartiality, and noted that judges express themselves freely in the media.[[265]](#footnote-265)
141. Additionally, in the framework of the hearing on human rights and free, plural, and uncensored education in Brazil, held during the 162 period of session of the IACHR, the Commission received information on bill 196/2016 " School without Party" [ *Escola Sem Partido*] [[266]](#footnote-266), which would propose modifying the basic guidelines of education, in order to eliminate any type of ideology in schools.[[267]](#footnote-267) As reported, one of the points of this project would contemplate, for example, the prohibition of gender-based education.[[268]](#footnote-268) The applicant organizations expressed their concern for the project as they indicated that it would be a violation of the right to freedom of expression and teaching, and would be a sign that the religious / conservative movement would seek to neutralize politics within the halls by barring gender discussions in schools and invisibilizing issues related to sexual orientation. For its part, the Brazilian State highlighted, among other things, that the school curricular base in the country is a document that positively values ​​cultural diversity and social groups. It also stressed that the discussions on these bills are ongoing in a democratic spirit.[[269]](#footnote-269)
142. In September, the first queer-themed exhibition in Brazil, which featured works by renowned Brazilian artists, was canceled beforehand given the campaigns and criticisms made on social networks and movements that alleged that the works were offensive in advocating acts of "blasphemy", "zoophilia" and "pedophilia".[[270]](#footnote-270) In this regard, in November organizations of the Brazilian civil society would have rejected through a public statement the attacks against the free artistic manifestation in Brazil, and called attention to the need to establish a parameter that guides the access to cultural and artistic events.[[271]](#footnote-271)
143. According to information of public knowledge, in October, the Minister of Justice of Brazil declared to the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper he wanted to change the Brazilian policy on Indicative Classification of audiovisual works. According to the minister, the current model, in which a division in Brasilia would be responsible for designating the age of those who can watch soap operas or movies, would be a "madness". In this regard, civil society organizations made a statement indicating that the current model would act "according to the principle of co-regulation, prioritizing the process of self-classification of content", that is, "the classification process is mostly in the hands of the audiovisual producers themselves." Additionally, the aforementioned statement would request that the Ministry of Justice reinforces "the democratic and participatory nature" of the indicative Classification" instead of signaling its dismantling".[[272]](#footnote-272)
144. On November 29, the São Paulo Court of Justice decided to deny the request for compensation made by the photographer Sérgio Silva to the State of São Paulo for damages caused to his vision. In June 2013 the photographer would have been hit by a rubber bullet while covering a demonstration and because of that he would have lost his left eye vision. In the decision, the three judges responsible for the trial voted against the photographer's request.[[273]](#footnote-273) According to the information, the judges would have understood that there would be no evidence that the professional was hit by a rubber bullet fired by a police officer186. This decision rejected the argumentation made by the judge of the 10th Court of the Treasury [*10ª Vara da Fazenda Pública*] of the Court of Justice of São Paulo on August 10, 2016. In the first instance decision, the request was not accepted, as the judge understood that "by putting himself in the middle of the confrontation between the police and the demonstrators [Sérgio Silva] consciously and voluntarily took the risk of being targeted by some of the groups that were facing eachother".[[274]](#footnote-274)
145. **CANADA**
146. Canada remains a country that has low levels of violence against journalists. However, there has been an increase in the reported number of incidents involving assaults by demonstrators against journalists covering social protest events. The Office of the Special Rapporteur also observes with concern the proceedings in the case of journalist Ben Makuch, who is contesting an order by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to hand over information related to one of his journalistic sources. This Office also notes the continued absence of whistleblowers rights in the country, and the State’s lack of initiative to resolve the issue.
147. The Office of the Special Rapporteur acknowledges the progress made with the enactment of the Journalistic Sources Protection Act, which enhances the legal protection of journalistic sources who offer information in exchange for anonymity.
148. In addition, the Office of the Special Rapporteur acknowledges the efforts of the State to amend its laws to solve problems related to surveillance and espionage activities and their possible infringement of the right to freedom of expression as well as the right to protest and dissent.
     1. **Progress**
149. On April 11, the Senate of Canada unanimously passed Bill S-231, the Journalistic Sources Protection Act, which establishes additional guarantees for journalists and informants. The bill amended the Canadian Evidence Act and allows journalists to refuse to provide to civil, criminal or administrative courts, documentation or information that could reveal the identity of a source, as well as documents provided by sources.
150. This protection would apply in all cases, unless the information or document cannot be obtained by any other reasonable means and the public interest outweighs preserving the confidentiality of sources. The law also amends the Criminal Code, imposing stricter conditions for the issuance of warrants to gather information or documentation and to intercept the communications of journalists, which will only be able to be issued by a superior court judge. The bill was sent to the House of Commons for consultation, where it was unanimously approved on October 4. Although it is an advancement in the Canadian legal framework on the protection of journalists and sources, the new law maintains a restrictive definition of journalistic activity and does not protect sources whose identity is not publicly known. The civil society organization Canadian Journalists for Free Expression stated that, “While we strongly support Bill S-231, it will provide no protection in the context of Makuch’s appeal, because his source does not conform to the requirement of source anonymity as defined in the bill. (…) This leaves our country open to a situation in which a young Canadian journalist could soon be behind bars for simply doing his job. Clearly, this demonstrates a need for stronger legal protections.”[[275]](#footnote-275)
151. On June 6, Justice Minister and Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould introduced Bill C-51, “An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Department of Justice Act and to make consequential amendments to another Act,” to the Canadian Parliament. The bill includes the repeal of several criminal offenses, including the crimes of blasphemy, challenging another person to a duel, fraudulently pretending to practice witchcraft, and the crime of possessing, printing, distributing, or publishing crime comics.[[276]](#footnote-276)
     1. **Social Protest**
152. On May 6, Canadian journalist Kevin Metcalf was assaulted by cultural supremacists at a “freedom of speech” rally in Toronto. According to the information available, the incident sparked particular controversy, as the local police were on the scene and said to be lenient toward the perpetrators of the intimidations, threats, and assaults against Metcalf. On June 6, one of the perpetrators of the attack on the journalist, a 22-year old man, was charged with assault by the Toronto Police, who are also investigating a second individual involved in the attack.[[277]](#footnote-277)
153. On May 29, Beatrice Hunter was arrested after appearing before the Supreme Court in Happy Valley-Goose Bay after violating and refusing to reaffirm an undertaking she signed in 2016 promising to stay a kilometer away from Muskrat Falls, in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, where she had reportedly been protesting against the construction of a hydroelectric plant. According to the information available, she was released ten days later.[[278]](#footnote-278)
154. On August 20, journalists Mike Armstrong and Jean-Vicent Verveille of Global Newswere harassed by demonstrators in Quebec while covering a counter-protest held by activists the same day as an anti-immigrant demonstration organized by the white supremacist movement La Meute. During the incident, one of the journalists was shoved by a demonstrator, and the camera he was carrying was damaged.[[279]](#footnote-279)
155. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[280]](#footnote-280) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[281]](#footnote-281)
156. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[282]](#footnote-282)
     1. **Confidentiality of Sources**
157. In 2016 Annual Report, the Office of the Special Rapporteur had documented the case of *Vice Media* journalist Ben Makuch*,* who was ordered by the Superior Court of Ontario on March 1, 2016 to turn over to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) details and content of his alleged correspondence with suspected ISIS fighter Farah Shirdon as the result of a case brought by the RCMP in February 2015.
158. Makuch published several articles and interviews between June and October 2014 about how ISIS supposedly recruits combatants in Western countries, based on information acquired through his professional contact with Shirdon. The court denied *Vice Media Canada’s* request to overturn, revoke, or modify the production order. On April 28, 2016, *Vice Media* filed an appeal with the Ontario Court of Appeal; in February 2017, the court upheld the decision, dismissing the appeal. According to the information available, *Vice Media* is now seeking to appeal the case to the Supreme Court of Canada.
159. The Office of the Special Rapporteur on May 6, 2016, sent a letter to the State of Canada requesting information about this issue. The State of Canada replied in a communication received by the Office of the Special Rapporteur on August 5 that the production order requested by the RCMP did not seek to identify a confidential source, as Farah Shirdon’s identity was known; rather, the State asserted, the objective was to obtain copies of the messages exchanged between the journalist and his source. In February 2017, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE) and a coalition comprised by civil society organizations, media outlets, and trade unions organized a day of protest in different parts of the country defending the protection of the sources in this case. In addition, various organizations including Reporters Without Borders (RWB), the Centre for Free Expression, Unifor, CWA/SCA Canada, *Association des Journalistes Indépendants du Québec* (AJIQ), *Féderation Nationales des Communications* (FNC-CSN), Newspapers Canada, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and the National NewsMedia Council have signed a petition requesting the withdrawal of the judicial order to produce information about Makuch’s communications with his source*.* *Vice News* reportedly sent a letter to the RCMP stating that it would abandon its attempt to fight the demand at the Supreme Court of Canada if the RCMP were to drop its production order. It further argued that the United States Army had confirmed the death of the alleged source, Farah Shirdon, in July 2015, which would negate the basis for the order to produce information, i.e., the criminal investigation and prosecution of Shirdon.[[283]](#footnote-283)
160. According to Principle 8 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression “[e]very social communicator has the right to keep his/her source of information, notes, personal and professional archives confidential.”
     1. **Legal Reforms**
161. The Anti-terrorism Act passed in 2015 by Stephen Harper’s administration has been strongly opposed by experts and members of civil society since it entered into force in 2015, among other reasons for supposedly violating provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and excessively increasing the powers of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), significantly expanding its surveillance capacity and allowing a large number of government departments and agencies to share the private information of individuals without sufficient oversight.
162. With regard to freedom of expression, the law has also been criticized for establishing the criminal offense of “promoting terrorism.” On June 20, the new government of Justin Trudeau introduced Bill C-59, “An Act respecting national security matters,” to Parliament, which proposed a number of changes to the national security laws, including amendments to part of the Anti-Terrorism Act. The proposed changes are the result of online and in-person consultations run by the government in late 2016. With respect to freedom of expression, the bill has constructive provisions such as increased supervision of the intelligence and security community, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the CSIS, and the Communications Security Establishment; the imposition of Federal Court orders for various activities conducted by Canadian spies; a more precise definition of the concept of “terrorist propaganda,” and the clarification that advocacy, protest, dissidence, and artistic expressions are not activities that undermine national security unless accompanied by other activities that threaten Canada’s security.
163. In the same context, civil society has criticized the bill for containing legal provisions allowing spies or police officers to impersonate journalists; allowing spies to falsify reports or fabricate false news for purposes of their investigations, and authorizing offensive cyber activities by the CSE outside Canada’s borders.[[284]](#footnote-284)
     1. **Access to Public Information**
164. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has observed the results of the annual report presented in June by Canadian Information Commissioner Suzanne Legault. The Commissioner has harshly criticized the Access to Information Act, for being outdated as well as for the way it has been implemented by government agencies. Regarding the latter, the report documents a number of practical cases and investigations who realize that the right to access to public information in Canada has been hindered in recent years by disinterest, negligence, or a lack of diligence on the part of different government authorities, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the Canada Post Corporation, and the Privy Council Office of Canada [*Bureau du Conseil privé*]. In addition, according to the Commissioner, the federal government’s proposal for 2017 contained no funding for transparency measures, and “the year is ending with a shadow of disinterest on behalf of the government.” In her report, Legault asserts that the Access to Information Act is being used as a shield against transparency and accountability.[[285]](#footnote-285)
165. Civil society had been criticizing the Access to Information Act since 2013, on the grounds that some parts of it are slow-moving, outdated (no significant changes having been made in 34 years), and have gaps in content that would make it unable to prevent government agencies from concealing or refusing to disclose requested information. In 2016, the new administration of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that a complete review of that law would not take place until 2018, but that legislation would be introduced in the meantime with detailed changes.
166. In May 2017, civil society was still calling for the government to introduce those changes. Days after the publication of the annual report of the Office of the Information Commissioner of Canada, the federal government introduced a bill in Parliament to amend the Access to Information Act (Bill C-58) and grant additional powers to the Office of the Information Commissioner, allowing it to compel government agencies to publish certain records after an investigation conducted by the Commissioner, and to reevaluate cases in which attorney-client privilege has been asserted as a reason not to disclose requested information.
167. The bill would also grant government institutions the authority to deny requests for information for different reasons, such as the vague, abusive, or ill-intentioned nature of the request. The Commissioner may also, according to the draft amendment, recuse him or herself from or stop the investigation of a request for information complaint on those same grounds. In addition, the bill would allow government institutions, and involved third parties, to ask the Federal Court for requested information to be protected after a disclosure order. Another relevant aspect of the proposed legislation is that it requires some government entities to proactively publish information defined as “of public interest,” such as the travel expenditures of public servants and, in some cases, of judges. Bill C-58 has been criticized by civil society for failing to make the offices of cabinet ministers subject to the Access to Information Act.[[286]](#footnote-286)
168. Principle 4 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression which states that “[a]ccess to information held by the state is a fundamental right of every individual. States have the obligation to guarantee the full exercise of this right. This principle allows only exceptional limitations that must be previously established by law in case of a real and imminent danger that threatens national security in democratic societies.” Additionally, with regard to the principle of maximum disclosure the law must guarantee the effective and broadest possible access to public information, and any exceptions must not become the general rule in practice. Also, the exceptions regime should be interpreted restrictively and all doubts should be resolved in favor of transparency and access.
     1. **Other Relevant Situations**
169. On September 22, U.S. whistleblower Chelsea Manning was barred by immigration authorities from admission to Canada, upon attempting to enter the country at the border between Champlain, New York, in the United States, and St-Bernard-de-Lacolle, Quebec. According to the available information, based on subsection 44(1) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, Manning was declared inadmissible for “having been convicted outside Canada of a crime that, had it been committed in Canada, would constitute a violation of the Act of Parliament punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment of at least 10 years,” under subsection 36(1) of the same law.[[287]](#footnote-287)
170. **CHILE**
171. In June 2016, the Office of the Special Rapporteur made an official visit to Chile to evaluate the situation of freedom of expression in the country. The conclusions reached by this Office lead to a series of recommendations published in the Report on the Situation of Freedom of Expression in Chile of 2016.[[288]](#footnote-288) Throughout 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur noted that there has been progress in compliance to the Inter-American standards, although several of the documented challenges persist and some of these recommendations remain to be met or implemented.
172. In this context, the Office of the Special Rapporteur receives with special satisfaction the efforts of the State to observe the recommendations made regarding the right to access to public information [[289]](#footnote-289), specifically regarding to the opening of the archives, documents, testimonies, and information provided by the victims to the Valech I Commission. In this matter the Special Rapporteur also highlights a series of judicial decisions that guaranteed access to public information.
173. During 2017 there were new cases of criminalization of demonstrations of students and members or sympathizers of the Mapuche community, a series of attacks against journalists, and a relevant number of criminal proceedings against media workers accused of attacking public order or of defamation of public officials.
174. On the other hand, the enactment of different laws stands out positively, especially the reform of Law 20.477, which prevents the Military Justice from taking action in the event that the victims or defendants in a proceeding are civilians, and the Law of Guaranteed Minimum Speed for Internet Access [*Ley de Velocidad Mínima Garantizada de Acceso a Internet*].
175. **Progress**
176. On November 11, 2016, Law 20.968 was enacted which, in addition to defining the crimes of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, modifies the jurisdiction of the Military Justice, establishing that in no case will civilians and children, who are victims or are accused persons, be subject to the jurisdiction of the military courts, in these cases the ordinary courts will operate.[[290]](#footnote-290)
177. The Office of the Special Rapporteur welcomes the State's observation on the recommendation made in the Report on the Situation of Freedom of Expression in Chile in 2016 regarding the need to reform its legislation as soon as possible, in order to guarantee that violations of human rights committed by agents of the security forces are investigated and judged by bodies and courts belonging to the civil jurisdiction.[[291]](#footnote-291)
178. On this matter, on February 20, the Second Chamber of the Supreme Court [*Segunda Sala de la* *Corte Suprema*] (CS) ruled that the Valparaíso Guarantees Court was competent to intervene in a case initiated against two officers for assaults in a protest, and not the Second Military Court of Santiago [*Segundo Juzgado Militar de Santiago*].[[292]](#footnote-292) In this regard, the CS based its decision on art. 1 of the amended Law 20.477. The Second Military Court of Santiago had dismissed both members of the police force. Specifically, the agents had been accused of beating the student Patricia Estay Barrera in the context of the protests that took place on May 21, 2015 in the city of Valparaíso.[[293]](#footnote-293)
179. On the other hand, on December 22, 2016, Law No. 20.977 was published, which provided that the text of Law No. 13.196, known as the "Copper Reserved Law" [*Ley Reservada de Cobre*], cease to be secret, therefore the public would be granted access to its text.[[294]](#footnote-294) Likewise, on April 7, Law No. 21.005[[295]](#footnote-295) was published, it provides that the National Television Council [*Consejo Nacional de Televisión*] (CNT), every year in March, must send a report to both Houses of the National Congress containing the results of the policy of audiovisual promotion and of the promotion of cultural and educational programming. In addition, the CNT must give public account on its website of the management of its policies, plans, programs, actions, and budget management; it must also publish the minutes of its sessions in accordance with the Law on Public Service Transparency and on Access to Information of the State Administration [*Ley de Transparencia de la Función Pública y de Acceso a la Información de los Órganos del Estado*].
180. The Office of the Special Rapporteur also highlights the different progress in legislative and judicial matters aimed at favoring access to public information, guaranteeing the autonomy of the competent bodies, and ultimately allowing the exercise of the right to seek information.[[296]](#footnote-296) Nevertheless, the Office of the Special Rapporteur warns that a significant number of secrecy laws[[297]](#footnote-297) persist and therefore urges the State to redouble its efforts to publicize the regulations of the texts that remain confidential.[[298]](#footnote-298)
181. On October 18, the Honorable Chamber of Representatives of the National Congress of Chile approved the Law on Guaranteed Minimum Speed for Internet Access Nº 21.046[[299]](#footnote-299) [*Ley de Velocidad Mínima Garantizada de Acceso a Internet*], the text of which modifies the General Telecommunications Law [*Ley General de Telecomunicaciones*] (LGT).[[300]](#footnote-300) According to the information available, the new law had technical support from the Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications [*Ministerio de Transporte y Telecomunicaciones*], and it was unanimously approved by both parliamentary chambers. The Law orders Internet access providers to guarantee a percentage of the average speeds that the user will receive, offered in their business plans, in national and international connections, wired and wireless, during times of greater and lesser congestion. Likewise, Internet providers will stipulate in the service contracts the limits at which the speed they provide will oscillate, and a system or application that allows the measurement of said speeds, also associated technical parameters must be made available to users. For its part, the Law provides that if the user suspects that the internet speed to which he or she accesses does not comply with the agreement, they may take action and "request the reparation or restitution of the service, as well as compensation for the time in which the connection would not have been found available or functioning in a defective way." Likewise, the Law establishes that a body will be designated through public bidding to measure the quality of national services, although the Deputy Secretary of Telecommunications could carry out the measurement in the exercise of its functions. Finally, the Law establishes that companies will have a period of six months to inform their customers of the speeds in the hours of greater and lesser congestion, corresponding to each contract.[[301]](#footnote-301)
182. The Office of the Special Rapporteur welcomes the approval of the Law on Guaranteed Minimum Speeds for Internet Access, and the effort of the State of Chile to move forward with the adoption of positive measures to facilitate access to quality Internet as recommended in the Report on the Situation of Freedom of Expression in Chile in 2016.[[302]](#footnote-302)
183. For its part, in 2017 this Office registered several judicial decisions that have ordered the provision of public information to different state institutions or companies with state contributions, and thus ensuring greater transparency of government actions.[[303]](#footnote-303) In this regard, on July 13, the Ninth Chamber of the Court of Appeals *[Novena Sala de la Corte de Apelaciones*] ruled that *Carabineros* (security forces) should provide "details of the expenses, bids, and registration of suppliers of deterrents, such as tear gas, and rubber bullets used for demonstrations control" to the Council for Transparency [*Consejo para la Transparencia*] (CPT). In this regard, on August 23, 2016, the newspaper *Biobio* made such request to the police institution, but the institution refused because its provision could cause damage or detriment to the proper performance of the functions of *Carabineros*, particularly in matters of restoration of public order. Faced with this, *Biobio* filed an appeal with the CPT, which set a deadline of five working days for *Carabineros* to deliver the information discussed. However, the police institution alleged the illegality of the Writ of Amparo before the Court of Appeals, which in turn ratified the CPT’s decision.[[304]](#footnote-304)
184. On July 21, the Fifth Chamber of the Court of Appeals of Santiago *[Quinta Sala de la Corte de Apelaciones de Santiago*] (CA) rejected the claim of illegality filed by the Chilean Defense Council [*Consejo de Defensa de Chile*], the Chilean Treasury [*Fisco de Chile*], and the Chilean Army [*Ejército de Chile*], against the decision of the Council for Transparency [*Consejo para la Transparencia*] (CPT) through which they were ordered to convey the payroll of officers promoted to the rank of General in the period between March 10, 2002 and March 11, 2006, along with those who between 1973 and 1990 were part of military or intelligence units that would have been involved in serious human rights violations. In this regard, the CA understood that it was not enough that the law that established the reservation or secrecy of these data was adopted in accordance with the Qualified Quorum Law [*Ley de Quorum Calificado*], but that it was important to determine whether the grounds used to deny the aforementioned information were framed within of the objectives of the constitutional and legal provisions. Therefore, the CA pointed out that the requested information did not affect the "national security" budget which, based on Article 8 of the Political Constitution of the Republic of Chile,[[305]](#footnote-305) allows its secrecy to be established, and therefore the information must be turned over to the applicant.[[306]](#footnote-306)
185. Also, on October 16, within the framework of a remedy of protection filed by Matías Rojas against a decision of the Court of Appeals which endorsed his expulsion from a press conference convened by *Carabineros* where they would refer to the corruption case known as "Pacogate,"[[307]](#footnote-307) the Third Chamber of the Supreme Court [*Tercera Sala de la Corte Suprema*] (CS) decided to revoke said ruling and, in its place, ordered that *Carabineros* must "give him the accommodations to participate without being able to prevent him from entering the press conferences attended by in the exercise of his professional work." The CS understood that the expulsion of the journalist by the police institution constituted an act of prior censorship. The CS based its decision on art. 5 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression, and interpreted the concept of interference as any action that comes from an external agent that obstructs or impedes the communication or information process. The CS also recalled the second principle of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression of the Organization of American States (OAS), art. 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and UNESCO Resolution 104, and concluded that in the light of the aforementioned instruments "it cannot but conclude that the action of preventing a journalist from participating in a press conference constitutes a threat to the freedom to issue an opinion and to inform, without prior censorship."[[308]](#footnote-308)
186. Moreover, on September 11, President Michelle Bachelet publicly announced that there would be an immediate discussion on the bill that seeks to lift the secrecy clause of the National Commission on Political Prison and Torture [*Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura*], referred to as the Valech I Commission.[[309]](#footnote-309) In this regard, Bachelet pointed out that the measure, with the prior authorization of the victims, seeks exclusively for the courts to access the information contained in a petition in order to clarify pending cases and "to contribute specifically to the attainment of truth, justice and reparation for the victims and their families." The President also indicated that, along with the above mentioned, a reclassification mechanism for victims of political prison and torture, enforced disappearance, and political execution will be presented, which through an advisory committee will review the background of those persons who allegedly were rejected by the Valech II Commission.[[310]](#footnote-310)
187. **Attacks, threats, and intimidation against journalists and the media**
188. On March 24, the journalist Sandra Mariscal and the cameraman Erick Condorena, of the public channel *Bolivia TV*, were reportedly detained and held incommunicado in the city of Iquique, Tarapacá region, despite presenting their documentation and identifying themselves as members of the press. Mariscal and Condorena would have arrived at the aforementioned airport in order to cover the events related to the diplomatic tension between Chile and Bolivia after the arrest of nine Bolivian officials at the border. However, Condorena was returned to Bolivia while Mariscal would have been able to enter the country but with the prohibition to carry out journalistic activities.[[311]](#footnote-311)
189. On March 28, nine Bolivian journalists from different media outlets participating in the inaugural flight of the Chilean-Brazilian airline LATAM, were reportedly held at the Santiago airport in Chile at approximately 5:00 p.m. (local time). According to the information available, they would have only been allowed to enter the country under the condition that they sign a document by which they undertook to not affect the internal and external security, sovereignty, and public order of Chile, allegedly under Article 15 of the Immigration Law of Chile. They would have all been returned to Bolivia.[[312]](#footnote-312)
190. In accordance to the faculties established in Article 41 of the American Convention on Human Rights, on April 25, the Office of the Special Rapporteur sent a letter to the State of Chile motived by the information presented on March 27 by the Ombudsman of Bolivia, related to the events presented in the two preceding paragraphs, where it noted that Chile attacked the right to access to information, used indirect prior censorship, and implemented regressive administrative measures to restrict the exercise of freedom of expression.[[313]](#footnote-313) In the letter information was requested on the events reported as well as on the legal basis of the measures adopted in the cases referred to in this communication, and on the regulatory framework applicable to the accreditation of foreign journalists in the country.[[314]](#footnote-314)
191. In its response, dated July 28, the State indicated with respect to the March 24 event that the journalistic team of *Bolivia TV*, consisting of Sandra Mariscal and Erick Condorena, did not have a temporary visa for foreign journalists or social media professionals who travel to Chile because of their activities and that, for this reason, in accordance with the law in force, Condorena was returned to Bolivia that afternoon, while Mariscal was informed about the current regulations on the matter and the procedure to be followed to obtain the corresponding accreditation. In addition, the State noted that the International Press Unit *[Unidad de Prensa Internacional*] (UPI) of the Division of the Communications Ministry, under the General Secretariat of Government, reported that both journalists subsequently entered the country on different dates, stating each of them. On the other hand, in relation to the event of March 29, the State stated that the nine Bolivians did not have a specific visa to carry out their activities, that all persons were detained on the current law in Chile, and that they were returned to Bolivia on April 1. He also added that the UPI did not receive any request for accreditation and that the Ministry of the Interior and Public Safety explained that the procedure was carried out within the time required for the control of any foreigner according to the amount that was detained.[[315]](#footnote-315)
192. This Office of the Special Rapporteur wishes to recall that in the Joint Declaration on the regulation of the media, restrictions on journalists and the investigation of corruption, the Special Rapporteurs for Freedom of Expression of the United Nations, the Inter American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), pointed out that the accreditation to journalists "are appropriate only where necessary to provide them with privileged access to certain places and/or events; such schemes should be overseen by an independent body, and accreditation decisions should be taken pursuant to a fair and transparent process, based on clear and non-discriminatory criteria published in advance."[[316]](#footnote-316)
193. On June 6, a journalist and a cameraman from *TVN Red Araucanía* were attacked by unknown individuals when they covered a news report on a fire in an evangelical church in the Temucuicui area. After making the report, the journalists would have noticed the existence of a barricade, from where unknown individuals came out with their faces covered, who would have fired at the vehicle in which they were traveling. The Office of the Attorney General of Araucanía announced that it was investigating the events as an assassination attempt.[[317]](#footnote-317)
194. On June 12, the community radio *Talcahuano*, from the town of the same name, would have suffered an attack that destroyed its antenna and part of the transmitting equipment, as a result of which the station stopped broadcasting its programming on air. As reported by the *JMG* radio of the School of Journalism of the University of Chile [*Escuela de Periodismo de la Universidad de Chile*], witnesses of the act would have identified that the attack was allegedly carried out by members of the Masonic Educational Corporation of Talcahuano [*Corporación Educacional Masónica de Talcahuano*] and an official of the municipality of the port, since, according to Alejandro Martínez, communications director of the city, "[the] members of this Freemasonry are the owners of the only authorized signal to operate in the area - *Radio Etchegoyen*-."[[318]](#footnote-318)
195. Between August and September, different journalists, photographers, and communicators reported attacks by *Carabineros* while covering different protests in the city of Santiago. In this regard, on August 1, Carlos Vera Mancilla, *Reuters* photojournalist, would have been prevented from covering the incidents that occurred between Carabineros Special Forces [*Fuerzas Especiales de Carabineros*] (FFEEC) and students[[319]](#footnote-319). On August 10, FFEEC agents allegedly assaulted, damaged their work equipment, and then arrested an independent photographer while covering the detention of some students as part of a protest.[[320]](#footnote-320) According to information received by this Office, on August 17, the aforementioned photojournalist, Vera Mancilla, of *Agencia Reuters*, would have been pushed with an FFEEC shield and fell to the ground, while covering the demonstrations that took place in front of the Consulate of Argentina.[[321]](#footnote-321) On September 17, two photojournalists would have been detained while they were recording a protest carried out by members of the "Free Animal" Civil Society at the Padre Hurtado Park rodeo.[[322]](#footnote-322) For its part, on September 22, a journalist of *Agencia Reuters* would have been detained while covering a demonstration for the Mapuche community.[[323]](#footnote-323)
196. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
197. **Social Protest**
198. As in the report prepared in 2016[[324]](#footnote-324), the Office of the Special Rapporteur has recorded that the tendency to limit or restrict the exercise of social protest continued throughout this year. This Office has documented numerous cases of arrests of demonstrators by the Carabineros Special Forces [*Fuerzas Especiales de Carabineros*] (FFEEC) along with other practices such as the dissuasive presence of police forces, the abusive use of tear gas bombs, rubber bullets, and hydrant trucks.[[325]](#footnote-325)
199. In this regard, the Office of the Special Rapporteur receives with concern the use of force and the persistence of arrests during the manifestations of members or sympathizers of the Mapuche community.[[326]](#footnote-326) Especially regarding the events of the months of September and October, in the context of the demonstrations that took place in the city of Concepción in support of the Mapuche community members detained in the Temuco prison as a result of the so-called "Operation Hurricane."[[327]](#footnote-327) On September 25, a group of individuals would have held a manifestation in favor of the aforementioned Mapuches. In this context, 26 people were apprehended by members of the FFEEC after a faction of the protesters allegedly took a building where the radio station *Biobio* is located.[[328]](#footnote-328) The next day, again a group of people protested insisting on the claim for the detainees of the Mapuche community. According to the information available, the demonstrators had interrupted the vehicular traffic for 20 minutes until FFEEC agents arrived at the scene, who proceeded to disperse the protest. There, they would have arrested at least ten people plus two reporters from the newspaper *Resumen.*[[329]](#footnote-329) Likewise, on October 2, a demonstration with the same purpose would have been held. The members of the FFEEC would have thrown tear gas to disperse the protesters and arrested at least 20 people.[[330]](#footnote-330) Then, on October 9, a new demonstration in support of the Mapuches would have been convened. However, before it began, at least 30 police officers would have approached the protesters and requested their identification. At least six of these people would have been detained.[[331]](#footnote-331)
200. In this regard, this Office of the Special Rapporteur regrets the continued use of force as a routine means to prevent or restrain the exercise of social protest under the pretext that they have not been authorized. Similarly, the Office of the Special Rapporteur notes with concern that no progress has been made since October 2016 regarding the bill that seeks to repeal Supreme Decree No. 1.086 of 1983[[332]](#footnote-332), despite having reminded the State of the importance of guaranteeing the right to assembly through the adoption of new legislation in accordance with international principles and standards in this area.[[333]](#footnote-333)
201. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[334]](#footnote-334) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[335]](#footnote-335)
202. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[336]](#footnote-336)
203. **Subsequent liability**
204. On January 5, the Oral Court No. 7 of Santiago [*Tribunal Oral Nª 7 de Santiago*] acquitted *Hispan Tv* journalist Leonel Retamal, who had been accused of committing the crime of damaging.[[337]](#footnote-337) Retamal would have been detained on July 28, 2016 while he was covering a student demonstration. After being released the next day, a complaint was filed against him allegedly for damaging *Carabineros*’s equipment.[[338]](#footnote-338)
205. On February 4, the Italian journalist Lorenzo Spairani would have been expelled from the country. Spairani, entered Chile with a grant from the European Union with the intention of carrying out a work trip with social groups and making a documentary about it. According to the information available, members of the Investigative Police [*Policía de Investigaciones*] (PDI) would have broken into his home, arrested Spairani and then transferred him to a police center, where he was handed the respective decree of expulsion through which he was informed about the prohibition of entry into the country to anyone who propagates or promotes doctrines "that tend to destroy or alter by violence, the social order of the country or its system of government."[[339]](#footnote-339) On February 20, Attorney General Rodolfo Isaac Noriega Cardo filed a writ of amparo in favor of Spairani and against the PDI and the Intendency of the Metropolitan Region [*Intendencia de la Región Metropolitana*] (IRM) before the Fifth Chamber of the Court of Appeals of Santiago [*Quinta Sala de la Corte de Apelaciones de Santiago*], through which he invoked the illegality of the expulsion order. However, the court decided to reject the appeal filed on considering that the decision was legal based on what is prescribed in art. 15 of Decree Law No. 1.094.[[340]](#footnote-340) Faced with this, the National Institute of Human Rights [*Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos*] (INDH) appealed to the Supreme Court [*Corte Suprema*] (CS). Finally, on March 7, the Second Chamber of the CS decided to revoke the judgment of February 20 and overturned the expulsion order, clarifying that Spairani "is not affected by any prohibition to enter Chile."[[341]](#footnote-341)
206. On February 23, three social media workers were accused by the Attorney General’s Office of Panguipulli of committing the crime of "public disorder". The media workers, who belong to independent media, would have covered the demonstration held on August 1, 2016 in Tranguil, where members of the Mapuche community and environmental organizations demanded compliance with Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO). According to available information, the protest would have developed peacefully without any injuries or arrests.[[342]](#footnote-342)
207. On May 16, the North Central Prosecutor's Office [*Fiscalía Centro Norte*] dismissed an investigation, which was then closed by the Seventh Court of Guarantee of Santiago [*Séptimo Juzgado de Garantía de Santiago*], against journalist Matías Rojas, of *El Ciudadano,* after determining that it did not have sufficient evidence to continue with the investigation of the case against him . Rojas had been accused in 2016 by the General Director of *Carabineros* [*Director General de Carabineros*], Bruno Villalobos, after the journalist published an investigation related to the General's assets; the information had been obtained through the Transparency Law.[[343]](#footnote-343)
208. On June 13, the First Chamber of the Supreme Court [*Primera Sala de la Corte Suprema*] (CS) confirmed the judgment that convicted the newspaper *El Mercurio* to pay compensation of CLP $ 20 million (approximately US $32 thousand) to Ignacio Loyola Villalobos, who sued the newspaper for "moral damage". On July 1, 2008, the media outlet reportedly had a headline on its cover which stated that Villalobos was expelled from the *Carabineros* because of his connection to a drug trafficking group. However, in the lawsuit this former official claimed that the newspaper had provided inaccurate information, since he had voluntarily resigned from the police institution, and also false information, since there was no reason to associate him with a drug trafficking group. Despite that the fact that the newspaper argued a "just cause of error", the CS maintained that "The defendant (*El Mercurio*) acted with obvious culpability in highlighting the existence of such links both on the cover and in the internal headlines of the paper. That is, when it made the publication in the manner indicated above, and knowing that such links had been established, acting unprepared, it reported as if they were verified, relating these facts to the departure of the plaintiff from *Carabineros* [...]."[[344]](#footnote-344)
209. On August 31, journalist Patricio Mery Bell had been detained by the Investigative Police [*Policía de Investigaciones*] (PDI) in response to the order issued by the Fourth Criminal Court of Santiago [*Cuarto Tribunal Oral en lo Penal de Santiago*] upon his arrival from Ecuador to the airport in Santiago. According to the information available, Mery Bell published an article in the *Panorama News* portal in September 2011, in which he stated that the former General Director of the *Carabineros*, Gustavo González Jure, would have leaded a platoon of police officers, who in 1988, in a context of protests, allegedly murdered a young man of 14 years.[[345]](#footnote-345) That same year, González Jure criminally accused Mery Bell for the crime of "serious insults". Throughout the trial the journalist traveled to Ecuador, where he would stay for a month, but due to an infection he had to be hospitalized, losing the possibility of returning and presenting himself before the respective Court. Although he would have sent the medical certificates stating what happened, the Court ordered his arrest.[[346]](#footnote-346)
210. In accordance with Principle 10 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression, “privacy laws should not inhibit or restrict investigation and dissemination of information of public interest. The protection of a person’s reputation should only be guaranteed through civil sanctions in those cases in which the person offended is a public official, a public person or a private person who has voluntarily become involved in matters of public interest. In addition, in these cases, it must be proven that in disseminating the news, the social communicator had the specific intent to inflict harm, was fully aware that false news was disseminated, or acted with gross negligence in efforts to determine the truth or falsity of such news.”
211. Principle 11 of the IACHR´s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states: “[p]ublic officials are subject to greater scrutiny by society. Laws that penalize offensive expressions directed at public officials, generally known as "*desacato* laws," restrict freedom of expression and the right to information.” Furthermore, the IACHR has held repeatedly that the application of criminal law to sanction expressions about public officials is disproportionate when dealing with protected speech, such as information or expression regarding matters of public interest, and infringes the right to freedom of expression.[[347]](#footnote-347)
212. **Legal reforms**
213. On March 13, President Michelle Bachelet signed the Bill that regulates the Protection and Treatment of Personal Data [*Ley que Regula la Protección y el Tratamiento de los Datos Personales*], which would seek to amend Law No. 19.628 on Protection of Private Life [*Ley Nº 19.628 sobre Protección de la Vida Privada*]. From the initiative it is clear that the bill seeks to raise the protection of privacy to comply with international standards on the treatment of personal data and the guidelines of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Likewise, it broadens the concept of public access sources, specifying as an only requirement a consultation in a lawful manner, it includes new principles that govern the subject, it contains a wide catalog of rights that assist the owner of the data, and creates the Agency for the Protection of Personal Information [*Agencia de Protección de Datos Personales*].[[348]](#footnote-348)
214. However, the draft law includes clauses such as the one set forth in article 25 on "right to be forgotten" where it is specified that personal data relating to the commission and conviction of criminal, civil, administrative, or disciplinary infractions cannot be communicated or published when the action has prescribed or once the sanction imposed has been complied with, and every person who works in public bodies is required to maintain the secrecy about the reserved information. In addition, the bill protects information self-determination and requires the owner of the data to have an email box.[[349]](#footnote-349)
215. On September 4, President Michelle Bachelet signed the bill that aims to incorporate the crime of "incitement to racial and religious hatred" to the Criminal Code. The bill that typifies the aforementioned crime, would have the intention to punish those who publicly, or through any means suitable for public dissemination, directly or indirectly incite physical violence against a person or a group of people, either by nationality, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or belief, which would be punished by imprisonment from 61 to 540 days, and fines of CLP$1,400,790 (approximately US$2,213) to CLP$ 2,334,650 (approximately US $ 3,668).[[350]](#footnote-350)
216. **Direct censorship**
217. On May 24, the Chilean Journalists Association [*Colegio de Periodistas de Chile*] reported that journalist Nathaly Álvarez had received pressure from the command of former President Sebastián Piñera. According to the information available, Álvarez would have conducted an investigation in which she reported Piñera's interests and links with companies in the fishing sector during his time as head of government, while stating that he hid those businesses in his sworn statement. After publishing the article, the journalist allegedly received a call from Cecilia Pérez, who is part of the former president's command, demanding that she dismissed the publication, to which the journalist refused. Later, *Radio Cooperativa*, the media that published the note, would have modified the content of the article alleging errors in the initial edition. After what happened the journalist resigned to the radio.[[351]](#footnote-351)
218. Moreover, on October 30, the Court of Appeals of Concepción [*Corte de Apelaciones de Concepción*] ordered a measure to not enforce a ruling against the media *Radio Bio Bio*, which would have order them to refrain from making publications "on these and recurring events" related to Bernardo José Neira Figueroa, Roberto Alfredo Belmar Carrasco, and Erick Antonio Rojas Benavides, three union leaders of the National Service for Children [*Servicio Nacional de Menores*] (Sename).[[352]](#footnote-352) The decision was adopted as a result of the appeal filed by the persons indicated above, after on September 25 *Radio Bio Bio* published an article in which it indicated that, according to a report made by the Regional Comptroller [*Contraloría Regional*], Neira Figueroa, Belmar Carrasco, and Rojas Benavides would have received millionaire salaries without working in months; the note also pointed out other irregularities associated to Sename.[[353]](#footnote-353)
219. According to Principle 5 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression “Prior censorship, direct or indirect interference in or pressure exerted upon any expression, opinion or information transmitted through any means of oral, written, artistic, visual or electronic communication must be prohibited by law. Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression.
220. **Freedom of expression in electoral contexts**
221. On October 27, the National Television Council [*Consejo Nacional de Televisión*] (CNT) filed charges against the *TVN, Mega, CHV* and *Canal 13* channels, which broadcasted the "Presidential Primary Debate 2017" together. According to the information available, the channels would have violated Law No. 18.838 since they granted space to the three candidates of *Chile Vamos*, Sebastian Piñera, Felipe Kast, and Manuel José Oseandón, and left out the candidates of *Frente Amplio*, Beatriz Sánchez and Alberto Mayol, affecting the "pluralist principle" and discriminating arbitrarily based on the tendency or belonging to a political group.[[354]](#footnote-354)
222. In electoral contexts, freedom of expression is directly connected to political rights and their exercise, and both types of rights mutually strengthen one another.[[355]](#footnote-355) Reasoned democratic debate requires the greatest possible circulation of ideas, opinions and information about the candidates, their parties, and their platforms during the period preceding an election, principally through the media, the candidates, and others who wish to express themselves. Everyone must be able to question and investigate the capacity and suitability of the candidates, disagree with and confront their ideas and opinions, so that voters can form their opinions.[[356]](#footnote-356) As the IACHR has underscored, free speech and political debate are essential for the consolidation of the democratic life of societies, and therefore are of compelling social interest.[[357]](#footnote-357)
223. **Access to public Information**
224. On March 23, the Constitutional Court of Chile [*Tribunal Constitucional de Chile*] (TCC) declared the second paragraph of Article 5 of the Transparency Law (LT) unconstitutional[[358]](#footnote-358), which stipulated that all information prepared with public budget or held by the organs of the administration will be public, unless it is subject to the exceptions indicated. The TCC concluded this after a presentation made by the Salmon Industry Association in Chile [*Asociación de la Industria del Salmón en Chile*] (together with other companies of the same industry) by means of which it requested that said article be declared inapplicable because it is unconstitutional. All this, within the framework of a judicial controversy where the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Service [*Servicio Nacional de Pesca y Acuicultura*] (Sernapesca) was required to provide information related to the use of antibiotics in salmon.
225. The TCC made an analysis on the importance of the economic rights of companies and therefore of the industrial secrecy and the regulatory development of it in Chile. On access to information and the compatibility of the second paragraph of article 5 of the law, the TCC concluded that when the law mentions that all information held by the State is public, it does not include the information that has to do with the industrial secrecy of the companies and that the provisions of article 5 are not compatible with article 8 of the Political Constitution of Chile, since the latter does not impose on the public administration the obligation to provide information in a different way to what is stated for in the legal system; the TCC added that the information that the companies give to the State authorities cannot be obtained through the right to access to the information since this possibility was ruled out in the constitutional reform of 2005.[[359]](#footnote-359)
226. Principle 4 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression which states that “[a]ccess to information held by the state is a fundamental right of every individual. States have the obligation to guarantee the full exercise of this right. This principle allows only exceptional limitations that must be previously established by law in case of a real and imminent danger that threatens national security in democratic societies.” Additionally, with regard to the principle of maximum disclosure the law must guarantee the effective and broadest possible access to public information, and any exceptions must not become the general rule in practice. Also, the exceptions regime should be interpreted restrictively and all doubts should be resolved in favor of transparency and access.
227. **Communications surveillance**
228. On June 13, 2017, the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security of Chile [*Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública de Chile*] adopted Decree No. 866, which amends Decree No. 142 of 2005, and establishes regulations on the interception of telephone and other telecommunication communications, and conservation of communication data.
229. The Decree, which has been questioned by civil society organizations who claim that the regulation restricts the rights to privacy and freedom of expression unnecessarily and disproportionately and that was adopted without any process of public consultation[[360]](#footnote-360), would establish in its article 8 that "the telecommunication service providers shall keep and store for a period of not less than 2 years, as reserved and at the disposal of the authority, all the communicational data referred to in [the decree]." This provision, in addition, would define in broad terms the type of data that should be collected and establish a storage term broader than the minimum established in the law. The Criminal Procedure Code provides for a period of "no less than one year". The decree would not establish guarantees of judicial control in relation to the preservation and distribution of communicational data, which would allow the forces in charge of citizen security to access this personal information without the necessary judicial order.
230. Likewise, it is questioned that Article 3 (i) of the decree prohibits companies from "maintaining and incorporating networks [and] equipment into their technology that hinder or prevent in any way, compliance with the orders issued by a competent authority that have as their object the interception and recording of communications," which would prevent the possible implementation of encryption technologies to protect the privacy of users, something increasingly common in digital communications. The legality of Decree no. 866 is currently under review by the Comptroller General of the Republic [*Contraloría General de la República*].[[361]](#footnote-361)
231. On this point, on September 26, the Office of the Special Rapporteur forwarded to the State of Chile a letter in the terms of Article 41 of the American Convention on Human Rights, where it requested its collaboration to receive the information it deemed pertinent on the State's reasons that justify the adoption of the Decree in question. In particular, this Office of the Special Rapporteur requested information regarding the legal and constitutional basis of Decree No. 866, the measures adopted to ensure full compliance of the Decree with international human rights instruments and standards, and finally, the spaces of consultation provided to civil society and other key actors in the design of this norm and its implications for the rights to freedom of expression and private life.[[362]](#footnote-362) At the closing of this report, the State of Chile has not replied to the letter sent.
232. The Office of the Special Rapporteur reiterates that surveillance programs must be designed and implemented in accordance with international human rights standards. Notably, States must guarantee that the interception, collection and use of personal information are clearly authorized by law in order to protect individuals from arbitrary or abusive interference with their privacy. Moreover, the decision to undertake surveillance activities that intrude upon individual privacy must be authorized by an independent judiciary and justified in terms of the objectives pursued in the specific case and the proportionality of the measure in relation to necessity and the interests pursued. States must ensure that the judicial authority is specialized and competent to make decisions on the legality of the communications surveillance, the technologies used, and its impact on the sphere of rights that could be involved, and that they have sufficient guarantees to fulfill its duties in an adequate manner. Finally, the Office of the Special Rapporteur observes that States should establish independent oversight mechanisms over the authorities in charge of conducting surveillance in order to ensure transparency and accountability.[[363]](#footnote-363)
233. **Diversity and pluralism**
234. In March it was made public that the National Television Council [*Consejo Nacional de Televisión*] (CNTV) opened a bid to award 116 Digital Television frequencies throughout the country, this being the first bid under the Digital Television Law [*Ley de Televisión Digital*] of 2014. This would allow a greater number of channels, greater offer, and greater diversity of content in digital television. The alleged concessions are of a national, regional, local, and local community nature; According to the public call, 40 percent of the available frequencies should be reserved for regional, local, and local community channels, of which two national frequencies destined only for cultural or educational signals should be considered.[[364]](#footnote-364)
235. For its part, in May, public information indicated that representatives of the *Partido Comunista* (PC) filed a request to prevent the Bethia Group to purchase the radio stations Tiempo, Infinita, and Romántica of Bezanilla group, before the National Economic Prosecutor's Office [*Fiscalía Nacional Económica*] (FNE). According to the information available, the Bethia Group would own the *Mega* television channel and the *Candela* and *Carolina* radio stations, thus, if the purchase is made, the aforementioned group would have ownership of 14% of the FM *dial.* The representative would have argued before the FNE that if the commercial agreement were reached, it would be encouraging the concentration of media and thus affecting the plurality and diversity of communications and the right to freedom of expression of Chilean society.[[365]](#footnote-365)
236. Principle 12 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression establishes that “monopolies or oligopolies in the ownership and control of the communication media must be subject to anti-trust laws, as they conspire against democracy by limiting the plurality and diversity which ensure the full exercise of people’s right to information. In no case should such laws apply exclusively to the media. The concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies should take into account democratic criteria that provide equal opportunity of access for all individuals.”
237. **Community broadcasting**
238. On March 19, the *Madre de la Divina Providencia* radio station (Madipro), from Villa O'Higgins, Aysén region, would had interrupted its broadcasts after receiving a complaint from the Undersecretary of Telecommunications [*Subsecretaria de Telecomunicaciones*] (SDT) before the Cochrane Prosecutor's Office, for operating without authorization. According to the information available, Madipro, a traditional radio station in the Region of Aysén, would have tried to obtain a concession that would allow it to regulate its operation but failed to win one in the periodic bids that the SDT calls for.[[366]](#footnote-366) Also, the director Yaline Riveros would have agreed to the conditional suspension of the procedure under the commitment not to carry out emissions for a year.
239. On September 16, Law 21.035 was published, which modifies the General Telecommunications Law [*Ley General de Telecomunicaciones*] in relation to notifications during the processing of granting concessions. The law incorporates a transitory article that provides that the concessionaires of the broadcasting of minimum coverage service who undertook the new regime established by the Law 20.433[[367]](#footnote-367), and who could not acquire the condition of community radios, whether it was due to not to having published or publishing outside of the term of the decree granting concessions, may participate one time in the contest of the following four-month period, to renew or receive their concession, as appropriate.[[368]](#footnote-368)
240. On various occasions, the IACHR and the Office of the Special Rapporteur have recognized that community media in our region fulfill a fundamental function for the exercise by diverse sectors of society of freedom of expression and access to information.[[369]](#footnote-369) In that sense, it is necessary for the states to legally recognize community media and to consider fair spectrum reserves for this type of media, along with adequate conditions of access to licenses that would take into account the circumstances. Similarly, community media must benefit from fair and simple procedures for obtaining licenses, must not have to comply with technological or other types of requirements that involve disproportionate barriers for access to licenses, and in their operation must not be the target of differentiated treatments that are not adequately justified.[[370]](#footnote-370)
241. **COLOMBIA**
242. The Office of the Special Rapporteur observes with concern that situations of violence against journalists reported in 2017 increased if compared with previous years. In October, radio journalist Efigenia Vásquez Astudillo was murdered in the Cauca region of Colombia. In addition, the Office of the Special Rapporteur continued to record multiple attacks, kidnappings, and threats against journalists and media workers, and notes with concern the information indicating an increase in these situations in relation to 2016. The Office of the Special Rapporteur particularly notes that different episodes of aggression against journalists were carried out by law enforcement agents during journalistic coverage activities. Several episodes of stigmatizing statements were also recorded.
243. On the other hand, the Office of the Special Rapporteur continued to receive information on the excessive use of force in the context of social demonstrations and protests.
244. The Office of the Special Rapporteur received information on progress during 2017 in the investigation and administration of justice related to specific cases of homicides and other crimes against journalists in Colombia. However, it continues to note with concern the high levels of impunity that persist in relation to the dozens of murders that have occurred in the last two decades and hundreds of other aggressions. The Office of the Special Rapporteur also values the efforts of the Colombian State to reduce violence against journalists through the implementation of the protection program managed by the National Protection Unit [*Unidad Nacional de Protección* ] (UNP), in an effort that has been sustained over time and takes note of the reform proposals presented by civil society to achieve a comprehensive policy of prevention and protection for those who exercise freedom of expression.
245. Through 2017, this Office registered positive sentences related to the protection of freedom of expression in the country. However, the Office of the Special Rapporteur also noted the proliferation of various judgments which have not strictly incorporated international standards on the matter.
246. The special situation the country is undergoing to strengthen peace and democracy, based on the implementation of the Peace Agreement signed between the government and the FARC guerrilla in 2016, also brings the opportunity to the implementation of those agreed measures to strengthen the rights of freedom of expression, association, and assembly and political rights in general. At the same time, it takes note of the proposals formulated by civil society regarding the importance of the design and operation of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace [*Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz*] (JEP) and the other mechanisms that make up the Integral System for Truth, Justice, Reparation, and non-Repetition [*Sistema Integral de Verdad, Justicia, Reparación y no Repetición]* incorporate transparency standards that guarantee the right to information and the reconstruction of the truth and memory to which the victims and society as a whole are entitled. It also notes the importance of these different mechanisms addressing the impact that the conflict has had on freedom of expression, journalists, and the media, as a fundamental pillar of the democratic system.[[371]](#footnote-371)
247. **Progress**
248. On July 24 the Ninth Chamber of Review of the Constitutional Court [*Sala Novena de Revisión de la Corte Constitucional*] issued a ruling that protects the right to due process and freedom of information and protects the right of citizens to know information about the harmful effects of sugary drinks to health.[[372]](#footnote-372) The decision referred to a writ of amparo filed against the Superintendence of Industry and Commerce [*Superintendencia de Industria y Comercio*], an organization that had forbidden the emission of a commercial talking about the harmful effects of sugar-sweetened beverages to health. The willing prohibition applied to any means of communication, including web pages. The Constitutional Court referred to the principle that freedom of expression is protected in the same way on the internet as in offline environments. The ruling warned the agency that in the exercise of its administrative powers in ​​consumer protection, cannot take any action that implies prior control over the information, regardless of the media through which it is transmitted, and that can only establish subsequently liability, within the framework of which the fundamental rights of those involved must be respected, which includes the right to due administrative process.
249. In another order of ideas, on January 30 Fabio López Escobar was deported from the United States, being fugitive from justice after being convicted in 2015 as co-author of the homicide of journalist Orlando Sierra in 2002.[[373]](#footnote-373)
250. On September 8, the Third Specialized Criminal Judge of Neiva [*Juez Tercero Penal Especializado de Neiva*] imposed a prison sentence of 47 years, 6 months, and 2 days on Juan Camilo Ortíz for the material authorship of the murder of the journalist Flor Alba Núñez, which occurred on September 10, 2015 in Pitalito, Huila.[[374]](#footnote-374) As reported, the ruling would have highlighted the profession of the victim as a determinant of the crime. Local organizations warned of the need for the investigation to continue since the other material author of the murder has not been brought to justice, nor have the intellectual authors of the crime been identified. The Prosecutor's Office reported that it was continuing to investigate.[[375]](#footnote-375)
251. On September 6, the Supreme Court of Justice [*Corte Suprema de Justicia*] sentenced the former director of the now extinct Administrative Department of Security [*Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad*] (DAS), Jorge Aurelio Noguera Cotes, to seven years and 10 months in prison, as co-author of the crime of aggravated conspiracy, after verifying his responsibility in the interceptions of communications, surveillance, and illegal monitoring of human rights defenders, NGOs, political leaders, and journalists.[[376]](#footnote-376) The Criminal Cassation Chamber [*Sala de Casación Penal*] determined that, Noguera Cotes designed and organized, with the then adviser José Miguel Narváez, and members of the General Directorate of Intelligence [*Dirección General de Inteligencia*], the so-called G-3, a group that operated between March 2003 and October 2005 and was "created with calling for permanence to intercept without judicial order of telephones, mails, fax, and follow-ups of people who did not exercise nor was attributable any illicit activity, with respect to those who could only reproach their opposition to the national government." The ruling also ordered "to give copies of the procedural documents (...) to the Accusations Committee of the House of Representatives [*Comisión de Acusaciones de la Cámara de Representantes*], so that if it finds merit, investigates former President Álvaro Uribe Vélez for the conduct referred to in this ruling, if it has not yet done so". In substantiating its decision on this point, the Court stated that "several of the victims, including Claudia Julieta Duque and Alirio Uribe Muñoz, stated "that the follow-ups and interceptions occurred during his government" who designated them as human rights traffickers and terrorists, adjectives that associated to the criminal actions carried out by the DAS during his term." [[377]](#footnote-377) The former president issued a certificate denying having given illegal orders to those in charge of the DAS.[[378]](#footnote-378)
252. The Office of the Special Rapporteur highlights the progress reported, notwithstanding reiterates its concern on the fact that impunity for crimes against journalists continues to be very high, which has been accompanied by delays in the resolution of the majority of crimes against journalists. In this regard, it notes that during the public hearings held in July in the framework of the 163 Period of Sessions of the IACHR, the Foundation for Freedom of the Press [*Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa*] (FLIP) reported that 99.7 percent of impunity persisted in murders of journalists, 100 percent impunity in cases of threats, and 47.7 percent of the statute of limitations for investigating homicides against journalists and media workers.[[379]](#footnote-379) According to abundant information provided by FLIP after the hearing, of the 153 cases of journalists murdered because of their work in Colombia since 1977 to date, 76 have prescribed, that is, almost 50 percent, while the great majority of homicide cases -128- remain in total impunity. In only 22 cases there has been some type of conviction against material authors, and only in 3 cases there has been convictions against intellectual authors" the organization reported.[[380]](#footnote-380) It added that "the situation is even more worrying in terms of threats against journalists." In this regard, FLIP indicated that between January 2016 and the date of the submission of information, the entity "has documented death threats against 198 reporters. These cases, like all the complaints filed in the last ten years before the Attorney General's Office, are in the investigation stage with total impunity." Likewise, the IACHR observes that in accordance with the results of an investigation published in August of 2017 by the International Federation of Journalists [*Federación Internacional de Periodistas*] (FIP) "out of the total number of attacks against investigative reporters between September 1986 and April 2017, only 0.2 out of 10 cases reached trial stage or were convicted."[[381]](#footnote-381) The report indicated that these data arise from figures given by the Attorney General's Office and correspond to 673 cases registered in a period of 31 years, in which 773 journalists were victims of various crimes. The document indicated that according to the data obtained, the impunity of murders of journalists is 95.23%. In addition, it reported that only one case of threats of a total of 304 investigated achieved conviction. The Prosecutor's Office informed that a specific strategy has been implemented to obtain procedural progress in the crimes against journalists.[[382]](#footnote-382)
253. **Murders**
254. On August 27, photojournalist Elmer Agudelo Vidales was murdered at the door of his house in Palmira. The local police would have reported that the crime would not be linked to the exercise of journalism but would be related to a personal problem, previously reported, and offered a reward to identify the perpetrator or perpetrators of the crime. The Colombian Federation of Journalists [*Federación Colombiana de Periodistas*] (FECOLPER) urged the authorities in charge of the investigation to clarify the events and "not to reject the hypothesis that his murder may be related to his reporting activity."[[383]](#footnote-383) The State said that the investigation was under way.[[384]](#footnote-384)
255. On October 8, radio journalist Efigenia Vásquez Astudillo was murdered in the Cauca region, Colombia. According to the information available, the speaker of the indigenous radio station *Renacer Kokonuko* died after receiving bullet wounds during a police eviction operation of Kokonuko People community members protesting in Puracé, department of Cauca.[[385]](#footnote-385) In a statement issued the same day the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia [*Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia*] (ONIC) indicated that the journalist was killed by the Mobile Anti-riot Squad [*Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios*] (ESMAD) of the Police. Different organizations indicated that the *journalist* was exercising her work. On October 30, the Office of the Special Rapporteur issued a statement expressing deep concern over the murder and urging the State to conduct the investigation of these events with due diligence and to punish those responsible.[[386]](#footnote-386) As reported by the Foundation for Press Freedom [*Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa*], on November 3, ESMAD attacked the station *Renacer Kokonuko.*[[387]](#footnote-387) According to the information provided by the organization, from midday on, confrontations took place between the public force and community members in the Aguas Tibias site, where the journalist was murdered on October 8. The station had been sharing with its listeners the statement of the council in which the community was summoned to join the demonstration.

1. **Attacks, threats, and intimidation to journalists and media**
2. On July 5, during the IACHR’s 163rd period of session, the public hearing "Situation of the right to freedom of expression in Colombia" was held, in which representatives of the Foundation for Freedom of the Press [*Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa*] (FLIP) participated, as well as a delegation of the State.[[388]](#footnote-388) The organization indicated that from 2016 to the date of the hearing it had registered a balance of 439 journalists who were victims of aggressions. The civil society organization assured that these data reflect that still "in Colombia there are forbidden zones" and a "scenario of self-censorship" in different regions.[[389]](#footnote-389) During the hearing civil society acknowledged some efforts of the public force to minimize the regressions against the press, but indicated that "it continues being a recurrent aggressor" of journalists, having registered "serious cases" of bullet impact against journalists who cover protest and measures of seizure of equipment and journalistic material in coverages. For its part, the State ratified its commitment to freedom of expression and the exercise of journalism in Colombia, and reported on the measures adopted to strengthen existing protection and investigation mechanisms, which will be addressed later in this report. In its observations on the draft version of this report, the State pointed out that in the past three years the national Protection Unit had conducted more than 450 risk assessments. It pointed out that while an assessment is being conducted the situation is monitored by an analyst who is empowered to order emergency measures in the event of an imminent risk.[[390]](#footnote-390)
3. The firearms attacks, threats, and intimidation against journalists and other media workers were repeated in different areas of Colombia throughout 2017. According to public information on January 12, journalists Cristian Herrera and Andrés González were attacked by unknown individuals in Cúcuta, department of Norte del Santander while they were traveling in a vehicle of the National Protection Unit [*Unidad Nacional de Protección]* (UNP), since Herrera would be beneficiary of the protection mechanism since 2014. Despite the shots and blows that the vehicle received, all were unharmed.[[391]](#footnote-391) On January 27, journalist Edwin Montiel, director of the *Frontera Stereo* radio station in Maicao, department of La Guajira, was the victim of an attack when, arriving at his house, unknown individuals shot him, hitting the vehicle several times. The media worker, who was unharmed, reportedly claimed that the attack was related to his work at the station and the complaints he made about public security in the border region with Venezuela.[[392]](#footnote-392) As this report was going to press, the State reported that the journalist still benefited from protection measures.[[393]](#footnote-393) On March 13, the Colombian Federation of Journalists issued an alert reporting the threats received by journalists Laura Toscanna, María Bustamante, David Márquez, and José Sarmiento, from the department of Sucre, and by journalist Lucio Torres, from Cartagena, due to their journalistic activity, among other cases.[[394]](#footnote-394) According to the State, additional information was requested to the journalists. The State also reported that Torres had been granted protection measures.[[395]](#footnote-395)
4. For its part, the threats against Ricardo Ruidíaz continued through 2017. On May 14, the journalist would havbe received death threats while his radio program *'Rompecabezas arma corazones'* was broadcasting on *Colmundo Radio*, in the city of Bogota. In recent months the journalist reported the crimes committed by the Gulf Clan against children, especially girls. Also, on November 23, unknown individuals would have thrown a grenade when the reporter entered his residence in Bogota aboard a vehicle assigned for his protection. The device did not explode nor were injured people reported. The journalist maintained that the police action was irregular since one of the police officers had picked up the grenade and offered public statements that would be incosistent: first he said that the grenade was a toy, and later that it was a stunning grenade.[[396]](#footnote-396) The journalist has been provided protective measures.[[397]](#footnote-397)
5. On July 28, journalist Claudia Gurisatti, director of *Noticias RCN* and *NTC 24*, denounced she was victim of a harassment campaign carried on social networks that could have put her personal integrity at risk.[[398]](#footnote-398)
6. On the other hand, according to the information available on August 23, Mauricio Cardoso, a journalist for the newspaper *Extra Caquetá*, was wounded by unknown individuals when he was traveling by motorbike to his home in Florence and three men intercepted him and knocked him out of the motorcycle, after which he was wounded with a dagger. The attackers would have told the journalist that they were going to assassinate him "for being a whistleblower". One of the men would have pointed the reporter with a firearm threatening to shoot him.[[399]](#footnote-399)
7. During the last year, the Office of the Special Rapporteur received with concern information on kidnappings of journalists in Colombia. On June 17, the Dutch journalists Derk Johannes Bolt and Eugenio Ernest Marie Follender were kidnapped in Norte de Santander - Catatumbo region - by the guerrilla of the National Liberation Army [*Ejército de* Liberación *Nacional*] (ELN). The journalists were released at dawn on the 24th of the same month and handed over to a commission of the Ombudsman's Office. According to FLIP, this organization has carried out four kidnappings in this region over the past three years.[[400]](#footnote-400)
8. The Office of the Special Rapporteur documented other situations in which ELN participation was indicated. Such is the case of the journalists of the newspaper *El País* Hugo Mario Cárdenas López, who had been told by the State that he enjoyed protection measures[[401]](#footnote-401), Oswaldo Paéz Fonseca, and Octavio Villegas Salinas, who were reportedly intimidated on March 9 by people carrying weapons, who would have kept their journalistic equipment, during a coverage in the rural area of the municipality of El Tambo, department of Cauca.[[402]](#footnote-402) Similarly, according to the information available on March 28, a communication attributed to the ELN guerrillas was circulated, in which statements were made against the station of Arauca *La Voz del Cinaruco* and against the *La Silla Vacía* website.[[403]](#footnote-403) The State reported that several journalists for *La Voz del Cinaruco* are currently being protected[[404]](#footnote-404).
9. The Office of the Special Rapporteur also learned of attacks against journalists and media workers during the coverage of police procedures and public demonstrations, in which the participation of law enforcement agents, and in some cases also of demonstrators, was reported. In addition to the murder of the journalist Efigenia Vázquez in which, as indicated, there are claims about the alleged responsibility of members of ESMAD that are being investigated, for example, on February 10 it was reported that the reporter Esteban Peralta (*Campo Television* channel) was assaulted in Santa Marta, Magdalena by members of the National Police.[[405]](#footnote-405) On March 21, journalists Martha Elena Monroy and Helmer González of the newspaper *La Patria* would have been detained by members of the National Police for a short period of time in the municipality of Aguadas, Caldas.[[406]](#footnote-406) Other cases on which complaints were filed regarding the alleged participation of State agents in the facts are outlined in the following section. On October 8, a humanitarian mission and journalists, who were in Tumaco to follow up on the serious events that had occurred a few days earlier in the area that led to the violent deaths of six people in confrontations between peasants and the public forces, were attacked mid-tour by the National Police with several stun bombs. As reported during the attack, shots were also heard.[[407]](#footnote-407)
10. On the other hand, according to information of public knowledge, on October 5, *Caracol Televisión* journalist María Camila Orozco was attacked by a businessman in the context of a hearing of the *Panama Papers* case.[[408]](#footnote-408)
11. Likewise, throughout 2017 the Corporation of Journalists of Arauca [*Corporación de Periodistas de Arauca*] (COPAR) reported that all the equipment of the *Emisora Arauca Stéreo* FM 100.3 was stolen from its transmission floor. The entity maintained that the act constituted an attack on freedom of expression and demanded that it be investigated.[[409]](#footnote-409) On October 25, the Rural Press Agenda [*Agenda de Prensa Rural*] reported the manipulation of a computer and several hard disks of its facilities with sensitive information.[[410]](#footnote-410)
12. On November 11, journalists of the portal *Crónicas Desarmadas* were detained for around 14 hours by agents of the National Army [*Ejércitoi Nacional*] in Tibú, North of Santander, for performing an investigation in the region by using a drone. According to available information, the agents accused the journalists of nocturnal overflight over military bases and, withouth warrant, tried to confiscate their journalistic equipments.[[411]](#footnote-411)
13. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
14. **Social Protest**
15. On April 20, the Constitutional Court issued a judgment declaring the articles of the Police Code which dealt with the right to assembly and protest to be unconstitutional. Said articles established among others the obligation to give written notice to the administrative authorities of the location, said document must have at least the signature of three persons and be submitted 48 hours in advance. The Constitutional Court after studying its jurisprudence, determined that what was enshrined in the revised articles "consisted of an integral regulation of the fundamental rights of peaceful public gathering and protest, with an impact on the interrelated and concurrent rights of freedom of expression and political rights, which dealt with the structural elements and the basic principles of those same rights, in the sense of having established limits, restrictions, exceptions and prohibitions", therefore such regulation had to be carried out through a law of statutory character and not of ordinary character as is the law under study. The Court determined that the Congress of the Republic should issue a rule with consideration of the above.[[412]](#footnote-412)
16. On June 12, the Third Section of the State Council [*Sección Tercera del Consejo de Estado*] convicted the National Police for the events surrounding the death of student Jhonny Silva and the injuries suffered by another student as part of a demonstration that was intervened by agents of the Mobile Anti-Riot Squad [***Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios*]** (ESMAD) in 2005.[[413]](#footnote-413) The State Council ordered as a measure of non-repetition, that within two (2) months counted from the execution of the judgment, the Ministry of National Defense - National Police - must implement within the ESMAD squadrons that operate in throughout the country a comprehensive training course in guarantee and protection of Human Rights of people who exercise the right of assembly, public demonstration, and protest, this in order to prevent events such as those that gave rise to this action.
17. On July 19, the World Organization against Torture (OMCT) made public the preliminary results on the international research mission carried out in the country between July 11 and 19[[414]](#footnote-414). As part of its conclusions, the OMCT indicated that "criminalization in cases of social protest continues to be worrisome" in Colombia, noting that the mission received "various information regarding the use of a repressive approach to the handling of peaceful protests." It maintained that there were several cases that included defenders in the department of Cauca and in the context of the civic strike in the city of Buenaventura.
18. Various journalists and media workers were attacked during the coverage of protest demonstrations in 2017. According to the information available, on May 9 alternative journalist Pedro García was shot while covering the Indigenous Minga in the municipality of Cornito, Department of Cauca. In the same events one of the indigenous and children who participated in the protest would have lost his life due to a projectile impact.[[415]](#footnote-415) On July 1, *Colombia Informa* reported the illegal detention of its correspondent in Santander, María Montiel, when she was covering demonstrations in the community of La Mata in Ayacucho, Cesar, and who had been illegally detained for 31 hours.[[416]](#footnote-416) In August, during the coverage of the mining strike in the municipalities of Segovia and Remedios, Antioquia, the journalist Francisco Pérez de *Teleantioquia Noticias* reportedly suffered different attacks by private individuals and agents of the Mobile Anti-Riot Squad tried to take his camera away and called him a troublemaker and a harasser, as reported[[417]](#footnote-417). On November 1, two journalists from *NC Noticias*, *Marcha Patriótica,* and *Prensa Rural* were attacked by agents of the National Police in Norte de Santander while they were covering the farmer’s strike in the Catatumbo region. According to the claim of the reporters, the officers confiscated journalistic material and threw fuel on the journalists.[[418]](#footnote-418)
19. The Office of the Special Rapporteur also recorded other situations in which the excessive use of force against the civilian population was reported in the context of protests and social demonstrations, which are outlined below:
20. On April 19, a group of people with disabilities, including children, were protesting in front of the facilities of the Bogota City Hall, when one of the members that was part of the operation deployed by the Mobile Anti-Riot Squad [*Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios*] (ESMAD) used tear gas to disperse the protest that also coincided with a protest by small transporters. The Bogota Police Commander indicated that the police procedure did not conform to the protocol and announced that internal investigations were being carried out against the police agent who threw the gas.[[419]](#footnote-419)
21. According to information of public knowledge, on May 16 a general strike began in Buenaventura that lasted for 22 days and during which marches and protests were held. The mobilizations were in demand of access to labor sources, housing, drinking water, education, and health, among other economic, social, and cultural rights. During the civic stop, demonstrators made blockades on the roads that connect the municipality with Cali, capital of the department; According to the information available, the blockades were dispersed by the Mobile Anti-riot Squad [*Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios*] (ESMAD) of the National Police where the abusive use of force by the soldiers was reported, who would have thrown tear gas indiscriminately towards the protesters, among those children and older adults.[[420]](#footnote-420) On June 13, the IACHR issued a statement in which it expressed concern over the repression of protests and demonstrations in Buenaventura by the Mobile Anti-riot Squad and urged the State to investigate whether there was excessive use of force and to adopt urgent and reasonable to fully guarantee the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression[[421]](#footnote-421). On July 7 it was made public that the Attorney General's Office opened an investigation into the alleged abuse of force in which ESMAD agents would have incurred in these events, given the filing of 169 complaints for this reason.[[422]](#footnote-422)
22. On June 9, ESMAD blocked and dispersed with water jets a massive mobilization of teachers in Bogotá.[[423]](#footnote-423) According to the information available, several demonstrators reported that they were also attacked with tear gas and beaten by the authorities. The Colombian Federation of Educators [*Federación Colombiana de Educadores*] (FECODE) also reported the repression of the ESMAD against the mobilization of teachers in Nariño.[[424]](#footnote-424)
23. On August 19, a verification commission was held in Segovia, Antioquia, composed of the Nodo Antioquia, Colombia Europe Coordination [*Coordinación Colombia Europa*] (CCEEU), Social process of guarantees for defenders [*Proceso social de garantías para defensores*], Popular Training Institute [*Instituto Popular de Capacitación*], Cahucopana, Legal Freedom Corporation [*Corporación Jurídica Libertad*], and the Human Rights Committee Gustavo Marulanda [*Comité de derechos humanos Gustavo Marulanda*], denounced through a statement the "military and war treatment that is being given to the protests" that were carried out for a month in the municipalities of Segovia and Remedios by mining workers.[[425]](#footnote-425) According to information published by various media outlets, the mining strike that lasted for 42 days left three people dead and several injured in circumstances over which contradictory versions have been reported by demonstrators and law enforcement authorities. In addition, police authorities reported that several police officers were injured by demonstrators.
24. On October 5, in the municipality of Tumaco six peasants who were in a mobilization against the forced eradication of illicit crops were killed and at least 20 people injured.[[426]](#footnote-426) The inhabitants of the region blamed the members of the National Police for the events. In a press release issued on the same day, the Army and National Police indicated that preliminary inquiries indicated that "apparently 'Guacho' and his residual GAO group of the FARC's Daniel Aldana, launched at least five bomb cylinders against the members of the Public Force and against the crowd that was there, and then attacked the demonstrators and the authorities with indiscriminate fire of rifles and machine guns."[[427]](#footnote-427) In a press release issued on October 9, the Ombudsman's Office made a series of recommendations and stated that "during the visit to the area, the Ombudsman's commission did not observe at first sight any evidence of the effects that generates the shock wave resulting from the activation of pump cylinders, such as craters, splinter damage, among others."[[428]](#footnote-428)
25. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[429]](#footnote-429) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[430]](#footnote-430)
26. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[431]](#footnote-431)
27. **Protection mechanism**
28. According to the information provided by the State, as of July 31, 2017, 139 journalists and social media workers throughout the country were protected by the National Protection Unit. 63 percent of which are located in 24 departments of the country and 37 percent in Bogotá.[[432]](#footnote-432) Likewise, the State reported that as of September 2016, the Risk Assessment Protocol for the Population of Journalists and/or Social Media Workers [*Protocolo de Evaluación de Riesgo para la Población de Periodistas y/o Comunicadores Sociales*] was implemented, which takes into account the specificities and particularities that must be observed at each stage of the risk assessment process when the beneficiaries are journalists and/or social media workers.
29. The State emphasized that said Protocol was built with the participation of the Foundation for Freedom of the Press [Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa] (FLIP) and the Colombian Federation for Journalists [*Federación Colombiana para Periodistas*] (FECOLPER).[[433]](#footnote-433) Throughout 2017, although civil society organizations have recognized the role of the UNP in reducing the murders of journalists in recent years, they have insisted that there are still problems in the implementation of protection schemes. In this regard, for example, on February 2, FLIP informed the national government of its withdrawal from the Committee on Risk and Recommendation of Measures [*Comité de Riesgo y Recomendación de Medidas*] (CERREM) due to discrepancies with some criteria that had been applied for the risk.[[434]](#footnote-434)
30. During the public hearing on July 5, FLIP also held that the response to the risk faced by journalists is "fragmented." In this sense, the organization raised the need to create a National Prevention System that involves the three branches of public power.[[435]](#footnote-435) In accordance with the diagnosis of the Prevention and Protection *Program* carried out by FLIP, the current mechanism "is exclusively reactive. According to the study, such restructuring should guarantee and/or improve the following aspects: (i) processing times and response of requests; (i) interim protection during the ordinary protection procedure; (iii) protection measures with a differential, ethnic, and gender approach; (iv) coordination of the protection measures with the beneficiary (v) collective protection; (vi) centralization of the decision-making bodies of the measures; and (v) strategy of prevention and fight against impunity.
31. The Office of the Special Rapporteur appreciates the efforts of the Colombian State to reduce violence against journalists through the implementation of the protection program managed by the National Protection Unit (UNP), in an effort that has been sustained over time. Notwithstanding the foregoing, it reiterates the need to continue strengthening and improving this system through the effective coordination of state bodies responsible for protecting journalists and social media workers at risk and the authorities responsible for investigating, prosecuting, and punishing those responsible for threats, harassment, attacks, and murders perpetrated against said population because of their profession.[[436]](#footnote-436)
32. The State also informed that the process of formulation of the Public Policy to Guarantee the Right to Freedom of Expression of Persons who Exercise Journalistic Activity in Colombia is in "a stage of growth so that it is formalized by the National Government by means of a Decree". However, the Commission also received information that during 2017 civil society organizations publicly warned about the halt of the aforementioned process.[[437]](#footnote-437) The Office of the Special Rapporteur notes that the program to develop this public policy has been in the design stage for more than two years and, in the current context, it is particularly important to implement it as soon as possible.
33. **Stigmatizing statements**
34. In this period, the Office of the Special Rapporteur also monitored the climate of hostility against the press, characterized by stigmatizing statements against journalists, issued by high-ranking public officials.
35. In March 2017, the former ministers Gina Parody and Cecilia Álvarez accused *Noticias RCN* of issuing false and biased information when referring to a journalistic investigation by the channel about a contract for public works.[[438]](#footnote-438) The high-ranking officials requested that the information be rectified, which was rejected by the channel, as it maintained that the information disclosed was "objective, truthful and impartial, and as a consequence rectification is not appropriate."[[439]](#footnote-439)
36. On June 1, 2017, the Undersecretary of the Senate, Saul Cruz, claimed that he had been the victim of an attack by the *Noticias Uno* news team before the plenary session of the Congress. Several senators took the complaint to be true and raised the need to investigate the facts and establish criminal sanctions against reporters. Subsequently, videos and testimonies revealed that the undersecretary would have simulated physical aggression.[[440]](#footnote-440) On November 29, the Office of the Attorney General [*Procuraduría General de la Nación*] (PGR) reported that it sanctioned Cruz Bonilla, with the suspension in the exercise of his position and a special ineligibility for a period of eight months. The PGR maintained that "by the time the subject investgated intervened in the plenary of the Senate of the Republic, his ability to discern was normal and he was even able to determine a real fact from a fake one" and concluded that he affected the integrity and transparency of the public service and the legislative function. The ruling was appealed and will be resolved by the Disciplinary Chamber of Congress.[[441]](#footnote-441) Subsequently, according to the State, the PGN punished that same official with eight months suspension from that office for the same incident along with special disqualification for the same length of time.[[442]](#footnote-442)
37. Other events of this type took place on social networks: on May 15, Senator Álvaro Uribe Vélez, through his twitter account, indicated journalist Julián Martínez of *Noticias Uno*, was a pro-FARC journalist.[[443]](#footnote-443) On May 16, the senator published another tweet in which he pointed to the weekly magazine columnist Daniel Samper of "little bandit" and "abuser of newborn girls."[[444]](#footnote-444) Later, on July 14, in another tweet he called him "rapist of children."[[445]](#footnote-445) Through various statements and a public letter, organizations linked to the defense of freedom of expression and dozens of personalities warned that this type of behavior is aimed at silencing critical journalism.[[446]](#footnote-446) Finally, Samper took the case to court and on August 2 the Criminal Chamber of the Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogotá [*Sala Penal del Tribunal Superior del Distrito Judicial de Bogotá*] granted him constitutional protection and ordered Senator Uribe to issue a firm and precise retraction of his syndications to the plaintiff through the same network in which he expressed them, making it clear that the statements are not based on available evidence and that, therefore, what he affirmed with regard to the journalist is not true. The legislator expressed his disagreement with the court decision but complied with it by means of a statement issued on August 5, in which he retracted his statements but remained critical of the journalist's work. In the same period, other situations of harassment and stigmatizing statements that would involve local authorities and political figures against journalists were made public.[[447]](#footnote-447)
38. On July 26, the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression issued a statement in which it warned of several episodes of stigmatization and violence against journalists in the country and recalled that public officials have the obligation to adopt a public discourse that contributes to prevent violence against journalists, which requires them to refrain from making statements that expose journalists and media workers to a greater risk of violence.[[448]](#footnote-448) . In its observations on the draft version of this report, the State indicated that such occurrences "are isolated incidents that do not reflect a pattern of stigmatization or violence against journalists on account of their profession" and it claimed that "they clearly demonstrate that it is not State policy to attack journalists."[[449]](#footnote-449)

1. **Subsequent liabilities**
2. On February 28, the Municipal Criminal Court of Chocontá ordered the arrest of journalist Aldemar Solano for the contempt of writ of amparo ruling that ordered him to rectify and remove from his blog an article published in the blog *Garabatos* in November of 2016 related to complaints of work-related harassment against a judge from the municipality of Sesquilé, department of Cundinamarca. Said decision was confirmed by the Municipal Criminal Court of Choconta on March 27 and, in addition to the arrest, the withdrawal of the published article and the payment of a fine were ordered.[[450]](#footnote-450) On March 31, the Criminal Court of the Chocontá Circuit reportedly revoked the sanction imposed by the Municipal Criminal Court after the journalist withdrew the article from its Facebook page and from his blog.[[451]](#footnote-451)
3. In accordance with Principle 10 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression, “privacy laws should not inhibit or restrict investigation and dissemination of information of public interest. The protection of a person’s reputation should only be guaranteed through civil sanctions in those cases in which the person offended is a public official, a public person or a private person who has voluntarily become involved in matters of public interest. In addition, in these cases, it must be proven that in disseminating the news, the social communicator had the specific intent to inflict harm, was fully aware that false news was disseminated, or acted with gross negligence in efforts to determine the truth or falsity of such news.”
4. **Right to rectification or response**
5. According to the information available, on four times during 2017 and by judicial order, the senator and presidential candidate Claudia López had to rectify herself on declarations made through her Twitter account and in journalistic programs.[[452]](#footnote-452) In November, a decision of the Supreme Court of Justice ordered Lopez to retract explicitly and publicly, through a radio station from her previous statement that, in her opinion, the *Cambio Radical* party is "an assembly to commit crimes with legal personhood".[[453]](#footnote-453) Previously she was ordered to retract from statements that had been posted on Twitter regarding the representative to the Chamber of Boyacá, Ciro Alejandro Ramírez[[454]](#footnote-454)  and the Attorney General, Nestor Humberto Martinez[[455]](#footnote-455) , and for statements made in a news program regarding the former Minister of Housing Luis Felipe Henao.[[456]](#footnote-456) As a result, the newspaper *El Espectador* published an editorial in which it stated that "[t]he cases involving Senator Claudia López demonstrate a disturbing pattern that threatens freedom of expression in Colombia".[[457]](#footnote-457)
6. **Source confidentiality**
7. On June 13, *Noticias RCN* reported through a statement that the Joint Monitoring and Verification Command of the Ministry of National Defense [*Comando Conjunto de Monitoreo y Verificación del Ministerio de Defensa Nacional*] summoned the journalist of that media, Maritza Aristizabal, to testify under oath.[[458]](#footnote-458) *Noticias RCN* said that this notification was part of a series of pressures that the media and its journalist received as a result of a report issued on May 26 in which a letter signed by General Javier Flórez and directed to Peace Commissioner Sergio Jaramillo was revealed. The press release states that two senior officials asked *Noticias RCN* to confirm or deny the identity of a source of information, as well as to deliver a document that is part of the investigative journalistic work to which it refused. *Noticias RCN* indicated that it informed its discontent to the Ministry of National Defense; A few hours later, the director received a call from a senior officer of the National Army who announced that the citation was canceled and that the investigation for which the journalist was summoned was closed. The Foundation for Freedom of the Press documented the case and issued a statement in which it rejected "that the military forces use unconstitutional mechanisms to pressure journalists to reveal their sources."[[459]](#footnote-459)
8. According to the information available, on June 13, the Third Municipal Criminal Warranty Control Judge of Buga [*Juez Tercero Penal Municipal de Control de Garantías de Buga*] authorized a search on the Facebook account of journalist William Solano, a journalist investigated for the alleged crime of insult, thus pretending to have access to his sources. On July 21, the First Judge of the Buga Circuit [*Juez Primero del Circuito de Buga*] denied the requested amparo. On July 27, FLIP appealed the decision in the second instance by the Superior Court of the Buga District.[[460]](#footnote-460)
9. The Inter-American Commission recalls that Principle 8 of the IACHR's Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that "[e]very social communicator has the right to keep his/her source of information, notes, personal and professional archives confidential."
10. **Censorship**
11. On March 31, 2016, the Constitutional Court upheld the decision of a municipal court to order a user to remove Facebook content in which one person accused another of being a thief.[[461]](#footnote-461) The Court held that the Facebook exhibition of the plaintiff's image accompanied by the assertion on her "thief" quality escapes any subjective or opinion scenario and, on the contrary, refers to an accusation of a specific factual situation related to with the commission of a crime, but without it being proved true. The ruling stated that in these cases "the effective fundamental guarantee includes, in addition to the cessation of the violation with the order to withdraw the publication, the assessment of the rectification measure aimed at the repair of the affected fundamental rights".
12. On February 3, the Sixth Review Chamber of the Constitutional Court *[Sala Sexta de Revisión de la Corte Constitucional*] adopted a decision in relation to a writ of amparo filed by a merchant through which it ordered Google Inc, in his capacity as owner of the "Blogger.com" tool, to delete a blog, considering that "its content imputes anonymously unproven information on the commission of the crime of fraud and other expressions that may be considered insults and slander against the plaintiff and his company, and given that the latter does not have another effective remedy for his claim."[[462]](#footnote-462) Additionally, the Chamber warned Google that while it does not regulate the subject matter of anonymous blogs with defamatory, disproportionate, slanderous, or abusive content in Blogger.com's content policy, the company must, without a court order, eliminate content in which the affected cannot defend, controvert, or rectify information by anonymous nature. Likewise, the judgment published in September, ordered that Google Colombia and Google Inc register in the ICT registry under the Ministry of Information and Communications Technologies *[Ministerio de Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones*]. Finally, it urged the aforementioned Ministry to regulate the protection of the rights of Internet users, especially in relation to abusive, defamatory, dishonorable, slanderous, and insulting publications. At the close of this report Google had raised a nullity incident[[463]](#footnote-463)
13. Principle 5 of the Declaration states that “Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression.” Principle 13, in turn, affirms that “The [media] have the right to carry out their role in an independent manner. Direct or indirect pressures exerted upon journalists or other social communicators to stifle the dissemination of information are incompatible with freedom of expression.”
14. **Access to public Information**
15. On April 5, Decree 588 of 2017 was issued through which the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition [*Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la no Repetición*] (CEV) is organized. Said Commission is an independent entity, of constitutional rank, with legal status, administrative, budgetary, and technical autonomy, which will have a term of three years. Its objective is to contribute to the clarification of past events, promote, and contribute to the recognition of the victims and promote coexistence in the territories. Title IV of the Decree deals with access to information. In this regard, it provides that all state entities must provide collaboration and provide the Commission with the information available to them regarding the fulfillment of the mandate of the Commission. It indicates that "in accordance with the provisions of Article 21 of the Statutory Law of Transparency and the Right of Access to National Public Information [*Ley Estatutaria de Transparencia y del Derecho de Acceso a la Información Pública Nacional*]" reservations regarding access to public information in the face of Human Rights violations or IHL infractions are not opposable. In compliance with its mandate, the CEV may request from public institutions the information necessary for the exercise of its functions, without any reservation against it." It specifies that when "it is reserved information, the CEV, in any case, must guarantee, in writing, the reservation of the same, the transfer of the legal reserve of the information, subscribe reserve commitment minutes, and observe the securities and levels of classification enshrined in Statutory Law 1621 of 2013, Statutory Law 1712 of 2014, its regulatory decrees, and other relevant regulations, without prejudice to criminal, disciplinary, and fiscal actions that may arise due to violation of the legal reserve." It also states that "when the information, files, documents, or data required by the CEV correspond to classified, qualified, or reserved information, the holding institution must provide, together with the required information, a report supporting the reservation or classification, according to the following rules: i) do it in writing; ii) specify the legal norms that support the reservation or classification; iii) argue whether there is a present, probable and specific risk of damaging the protected interest that supports the restriction of the information, and iv) demonstrate the damage that may occur with the publicity of these files and information." The regulation stipulates that the "National Government shall guarantee the publicity and mass dissemination of the final report and other documents that the CEV deems necessary to bring into public"[[464]](#footnote-464) At the close of this report, the Decree was being examined by the Constitutional Court.[[465]](#footnote-465)
16. On September 21, *Dejusticia* made a public call to the Selection Committee to strengthen publicity and transparency in the selection of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace [*Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz*].[[466]](#footnote-466) The organization requested that the Committee inform the public about aspects of the pre-selection process and selection of candidates, the criteria used for the definite selection of the pre-candidates.
17. On September 28 the Alliance More Information More Rights [*Alianza Más Información Más Derechos]*, composed by Corporation Ocasa, the Center for Law, Justice, and Society Studies [*Centro de Estudios de Derecho, Justicia y Sociedad]* (Dejusticia), the Antonio Nariño Project [*Proyecto Antonio Nariño*] (PAN), the Foundation for Freedom of the Press [*Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa*] (FLIP), and the Transparency for Colombia Corporation [*Corporación Transparencia por Colombia*] (TpC), issued a statement in which it expressed its "concern for the barriers that still persist for access to information" in the country.[[467]](#footnote-467) Among other things, the document noted that "there is no evidence that the Office of the Prosecutor has prioritized its obligations as a guarantor body" and called for improving and guaranteeing transparency in the face of the legislative and presidential elections process that will take place in 2018, and in relation to the judicial system. In particular, civil society called for the publication of the resumes of the auxiliary magistrates and holders of the high courts, their income statements, their licenses and service commissions, and to disclose the names of those who have family members in public positions of free appointment and removal in the Office of the Prosecutor, the control bodies, the Congress of the Republic, or in high levels of the executive branch, their travel and leave days, among others.
18. On October 11, the Foundation for Freedom of the Press issued a statement in which it reported "constant restrictions and attacks on the press by officials of the Technical Investigation Corps [*Cuerpo Técnico de Investigación*] (CTI) of the Prosecutor's Office in the coverage of public hearings." The organization outlined several cases in which journalists were prevented from covering public hearings.[[468]](#footnote-468)
19. **Internet and freedom of expression**
20. On December 12, 2016, the Ninth Review Chamber of the Constitutional Court [*Sala Novena de Revisión de la Corte Constitucional*] determined that *El Espectador* should, by means of de-indexing techniques, prevent that, when the name of Mr. Carlos Alberto Plata Gómez is entered in search engines, the opinion article "The cartel that stole Bogota" doesn’t show up.[[469]](#footnote-469) The Court considered, among other matters, that the title of the article implied that the plaintiff was involved in criminal acts. Additionally, given that the article can be found on Google, the Court considered that the violation of the plaintiff's rights were permanent.
21. On December 16, 2016, the Constitutional Court determined that the *RCN* channel should update information on its website in relation to a note that contained a citizen complaint.[[470]](#footnote-470) The Court determined that the permanence in time of a content on the web was a factor that caused risk to the people related to the content. The IAPA considered that the decision made public in June is regressive, since, although the Court does not say that the obligation to update is ex officio, but rather refers to the power of the person interested to request such an update, it raises that such possibility is maintained while the information is available on the Internet.[[471]](#footnote-471) It noted that according to what arises from the ruling, the Court's rule does not only apply to criminal proceedings but to all types of news published on the internet .
22. On January 26, the First Land Court [*Juzgado Primero de Tierras*] ordered the newspaper *La Patria*, through a precautionary measure, to remove a content from its website. The decision referred to a news report on a decision issued by that court in the context of a process of land restitution of an indigenous reserve.[[472]](#footnote-472)
23. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has stated that “procedures for de-indexing or removing content cannot be used as a preventive mechanism to protect the right to honor or reputation. Individuals have other remedies available to them to seek redress for the harm caused in the case of alleged dissemination of false, offensive, or inaccurate information by digital media, such as the right of correction and reply, and civil actions for damages. These remedies are less harmful to the right to freedom of expression and require the plaintiff to bear the burden of proving the falsity or inaccuracy of the information being disseminated”. [[473]](#footnote-473)
24. **Communications surveillance**
25. On August 23, the *Las2orillas* website reported that journalist Gustavo Rugeles was the victim of interceptions of his communications during 2016 when he worked for that media outlet.[[474]](#footnote-474) The interceptions were ordered by the Prosecutor's Office and would have lasted two months, coinciding with the period in which the journalist was conducting a journalistic investigation. According to the media, the Attorney General of the Nation would have confirmed to the journalist that the interception took place. Additionally, in the file held by the Prosecutor's Office it was determined that Rugeles had nothing to do or was being investigated for the events that are part of the process that was used as a pretext to listen to his conversations.
26. The Office of the Special Rapporteur reiterates that surveillance programs must be designed and implemented in accordance with international human rights standards. Notably, States must guarantee that the interception, collection and use of personal information are clearly authorized by law in order to protect individuals from arbitrary or abusive interference with their privacy. Moreover, the decision to undertake surveillance activities that intrude upon individual privacy must be authorized by an independent judiciary and justified in terms of the objectives pursued in the specific case and the proportionality of the measure in relation to necessity and the interests pursued. States must ensure that the judicial authority is specialized and competent to make decisions on the legality of the communications surveillance, the technologies used, and its impact on the sphere of rights that could be involved, and that they have sufficient guarantees to fulfill its duties in an adequate manner. Finally, the Office of the Special Rapporteur observes that States should establish independent oversight mechanisms over the authorities in charge of conducting surveillance in order to ensure transparency and accountability.[[475]](#footnote-475)
27. **Diversity and pluralism**
28. In the framework of the public hearing "Situation of the right to freedom of expression in Colombia" mentioned above, the Foundation for Press Freedom [Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa] (FLIP) presented an investigation on the challenges to guarantee the right to information in the country given the lack of media outlets in many areas of the territory; 83 municipalities in Colombia lack media, or the only source of local information is provided by the Ministry of Defense through military radio.[[476]](#footnote-476) According to the data of this same investigation that appeared in the page of the Project Mapping of the Information[[477]](#footnote-477) to October of 2017, of 509 municipalities it had been identified that 287 correspond to " silence zones" where there are no outlets that produce local news. For its part, the State of Colombia indicated that it has implemented different projects to guarantee access to information and technology through initiatives to advance Internet connectivity and reduce the digital divide. It argued that the government has opted for the strengthening of Public Radio. It reported that the State has granted 669 concessions for commercial stations, 300 of public interest, 625 community.
29. In October, the Ministry of Information and Communications Technologies [*Ministerio de Tecnologías de la* Información *y las Comunicaciones*] (MinTIC) presented a bill to the Congress of the Republic for the creation of the Communications Commission as a converging regulatory body.[[478]](#footnote-478) This Commission will have the power to grant concessions in television and sound broadcasting, and administer the Fund for the Development of Television. According to the MinTIC when explaining the project, the attributions of the sector will be distributed in the following way: MinTIC will continue being the policy rector and in charge of the monitoring and control of ICT, TV, and sound broadcasting; the Communications Commission will be responsible for the regulation and granting of concessions; the National Spectrum Agency [*Agencia Nacional del Espectro*] (ANE) will be the advisory body in the management of the electromagnetic spectrum in ICT, radio, and TV; The ICT Ministry, for its part, will have the functions of surveillance and control of the sector, except in matters related to the protection of the rights of users and the competition regime, which will continue to be in charge of the Superintendence of Industry and Commerce [*Superintendencia de Industria y Comercio*]. The project orders the suppression of the National Television Authority [*Autoridad Nacional de Televisión*]. The Commission will be a National State Agency of Special Nature [*Agencia Nacional Estatal de Naturaleza Especial*], of national order, with legal status, its own assets, and financial and administrative autonomy, which will be part of the Information and Communications Technologies sector, but will not be part of the executive branch of public power.
30. Principle 12 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression establishes that “monopolies or oligopolies in the ownership and control of the communication media must be subject to anti-trust laws, as they conspire against democracy by limiting the plurality and diversity which ensure the full exercise of people’s right to information. In no case should such laws apply exclusively to the media. The concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies should take into account democratic criteria that provide equal opportunity of access for all individuals.” [[479]](#footnote-479)
31. **Other situations**
32. The Attorney General's Office announced on May 23 that it confirmed the dismissal and general disablement for thirteen years against three patrol officers of the National Police who had assaulted two journalists from the *City TV* channel in Bogotá when they were recording the arrest of a person by the police. According to the ruling, they carried serious intentional misconduct.[[480]](#footnote-480)
33. The journalist Gina Rojas reported that the directors of the newspaper *Extra Boyacá* asked her to omit information that affected Governor Carlos Amaya. The pressures would have become evident after the publication of a report. As reported by different organizations, the jorunalist was pressured, she was asked to resign and was harassed by the employer until she submitted her resignation on July 29.[[481]](#footnote-481) Through a statement published on August 1, the governor of Boyacá stated he had no interference in the decision made by the media to request her resignation.[[482]](#footnote-482)
34. According to the information available, in the case of the journalist Jineth Bedoya, in August the Office of the Prosecutor had requested the conviction of former paramilitaries Alejandro Cárdenas Orozco, for the crime of aggravated violent carnal access, and of Jesús Emiro Pereira for the crimes of aggravated simple kidnapping, aggravated torture, and aggravated violent sexual act.[[483]](#footnote-483) On August 9 it was made public that the Criminal Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice confirmed the expulsion from the special jurisdiction of Justice and Peace of two paramilitaries for the kidnapping, torture, and rape of the journalist.[[484]](#footnote-484) In this context, civil society organizations reported that the journalist had to give a statement for the twelfth time about the events and the sexual assault that is being investigated in the framework of this process.[[485]](#footnote-485)
35. Throughout 2017, various judicial bodies took part in the trials for the serious acts of psychological torture to which the journalist Claudia Julieta Duque was subjected to by officials of the former Administrative Department of Security [*Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad*] (DAS), as a result of her investigation into the murder of the also journalist Jaime Garzón in 1999. In October the Office of the Attorney General declared as crimes against humanity the crimes committed against the journalist and issued an indictment against the former director of DAS Emiro Rojas Granados, and the former Intelligence Detective of that entity, Néstor Pachón Bermúdez.[[486]](#footnote-486) According to the International Federation of Journalists, in November the Prosecutor’s and the Attorney General's Office [*Procuraduría General de la Nación*] (PGN) had requested a conviction against Ronal Harbey Rivera Rodríguez and Rodolfo Medina Alemán, former Colombian intelligence agents accused of torturing the journalist[[487]](#footnote-487). Meanwhile, on April 24, Enrique Alberto Ariza Rivas, former intelligence chief of the organization, was deported from the US after the journalist reported that he was in that country. On June 23, the pretrial detention order against William Alberto Merchán López was complied with, he had been a former detective of the DAS's Counterintelligence Department and was also linked to the investigation since May 2016. When the measure was ordered, Merchán worked as an officer of the Victims and Witnesses Protection Program of the Office of the Attorney General.[[488]](#footnote-488)
36. On the other hand, it was made public in December that the Prosecutor's Office had decided not to investigate the former director of the DAS, Jorge Noguera Cote, for the psychological torture and threats against the journalist Claudia Julieta Duque. According to the information available, regarding the threats, the fifth deputy prosecutor before the Court would have indicated that "as the acts constituting the threats occurred from March 2003 to October 25, 2005" the crime prescribed. With regards to the crime of torture, the prosecutor announced that there is no evidence to confirm that Noguera Cote "has devised, participated, intervened, or promoted them". The journalist stated that she would appeal the decision of the Prosecutor's Office.[[489]](#footnote-489)
37. **COSTA RICA**
38. The Office of the Special Rapporteur highlights that Executive Branch sent to the Legislative Assembly a bill that contemplates the decriminalization of crimes against honor in cases of public interest, recognizes the right to protect the confidentiality of sources, and stipulates the conscience clause for journalists’ employment contracts. On the other hand, it takes into account the bill sent to the legislature aimed at regulating the right to access to public information. Both bills are under discussion, the present report describes their fundamental characteristics, as well as the contributions and observations made by civil society.
39. Throughout 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur received complaints and information from civil society concerning alleged media concentration levels on radio and television in the country, and on the lack of an adequate regulatory framework to guarantee the diversity and plurality of contents and operators. According to this information, the situation could be aggravated by the implementation of the transition to digital television. Meanwhile, the State reported that it is conducting studies on the concentration levels of the actors in the market and encouraging the entry of new non-commercial actors.
40. **Legal reforms**
41. On April 27, the Executive Branch issued two decrees to regulate "Transparency and access to public information in the State and its dependencies" and the "Opening of Public Data," as part of the National Open Government Strategy.[[490]](#footnote-490)
42. Decree 40200 on Transparency and Access to Information [*Transparencia y Acceso a la Información*] and its Guideline 073 have as their object ensuring that all dependencies of the Central Government and the Decentralized Public Administration guarantee the effective fulfillment of this human right in a proactive, timely, officious, complete, and accessible manner.[[491]](#footnote-491) The Decree regulates the procedure and deadlines for requesting and providing information, and establishes that each agency must appoint an Access to Information Officer. The rule provides that in cases where access to public information is denied based on a regulatory exception, the applicant may file the corresponding administrative appeal with the corresponding institutional authority. Chapter III of the Decree establishes a set of obligations of active transparency indicating the list of information that the agencies must publish on their websites. In turn, Guideline 073 instructs the decentralized public administration to "govern their actions in accordance with the principles of maximum disclosure, transparency, citizen participation, celerity, informality, and non-discrimination."[[492]](#footnote-492) It also "urges the Decentralized Public Administration to adopt the same principles of access to information.”
43. In turn, Decree 40199 and its Guideline 074 establish that public data are made available to the public as open data for the purpose of facilitating their access, use, reuse, and redistribution for any legal purpose,[[493]](#footnote-493) under a series of principles, public data should be open by default, accessible and usable, comparable, neutral, and interoperable. The implementation and enforcement of the National Public Data Opening Policy [*Política Nacional de Apertura de Datos de Carácter Público*] will be composed by a National Open Data Commission [*Comisión Nacional de Datos Abiertos*], a Technical Secretary of the National Public Data Opening Policy [*Secretaria Técnica de la política Nacional de Apertura de Datos Públicos*], and the Institutional Links Group for the Opening of Public Data [*Grupo de Enlaces Institucionales para la Apertura de Datos Públicos*].
44. On 27 April, the Executive Branch sent to the Legislative Assembly two initiatives on freedom of expression and access to public information.[[494]](#footnote-494)
45. The draft of the "Freedom of Expression and Press Act" [*Ley de libertad de expresión y prensa*] promotes the decriminalization of crimes against honor for cases of information of public interest, expressly recognizes the right to protect the confidentiality of sources, and stipulates the inclusion of the conscience clause in journalists’ work contracts. The statement of reasons for the initiative emphasizes the need for these reforms in order to harmonize national legislation with Inter-American standards. In this regard, it expresses that both the IACHR and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights "have reiterated the duty of States to ensure the protection of the right to freedom of expression as a means of strengthening the functioning of pluralistic and deliberative democratic systems through promotion of the free circulation of information, ideas, and expressions of all kinds."
46. Regarding the reforms to the title of crimes against the honor of the Criminal Code,[[495]](#footnote-495) the bill foresees amendments to articles 151 (Exclusion of crime) and 155 (Reparation publication), and repeals article 149 (Proof of veracity). Article 151 of the Criminal Code establishes that an expression is not punishable: "a) If the accusation made refers to facts of public interest; b) If the accusation is true and has not been made out of pure desire to offend; c) In the case of unfavorable opinion to literary, artistic, historical, scientific, or professional work; d) If it is an unfavorable opinion expressed in fulfillment of a duty or exercising a right, provided that the procedure or the lack of reservations, when there should have been one, does not demonstrate an offensive purpose. In the case of the offense referred to in article 152, it shall not be punishable in the case of the publication or reproduction of information or judgments on acts of public interest offensive to honor issued by mass media, by news agencies, by public authorities, or by individuals with authorized knowledge of the facts; provided that the publication indicates from which of these the information comes from.*"*
47. Additionally, the bill reduces the limitation period for crimes against honor to one year, "in order to avoid that the threat of a judicial process acts as a brake on the medias’ duty to disseminate information," the statement of reasons states. Also, it expressly included the right to protection of sources.
48. On the other hand, the initiative introduces amendments to the Labor Code which regulate the conscience clause aimed at ensuring that those who practice journalism are not forced to perform work contrary to their conscience or the ethical standards generally accepted in the exercise of their profession. This clause stipulates the right of journalists to not be subject to sanctions by directors or employers because of their opinions or information, in their professional performance; when such situation occurs, those who exercise journalism may invoke this clause to terminate the employment contract under a justifiable cause, with the guarantee of receiving the compensations and legal benefits provided in the Labor Code. The bill proposes that all provisions contained therein should be interpreted and applied in accordance with inter-American standards and international human rights law in force in the country.
49. **Access to public information**
50. On June 30, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice granted an *amparo* appeal filed by a journalist of *La Voz de Guanacaste* against the Municipality of Santa Cruz, due to the absence of a response to the request for a set of information on the concessions granted in the Maritime Land Area by the municipality.[[496]](#footnote-496) Basing the decision, the Chamber reaffirmed that the right to access to public information "entails an extension of the State's obligations, in the information society, which now goes beyond simply responding to a request for information." "Today, the Administration is obliged to inform the public about their actions and progressively make accessible the information that is in their possession through the technological means at their disposal. In this ideal development of the law the State should aspire to have information that is officially made available to the public by technological means, must be complete, current, orderly, accessible, as far as possible, through programs or interfaces of common use, without imposing unjustified barriers." Thus, the digitization of public information demands "a progressive adaptation" according to the budgetary and human resources of each agency.
51. On August 11, the Constitutional Chamber granted an *amparo* appeal filed by a journalist from the digital newspaper *Elmundo.cr* and ordered the Ministry of Health to provide a letter prepared by the agency that had been requested in the framework of a journalistic investigation on alleged irregularities at open pit garbage dumps.[[497]](#footnote-497) In rendering the judgment, the Chamber indicated that the fact that there was a pending process before the Environmental Administrative Court was not an impediment to enable the journalist access to the required document as it is information of public interest.
52. According to the newspaper *La Nación*, on August 3, the Board of Directors of the Bank of Costa Rica (BCR) limited access to audio recordings of Board sessions to avoid leaks. Basing the decision, the authorities consulted by the media indicated that the audios are support materials for the preparation of the minutes and contain information that is not public insofar as it relates, inter alia, to bank secrecy.[[498]](#footnote-498)
53. On April, 27, the Executive Branch sent to the Legislative Assembly a initiative for the "Access to public information Act" [*Ley de acceso a la información pública*]. In accordance with Article 1 of this bill to be reviewed by the Legislative Assembly, it aims to "ensure the proper exercise of the right to access to public information." Public authorities of the central and decentralized Administration of the State and the private law subjects are bounded under the bill when they exercise an activity or power of public nature, permanent or temporary, administer, or manage public funds. It establishes the principles of universality, non-discrimination, transparency, maximum disclosure, inclusion, neutrality, citizen participation, and accountability. Chapter II of the bill stipulates a set of obligations of active transparency and the control of their compliance by the Ombudsman's Office [*Defensoría de los Habitantes de la República*]. Requests for information must be answered within a maximum of 10 days.
54. The system of exceptions regulated by article 12 provides that "with regard to the principle of maximum disclosure and the supremacy of the public interest, any information held by a public authority is of public interest, except for the specific exceptions established." Article 13 lists the exceptions indicating that the obliged will not grant access to the information requested, only in the following cases: a) When the information has been declared a State secret, because it affects public safety, national defense, or foreign relations in accordance with the second paragraph of article 30 of the Political Constitution; b) In the case of ongoing processes relating to international relations; c) In the case of monetary and fiscal policies at the stage prior to their implementation, the disclosure of which represents a risk to the economic public order or concedes undue advantage in such regimes; d) By provision contained in a special law. In accordance with article 25, in refusing to submit information based on any of the aforementioned legal exceptions, the obligated party must establish and prove that what is required is subject to the regulated exceptions. In the event of total or partial refusal to provide information, the interested party may file an appeal for revocation before the same authority that issued the act and/or resort to the constitutional writ of *amparo*. Failure to comply with any of the obligations established by law by the public authority will entail administrative responsibility, which will be substantiated under the ordinary and current regime; for the obligated subjects of private law, it provides they will be sanctioned with a fine.
55. A number of civil society organizations welcomed the presentation of an initiative to advance the implementation of the right to access to public information in the country, but warned of the need to refine the bill, taking into account, *inter alia*, the legal exceptions regime, which is argued, could present a confusing and ambiguous formulation that could lead to the imposition of limits on access to public information beyond those recognized by national jurisprudence.[[499]](#footnote-499) According to available information, some legislators and the media would also have raised objections to the proposed regulation. At the close of this report, the Legislative Assembly Commission on Technology and Education [*Comisión de Tecnología y Educación de la Asamblea Legislativa*] had approved a motion to convene a hearing to hear the positions of the authorities of the different media and the Association of Journalists [*Colegio de Periodistas* ].[[500]](#footnote-500) A motion was also approved to request an opinion from these actors on the draft of the "Freedom of Expression and Press Act" [*Ley de libertad de expresión y Prensa*].
56. Principle 4 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression which states that “[a]ccess to information held by the state is a fundamental right of every individual. States have the obligation to guarantee the full exercise of this right. This principle allows only exceptional limitations that must be previously established by law in case of a real and imminent danger that threatens national security in democratic societies.” Additionally, with regard to the principle of maximum disclosure the law must guarantee the effective and broadest possible access to public information, and any exceptions must not become the general rule in practice. Also, the exceptions regime should be interpreted restrictively and all doubts should be resolved in favor of transparency and access.
57. **Internet and freedom of expression**
58. On July 14, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice, by a majority, partially admitted, a writ of *amparo* filed against the Superintendence of Telecommunications *[Superintendencia de Telecomunicaciones*] (Sutel) and others, in which the "fair use policy" of the postpaid mobile Internet was challenged, by which, the companies were allowed to decrease the mobile Internet speed of the user for the rest of the billing cycle, once it had reached the contracted capacity threshold.[[501]](#footnote-501) The applicants who submitted the writ indicated that the applied policy limited the Internet navigation speed to such a degree that it rendered it inoperative, thereby damaging their fundamental rights, in particular the right to Internet access.
59. The ruling emphasized the relevance of the Internet in today's society for the exercise of freedom of expression and other rights. In that sense, it indicated that a restriction to the Internet could affect freedom of expression in the terms established in Article 13 of the American Convention, "extending the prohibition established in section 3 thereof."
60. Additionally, the ruling held that "given the constitutional relevance of the Internet in our society, it is clear that the State and, as part of it, Sutel has an obligation to ensure that a minimum access to said network is guaranteed." The Chamber clarified that it does not oppose the fair use policy as a mechanism for traffic management, but warned that such a policy "cannot harm the irreducible minimum of a right, also called essential content. The disregard of this minimum, which allows a functional access to the Internet, would mean denying the right itself, as from the point of view of its effectiveness it ends up voiding it of content (...) the policy of fair use is not a sanction, but a traffic management mechanism. In that respect, it is contrary to the constitutional principle of reasonableness and proportionality that the essential content of a fundamental right disappears, when there are other methods capable of achieving the same result (avoiding intensive consumption), without the need to excessively restrict the persons of such right."
61. Consequently, the Chamber held that according to the criterion of necessity, "it wouldn’t be justifiable the application of the policy of fair use when there is no congestion in the networks, as could be in times of low demand for the service. The decrease in speed can only happen to relieve the service" stated the judgment. The Chamber understood that being Internet access a fundamental right as established by its jurisprudence in 2010, the determination of the minimum speed for Internet connection that will serve as a basis for the implementation of the fair use policy should be established by Sutel and not by the operators, so that the user affected by said policy maintains functional access to the Internet. In that sense, among other measures, it ordered the agency to make such determination within a four months period. The policy of "fair use" of the Internet had also been challenged by the Costa Rican Association of Journalists and the Ombudsman's Office.[[502]](#footnote-502)
62. **Diversity and pluralism**
63. The *Red de Iniciativas de Medios de Comunicación Alternativa* (Redmica) together with the organization *Voces Nuestras* filed an action of unconstitutionality against Radio Law [*Ley de Radio*] No. 1758 of June 19, 1954 and its amendments, and the Rules of Procedure for the Transition to Digital Terrestrial Television in Costa Rica [*Reglamento para la Transición a la Televisión Digital Terrestre en Costa Rica*], Executive Decree No. 36774 of September 6, 2011.[[503]](#footnote-503)
64. They argued that the legal framework omitted to regulate the granting of concessions for the use and exploitation of the radio spectrum to carry out broadcasting activities and, in addition, failed to recognize and regulate the existence and activity of community radio broadcasters, as well as digital television, and the use of the digital dividend. By a resolution issued on July 26, the majority of the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice rejected "based on the merits" the filed action.[[504]](#footnote-504) The ruling indicated that according to article 29 of the General Telecommunications Law, the enabling title for individuals to use and exploit the radio spectrum is the concession, and it also establishes the procedure to grant it, in the sense that it should be by public tender, which must be prepared by Superintendence of Telecommunications *[Superintendencia de Telecomunicaciones*] (Sutel). The ruling held that "at the time of preparing the respective tender, said body must necessarily take into account the international instruments on human rights applicable in Costa Rica - and their interpretation by the competent bodies -, as components of Constitutional Law."
65. On September 6, during the 164th Extraordinary Period of Session of the IACHR, a public hearing was held on the "Situation of the Right to Freedom of Expression in Costa Rica".[[505]](#footnote-505) During this hearing, *Red de Iniciativas de Medios de Comunicación Alternativa* (Redmica) and the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) expressed their concern about said sentence, which, they consider "aggravates" the situation. During the hearing, the organizations that requested the hearing emphasized that the legal framework under which broadcasting in the country currently operates is obsolete, insufficient, and disregards the inter-American standards on freedom of expression, insofar as it does not offer guarantees for the existence of diversity and plurality of media. Additionally, it would not explicitly recognize community media, nor does it provide for anti-monopoly measures, and an adequate regulatory institutionality. The organizations also presented the results of a study carried out by Redmica, according to which 90 percent of the media is commercial. They affirmed that there are no community media in the country, but a network of cultural media that belong to a single public-private institution. They indicated that 57 percent of the radio frequencies belong to seven groups, and in television, 60 percent of the channels belong to five companies of which only two are Costa Rican. The organizations that requested the hearing said that at least 10 companies exceed the technical criteria on concentration established by Sutel in 2012 that were rejected by the Ministry of Science and Technology.
66. For its part, the State delegation highlighted Costa Rica's commitment in the promotion and defense of freedom of expression. The State announced that it is working on the presentation of a bill draft in the coming months aimed at regulating taxing and sanctions in the field of broadcasting. As for the concentration of the media, the State indicated that it is working on defining procedures to determine if there is a concentration that affects the market; it affirmed that nowadays there is plurality but admitted that plurality and diversity can be broader and indicated that this is an aspiration to which it is committed. According to state representatives in the National Telecommunication Development Plan [*Plan Nacional de Desarrollo de Telecomunicaciones*] it has reserved "at least" 24Mhz for non-commercial purposes. In that sense, the State promised to continue the dialogue with civil society. The members of the IACHR and the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression took note of the information on the situation of media concentration and asked the State about the measures planned to combat it and to guarantee the diversity and plurality of broadcasting media.
67. On April 27, Sutel’s Board of Directors resolved to recommend to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Telecommunications [*Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología y Telecomunicaciones*] (Micitt) the opening of an administrative procedure for the possible application of Article 22 of the Telecommunications Law and the eventual recovery of 12 television frequencies, on the grounds that the concessionaires would not be operating under the conditions of coverage set forth in the enabling title.[[506]](#footnote-506) The Chamber of Concessionaires would have challenged the lack of due process in the adoption of said recommendation by the Board of Directors of Sutel , as the concessionaires hadn’t had previous knowledge of the respective reports on which the recommendation was based.[[507]](#footnote-507) Speaking to the press, ministry officials said they will enforce the law and take the necessary steps to sort the spectrum by recovering frequencies that are not being properly used.[[508]](#footnote-508)
68. On June 19, *Crhoy.com* reported that five business groups that run the nation's top commercial television channels use a network of anonymous corporations to maintain control over 45 percent of analogue channel concessions. Citing a response from Sutel to a request for access to public information, the media indicated that the group holding the largest number of channels is Repretel under the legal entities of Telesistema Nacional S.A., Televisora Sur y Norte S.A., and Teleamérica S.A. has the concession of 10 television channels, 5 arrays (2, 4, 6, 11 and 46) and 5 repeaters (3, 12, 22, 26 and 34). As reported by this media, Repretel is followed by the Christian organization Enlace, which owns 7 channels, and Teletica, with has rights over 5 channels.
69. On 4 July, members of various political factions presented a bill on the efficient use of the radioelectric spectrum in radio and television broadcasting.[[509]](#footnote-509) The text provides for a set of guiding principles. The initiative establishes that the current concession contracts for array signals are in force until their expiration date. Existing licensees are guaranteed to be able to continue broadcasting in digital format the array signal that was concessioned in analogue in the 6MHz space. The draft establishes a reserve for public purposes of 30MHz, corresponding to the 3 channels of 6MHz to SINART, 1 channel of 6MHz to *Universidad de Costa Rica*, and 1 channel of 6MHz tp *Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia*. Also, a reserve for non-profit organizations of 24MHz is established.
70. On the other hand, according to what was informed by the Presidency of the Republic, in July the National Radio and Television System of Costa Rica [*Sistema Nacional de Radio y Televisión de Costa Rica*] (Sinart) launched the Office of the Audience Ombudsman [*Defensoría de las Audiencias*]. At the head of the Office of the Ombudsman, the Executive Council of Sinart appointed the communicator Nathalia Rojas Zúñiga, after a public tender.[[510]](#footnote-510)
71. Principle 12 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression establishes that “monopolies or oligopolies in the ownership and control of the communication media must be subject to anti-trust laws, as they conspire against democracy by limiting the plurality and diversity which ensure the full exercise of people’s right to information. In no case should such laws apply exclusively to the media. The concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies should take into account democratic criteria that provide equal opportunity of access for all individuals.”
72. **Other relevant situations**
73. On November 8, *Diario Extra* reported the existence of an alleged strategy of harassment by the Bank of Costa Rica [*Banco de Costa Rica*] (BCR) in collaboration with the cement businessman Juan Carlos Bolaños. According to the newspaper, the Attorney General's Office found a document that cites this media outlet as a "tactical objective" for both parties linked to the "Cementazo" case, in order to destabilize it. The finding was made during the raids executed in the main building of the BCR, as part of the investigations carried out by the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Judicial Investigation Agency in that case. *Diario Extra* reported that the idea of weakening the environment would have arisen after a series of publications on top management of the bank and irregular management in the entity. On November 9, through a public statement, the Costa Rican Journalists Association [*Colegio de Periodistas de Costa Rica*] demanded an investigation into the events reported, which, if confirmed, would constitute a serious precedent to destabilize the democratic State, they said. On November 13, the Court of Honor of the Journalists' Association [*Tribunal de Honor del Colegio de Periodistas*] issued a statement in which it stated that: "it emphatically rejects any action, strategy, speech, or proposal, aimed at curbing and hindering the free exercise of Freedom of Information and Freedom of Expression, as was intended to be done against *Diario Extra*, knowing that these rights are enshrined in the legislation. To violate these principles is to attack freedom as the foundation of democracy."
74. **CUBA**[[511]](#footnote-511)
75. During 2017, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression continued to receive troubling information about unlawful restrictions on freedom of expression in Cuba and government actions designed to inhibit or punish—through the criminal justice system—speech and positions critical of the government. Of particular concern is the steady increase in the selective and deliberate persecution of independent media outlets and organizations that disseminate information outside the control of the State and opinions on matters of public interest. All of this is under a legal framework that does not protect the practice of independent journalism. Government control of the media and of access to digital media also persisted in the country, due to Cuba’s limited Internet connectivity and the blocking of critical media outlets, which restricts the Cuban people’s access to information, cultural expression, and the discussion of ideas through the print media, radio, television, and the Internet.
76. **Violence due to the exercise of freedom of expression and the situation of impunity**
77. According to non-governmental organizations, State security agencies maintained a policy of harassment toward journalists, human rights defenders, political dissidents, and others. Different measures have reportedly been taken by State agents to prevent such persons from conducting their activities freely, including arbitrary detentions (generally of short duration) the use of the criminal justice system to criminalize their activities, internal deportations, summonses to police stations, house searches, and the confiscation of the instruments of their work. Restrictions on the right to demonstrate, the excessive use of force at demonstrations, and impunity in cases involving such abuses were also reported.
78. According to theCuban Observatory of Human Rights [*Observatorio Cubano de Derechos Humanos*] (OCDH), 3,594 arbitrary arrests were reported in the first eight months of the year.[[512]](#footnote-512) The OCDH reported that the government increased its use of other repressive tactics, such as barring and physically preventing activists from leaving their own homes, the “fabrication” of common criminal offenses to intimidate or detain opponents, and direct pressure and attacks on the children and relatives of activists.[[513]](#footnote-513) It indicated that the government had reportedly begun “a new gamut of harassment and repression” against independent journalists, after a supposed kind of “moratorium” on repression against them. The OCDH pointed to the examples of Henry Constantín Ferreiro, Director of the magazine *La Hora de Cuba* and Regional Vice Chair of the Press Freedom Committee of the Inter American Press Association (IAPA), journalist Sol García Basulto of *La Hora de Cuba*, and Manuel Alejandro León Velázquez, a contributor to *Radio Martí* and *Diario de Cuba.*[[514]](#footnote-514)
79. According to the information available, Sol García Basulto and Henry Constantín were also the victims of cyber-harassment on social media and anonymous social networks, and were spied on continually.[[515]](#footnote-515) The same thing reportedly happened to journalist Iris Maria Mariño Garcia, also of *La Hora de Cuba,*[[516]](#footnote-516) who was also reportedly threatened by State security agents with prosecution for “usurpation of legal capacity.”[[517]](#footnote-517) Henry Constantín Ferreiro and Sol García Basulto were reportedly charged with the same offense.[[518]](#footnote-518) García Basulto was additionally reported to have been subject to the precautionary measure of house arrest since June.[[519]](#footnote-519)
80. In May 2017, Laritza Diversent, director of the human rights defense organization Cubalex, was reportedly summoned to appear at the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic [*Fiscalía General de la República*]. There, she was notified of the result of the legal action brought against the organization in September 2016, in which it was determined, among other things, that Cubalex was operating without authorization. It was also suggested to Laritza that there may be a case against her. According to the information available, because of the escalation of the repression against the organization’s work, 14 members of the Cubalex team and Laritza Diversent traveled to the United States in May and June as political refugees.[[520]](#footnote-520) According to reports, Julio Iglesias and Julio Ferrer, also members of the team, are reportedly still in Cuba because they are said to be in criminal proceedings or in custody.[[521]](#footnote-521)
81. According to the information available, on May 1, Daniel Llorente, known as “the opponent of the flag,” was reportedly detained after having run through the Plaza de la Revolución with the United States flag. Llorente was charged with resistance and disorderly conduct, and held at the police station for a month. He was later transferred to the Havana Psychiatric Hospital, where he reportedly remains in custody. This was reportedly not the first time Daniel Llorente carried out public actions. In the past—among other things—he reportedly protested former President Barack Obama’s visit to Cuba in 2016, as well as the opening of the U.S. Embassy in Cuba in 2015. Because he reportedly did not belong to any activist or political group, he was classified as an “independent opponent.”[[522]](#footnote-522)
82. For its part, The Cuban Institute for Freedom of Expression [*Instituto Cubano por la Libertad de Expresión y Prensa*] (ICLEP) reported that during the first 20 days of May, the political police committed 13 acts of repression against citizen journalists working for media outlets of the ICLEP.[[523]](#footnote-523) The cases they cited included the arrest of ICLEP’s Director, Raúl Velázquez, who was reportedly detained for just over 72 hours, during which time his cell phone was confiscated. A case file was reportedly opened on him for the propaganda offenses of “unlawful printed matter,” “subversion,” and “counter-revolutionary plans.”[[524]](#footnote-524)
83. On August 18, the coordinator of the Patriotic Union of Cuba [*Unión Patriótica de Cuba*] (Unpacu) Jorge Cervantes García, was reportedly released on bond after spending three months in detention. According to Unpacu, he was charged with the offenses of ongoing *desacato*, acting without authority, and resistance.[[525]](#footnote-525) On August 19, three Unpacu activists (Jesús Sánchez Romero, Alexis Rodríguez Chacón, and Ovidio Martín Castellanos) were arrested in Santiago de Cuba. On August 23, Sánchez Romero was reportedly sentenced to 1 year and six months in jail after an abbreviated trial; Martín Castellano reportedly remains in custody, provisionally charged with the offense of assaulting a State official [*atentado*], and Rodríguez Chacón is said to have been released.[[526]](#footnote-526) On August 31, independent journalist Carlos Alberto Torres Fleites, who worked as an observer with the Association for Free Press [*Asociación Pro Libertad de Prensa*] (APLP), was reportedly summoned and threatened by a political police officer of the State of Santa Clara with years of imprisonment and retaliation against his family “if he continu[ed] with the regulatory activity and his ties with APLP.”
84. On September 1, journalist Ramón Góngora of Palanque Visión was reportedly detained, beaten, and interrogated for hours. This incident took place less than a week after another journalist from the same media outlet was reportedly detained for 5 hours in the city of Bayano.[[527]](#footnote-527) Like Palanque Visión, other new media projects like Convivencia of Pinar del Rio and La Hora de Cuba of Camagüey were also reportedly targeted for attacks.[[528]](#footnote-528)
85. On September 2, independent journalist Serafín Moran Santiago was reportedly detained for 6 hours in the municipality of Plaza as he was leaving the home of Juan Antonio Madrazo, where he had gone to interview Madrazo about the alleged government harassment of members of the platform #Otro18.[[529]](#footnote-529)
86. Also in the month of September, it was reported that journalists covering Hurricane Irma in Cuba were detained. Reporters Carlos Alejandro Rodríguez and Maykel González Vivero were arrested while reporting from northern Villa Clara. They were released after six hours. According to publicly available information, they were subjected to criminal investigation proceedings, stripped naked and searched by officers who confiscated their cell phones and a camera.[[530]](#footnote-530) Other journalists including Karina Gálvez, Martínez Jerez, Rolando Rodríguez Lobaina, and Iván Hernández Carrillo, also reportedly had their work tools confiscated and their records, images, and audio files erased.[[531]](#footnote-531)
87. In October, the three protestors who had been arrested on July 26 in Santiago de Cuba during a protest surrounding the “regime’s symbolic celebration of July 26, the anniversary of the failed attack on the Moncada Barracks” were reportedly released. According to reports, Alberto Antonio and Leonardo Ramírez Odio, and their father Alberto de la Caridad Ramírez Baró, members of the Citizens’ Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Cuba [*Comité Ciudadanos Defensores de los Derechos Humanos en Cuba*], were reportedly charged with disorderly conduct and transferred to the Aguadores jail to await trial.[[532]](#footnote-532)
88. Also in October, operations organized by State security authorities resulted in the arrest of several women from the Dignity Movement [*Movimiento Dignidad*]. According to the information available, the regime prevented them from leaving the town of Palmarito de Cauto, in Santiago de Cuba, for several months. The members of the Dignity Movement, led by activist Belkis Cantillo Ramírez, had allegedly been subjected to “strong pressure” from State security authorities from the time the movement became known 10 months ago.[[533]](#footnote-533) In a statement released in October, they denounced the repression and arbitrary arrest of their members, and demanded “the citizens’ right to exercise freedom of movement and communication.”[[534]](#footnote-534)
89. According to the information provided, in the first seven days of December, 15 journalists from the Cuban Institute for Freedom of Expression and Press [*Instituto Cubano por la Libertad de Expresión y Prensa*] (ICLEP) who would work in community media outlets had been arrested, subpoenaed, and interrogated by the Cuban political police. According to ICLEP, there would be a "repressive wave" against these media and their journalists. It also stated that "the situation of ICPLE journalists is worrisome, mainly that of the directors who are under investigation".[[535]](#footnote-535) Previously, on November 30, the headquarters of the community media outlet *El Majadero de Artemisa*, which would be harrased and permanently surveilled by the political police, would have been raided by said police and its director Roberto Morena arrested and transferred to the Unit of the Revolutionary National Police [*Unidad de la Policía Nacional Revolucionaria*] (PNR) of Artemisa, where he would be accused of printing "illicit gazettes". Similarly, as reported, through third parties, the political police would inform that "all journalists who make this newspaper possible will be interrogated and criminally processed".[[536]](#footnote-536)
90. In 2017, acts of retaliation, harassment, and arrests continued to be carried out against journalists, activists, and human rights defenders who expose the situation of freedom of expression in Cuba in international forums. Such persons have reportedly been subject to repressive measures including prosecution under the Criminal Code, prohibitions against traveling abroad, and exhaustive searches at airports, as in the cases of Dagoberto Valdés, Yoandy Izquierdo, and Rolando Rodríguez Lobaina.[[537]](#footnote-537) According to the information received, on April 27, Leticia Ramos Herrería, a member of the Ladies in White [*Damas de Blanco*] movement, was detained at the Juan Gualberto Gómez International Airport in Varadero for 5 hours, after having taken part in a number of meetings in the United States with officials from the U.S. State Department and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.[[538]](#footnote-538) Lia Villares, an independent activist, was held for 3 hours on May 2 by a National Revolutionary Police officer.[[539]](#footnote-539) Similarly, it was learned that the Cuban authorities reportedly prevented Berta Soler, the leader of the Ladies in White, from leaving the Varadero airport for Washington, D.C. where she was to receive the Freedom Award from the International Republican Institute (IRI).[[540]](#footnote-540) In October, Soler was reportedly kept from leaving the country for the fourth time in 2017.[[541]](#footnote-541) Other journalists, including Carlos Alejandro Rodríguez Martínez, Maily Esteves Pérez Regina Coyula, Joan Manuel Núñez Díaz, Sol García Basulto, Maykel González Vivero, Yoandy Izquierdo, Anderlay Guerra, Raúl Velázquez, Roberto de Jesús Quiñones, Iván Hernández Carrillo, Abel Estrada, and Henry Constantín, among others, were also reportedly prevented from traveling abroad.[[542]](#footnote-542)
91. During this year, the organization Ladies in White reported that it continued to be subject to attacks, harassment, and arrests. Relatives of the movement’s members also reported having been subject to repression by State agents.[[543]](#footnote-543) Members described a spike in the Cuban regime’s harassment of their children in an attempt to force them to leave the organization.[[544]](#footnote-544) According to the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation [*Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional*] (Ccdhrn), the Ladies in White and the Patriotic Union of Cuba (Unpacu) continue to be “the main targets of political repression” in Cuba.[[545]](#footnote-545)
92. The Inter-American Commission reiterates that Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles establishes that “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.” In addition, as the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Protection and Promotion of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression and the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression de the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS), have established, the State “has the duty to ensure that journalists and media workers reporting on public demonstrations are not arrested, threatened, assaulted, or limited in any manner in their rights as a result of practicing their profession. Their work materials and tools must not be destroyed or confiscated by the authorities.” Furthermore, “the authorities must not stigmatize or stereotype demonstrators and their demands. They must refrain from making generalizations based on isolated events or the conduct of particular groups.”[[546]](#footnote-546)
93. **Subsequent liability**

1. The IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur have maintained that laws criminalizing the defamation of public officials [*desacato* laws] are incompatible with the inter-American human rights system, as they lend themselves to “abuse as a means to silence unpopular ideas and opinions, thereby repressing the debate that is critical to the effective functioning of democratic institutions.”[[547]](#footnote-547) In addition, they have affirmed that the public has the right to “criticize and scrutinize the officials' actions and attitudes in so far as they relate to the public office.”[[548]](#footnote-548) During 2017, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur continued to receive troubling information about the use in in Cuba of the criminal law—both substantive and procedural—and the offense of *desacato* as mechanisms for the subsequent imposition of liability against journalists and activists who disseminate ideas, opinions, and information critical of the party in power.
2. In March, the national coordinator of the Christian Liberation Movement[*Movimiento Cristiano Liberación*] (MCL), Eduardo Cardet, was reportedly sentenced to three years in prison. Cardet was detained on November 30, 2016, five days after the death of Fidel Castro, and accused of assaulting a State official.[[549]](#footnote-549) However, MCL alleged that his arrest was “in retaliation against the movement and its criticism of the legacy of the deceased dictator Fidel Castro.”[[550]](#footnote-550)
3. Four activists from the Patriotic Union of Cuba (Unpacu)—two of whom were members of the Ladies in White—as well as seven members of the Orlando Zapata Tamayo Civic Action Group [*Grupo de Acción Cívica Orlando Zapata Tamayo*], were reportedly tried in June, after awaiting trial for more than a year. According to reports, the first four activists were arrested after taking part in a demonstration on April 15, 2016 in Havana’s *Parque de la Fraternidad*, and were transported to detention centers; the other seven were reportedly arrested, charged, and released on bond after participating in a 2016 demonstration outside the National Capitol Building in Havana. The Cuban regime reportedly asked for up to 3 years in prison in some of the cases.[[551]](#footnote-551) According to reports, they were given notice of the judgments on June 31.[[552]](#footnote-552)
4. The Inter-American Commission recalls that Principle 1 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles establishes that “Freedom of expression in all its forms and manifestations is a fundamental and inalienable right of all individuals. Additionally, it is an indispensable requirement for the very existence of a democratic society.” In addition, Principle 5 of the Declaration states that “Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression.” Principle 13, in turn, affirms that “The [media] have the right to carry out their role in an independent manner. Direct or indirect pressures exerted upon journalists or other social communicators to stifle the dissemination of information are incompatible with freedom of expression.”
5. **Direct censorship**
6. In April, journalism student Karla María Pérez González was expelled from the Universidad Central de Las Villas for belonging to the opposition movement Somos+, a Cuban civil society organization that reportedly promotes, among other issues, a multi-party system, the independent press, and open elections. According to the information available, classmates of hers decided that she should be expelled, and their decision was upheld by the school’s Federation of University Students [*Federación Estudiantil Universitaria*] (FEU). In its statement, the FEU alleged that she was a “member of an illegal and counter-revolutionary organization, contrary to the principles, objectives, and values of the Cuban Revolution.”[[553]](#footnote-553) In May, Pérez González reported being the victim of a systematic attack by journalists from official government media outlets, bloggers, and university authorities.[[554]](#footnote-554)
7. On August 17, graffiti artist Yulier Rodríguez Pérez was reportedly detained for 48 hours when attempting to paint a mural in downtown Havana. The Cuban artist was reportedly released after the authorities made him sign an agreement to erase his paintings within seven days, with the warning that failure to do so could result in a fine or arrest for the crime of property.[[555]](#footnote-555) Similarly, according to members of the punk rock group *Porno para Ricardo*, they were subject to government harassment and censorship, and reportedly barred from performing publicly in Cuba, due to, among other things, a repertoire alleged to be anti-government.[[556]](#footnote-556)
8. In December it was made public that the Ministry of the Interior (Minint) would have subpoenaed theater director Adonis Milás after he had allegedly decided to join the alternative biennial. Likewise, they would have pressured members of the Milan group, Persephone Theater. According to what was reported, the director would be a part of the Hermanos Saíz Association [*Asociación Hermanos Saíz*] (AHS), which recently organized presentations of the Hamlet Machine play in Santiago de Cuba. This play would have gone through a jury of the Provincial Council of Performing Arts of Santiago de Cuba [*Consejo Provincial de las Artes Escénicas de Santiago de Cuba*], which approved the showings scheduled for November 24 and 25. However, State Security would have suspended the second show, arguing that the work would cast doubt on the image of Fidel Castro. Due to the alleged pressure of the regime's agents, the actors would now be afraid to work.[[557]](#footnote-557)
9. According to Principle 5 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles “Prior censorship, direct or indirect interference in or pressure exerted upon any expression, opinion or information transmitted through any means of oral, written, artistic, visual or electronic communication must be prohibited by law. Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression.”
10. **Freedom of expression and the Internet**
11. Although the use of the Internet and the development of digital media—especially those aimed at the international community and exiles—have begun to open up new spaces for the circulation of information and ideas outside the official control of the government, access to digital media is hindered by limited connectivity and the blocking of critical media.[[558]](#footnote-558) According to reports, the number of websites censored by the government has grown in recent years, and in order to access them—for instance the news sites *CiberCuba*, *14ymedio*, and *Cubanet*—Cuban citizens have used virtual private networks (VPN) or anonymous proxy websites.[[559]](#footnote-559)
12. According to a report published in August by Amnesty International, Cuba has a dual Internet system: one that is less expensive and subject to “strict censorship” by the government through access to selected information, and the global Internet, which is inaccessible to the majority of Cubans.[[560]](#footnote-560) It further indicated that, according to a study by the Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI), 41 websites were blocked in Cuba, including *14yMedio, Martí Noticias, Damas de Blanco,* and *La Nueva Cuba*. The common thread among these websites was that they expressed criticism of the government, or were involved with human rights issues, or with circumvention tools, which are techniques for “getting around censorship.”[[561]](#footnote-561) This lack of Internet access in Cuba was cited by the participants in the hearing on the “Human Rights Situation of Afro-Descendants in Cuba,” held on March 21, during the 161st Regular Session of the IACHR. According to the attendees, the lack of media and Internet access in Cuba affects their rights to free expression and the performance of their work as human rights defenders.[[562]](#footnote-562) ‘
13. In November, it was known that the Telecommunications Company of Cuba [*Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba S.A.* ] (ETECSA) and the Curacao United Telecomunication Services (UTS) would have signed an agreement to increase the bandwidth of Internet service in Cuba. As reported, UTS would also sell roaming services in the country to customers from all countries.[[563]](#footnote-563)
14. As the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media, the OAS Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information stated in their 2011 Joint Declaration,[[564]](#footnote-564) “Mandatory blocking of entire websites, IP addresses, ports, network protocols or types of uses (such as social networking) is an extreme measure – analogous to banning a newspaper or broadcaster – which can only be justified in accordance with international standards, for example where necessary to protect children against sexual abuse.” They similarly recalled, *inter alia*, that “Content filtering systems which are imposed by a government or commercial service provider and which are not end-user controlled are a form of prior censorship and are not justifiable as a restriction on freedom of expression.”
15. **Freedom of expression in the electoral context**
16. The Office of the Special Rapporteur also received information indicating that the government is retaliating against those who have expressed their intent to run for office in Cuba’s 2018 elections, in view of Raúl Castro’s promise to leave office in February 2018. According to the information available—through the application of the law or outside the law—limitations have been placed on pluralism in the exercise of political rights and freedom of expression in the country.
17. On June 13, the Council of State announced that the first round of elections of delegates to the municipal assemblies would be held on October 22, and run-off elections would be held on October 29 in those districts where no single candidate obtained more than 50% of the valid votes cast.[[565]](#footnote-565) However, because of the serious damage caused by Hurricane Irma, in September the Council of State announced the rescheduling of those dates to November 26 and December 3, 2017, respectively.[[566]](#footnote-566) The date of the elections of delegates to the provincial assemblies and the representatives to the National Assembly—the body that votes to appoint the country’s President—will reportedly be announced at a later time.[[567]](#footnote-567) As announced by the National Electoral Commission [*Comisión Electoral Nacional*] (CEN), 12,515 People’s Power delegates would be elected in the general elections held from September 4-30.[[568]](#footnote-568)
18. Most of the aspiring candidates were said to be connected to dissident citizen platforms like the Christian Liberation Movement, #Otro18, the Democratic Action Roundtable [*Mesa de Unidad de Acción Democrática*] (MUAD), *Plataforma Ciudadana*, Citizen Observers of Election Processes [*Ciudadanos Observadores de Procesos Electorales*] (COPE), *Un voto*, *Cuba Decide* and *Un cubano*.[[569]](#footnote-569) According to reports, there is a growing campaign of intimidation and disparagement against the candidates from the different platforms seeking to run in the upcoming municipal elections,[[570]](#footnote-570) and the Cuban government “systematically frustrates the nomination of independent candidates to the Municipal Assemblies of the People’s Power.”[[571]](#footnote-571)
19. On September 7, independent candidate Joan Manuel Núñez Díaz reportedly decided not to run as a candidate for municipal delegate due to “the pressure on him and his support networks.”[[572]](#footnote-572) Other individuals who, according to the information available, were prevented from participating in the Municipal Assemblies of the People’s Power as a result of actions taken against them by the Cuban government are: **Lisset Naranjo, Anais Peñalba, Nancy Quiñones, Elías Sánchez, Zelandia de la Caridad Pérez Abreu,** [Yusniel Pupo Carralero](http://www.14ymedio.com/nacional/Seguridad-candidato-independiente-Asamblea-Nominacion_0_2294770511.html), and Raúl Martínez Caraballo, **among others.**[[573]](#footnote-573) **Similarly, five independent candidates entered the race in Santiago de Cuba, but, according to reports, this was not reflected in the official press. In the eastern province, police forces** reportedly **intervened in nomination meetings “as a form of intimidation.”**[[574]](#footnote-574)
20. Similarly, on September 9, the independent candidate from Mayarí, Holguín, Confesor Verdecia Ellcok, also known as “Proco,” was reportedly removed from his house by a Police patrol, and driven to the local police station where he was detained for two hours and interrogated by State security agents. His arrest was reported to have occurred the day after *Diario de Cuba* published an interview with him, conducted by independent journalist Osmel Ramírez Álvarez. According to the information available, they tried to intimidate him into withdrawing his candidacy, and assured him that they would arrest the journalist who interviewed him “within the next few hours.”[[575]](#footnote-575)
21. The Inter-American Commission has underscored that there is a “direct relationship between the exercise of political rights and the concept of democracy as a way of organizing the State,” and has reiterated the need to guarantee citizens and organized political groups the rights to political participation and freedom of expression without fear of retaliation, enabling and fostering a plural, broad, and robust public debate. In the inter-American system, the relationship between human rights, political rights, and democracy is enshrined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which states that: “Essential elements of representative democracy include, *inter alia*, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, access to and the exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law, the holding of periodic, free, and fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people, the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations, and the separation of powers and independence of the branches of government.”
22. **Other situations**
23. On January 21, Danilo Maldonado “El Sexto” was released after spending nearly two months in custody without any charges having been brought against him.[[576]](#footnote-576) In July, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention determined that “El Sexto’s” arrest in November 2016 was arbitrary “according to categories I and III of the methods used by the Working Group, and therefore violates Articles 3, 9, and 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”[[577]](#footnote-577) Maldonado was reportedly detained in Havana on November 26, 2016 for the offense of property damage. Maldonado painted graffiti containing the words “He’s gone” [“*Se fue*”] on a wall of the Habana Libre Hotel after the announcement of Fidel Castro’s death, and reportedly posted a video on his Facebook page celebrating Castro’s death.[[578]](#footnote-578)
24. In June, it was reported that José Antonio Torres, a *Granma* journalist convicted of espionage, was released on probation. Torres was arrested in 2011 and later sentenced to 14 years in prison for the offense of espionage. According to reports, his arrest and conviction were the result of having written a letter to the head of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana (SINA), with the objective of "obtaining a personal interview” and "sensitive information," according to the court file.[[579]](#footnote-579)
25. **DOMINICA**
26. **Progress**
27. On March 18, the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority (ECTEL), of which Dominica is part along with Grenada, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent, would have approved the Electronic Communication Bill (ECB)[[580]](#footnote-580), whose purpose is to replace the current telecommunications law. The law would have a series of objectives such as the absence of discrimination between licenses that do not have similar circumstances or the access of retail clients to information and its dissemination.
28. In addition, when as a result of a market research a license is found to have "significant power", the ECB, through a commission created for this purpose, would guarantee fair and equal access to the public network of electronic communications or submarine cable stations, guaranteeing the interconnection with said network or access to its infrastructure (towers, property, or underground installation), thus favoring the participation of other licenses. Likewise, ECTEL could recommend to the aforementioned commission to compel said media to provide wholesale services to other concessionaires for resale and, when necessary, to offer prescribed functions or attributes to other licenses.
29. For the rest, the ECB would have among its tasks to favor open access to the Internet and to specify the guidelines that should guide the consumer's defense of electronic communications. According to the information available, each member state of ECTEL must adopt the electronic communications law in its internal legislation[[581]](#footnote-581).
30. **Attacks, aggressions, and intimidation against journalists and the media**
31. On October 5, journalist Kenton Chance would have been assaulted by a member of the Barbados Defense Force (BDF) who was participating in the activities of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA). Chance was reporting to the Caribbean News Commission the relief work that was carried out in the port of Dominica after the passage of Hurricane Maria when the agent would have taken the camera with which he registered the events.
32. Then, instructed by a third person, the agent would have proceeded to delete the film records. Minutes later, the camera would have been returned to the journalist. On October 6, the BDF issued a statement publicly apologizing for what had happened and reported that it would carry out an investigation to find the person responsible for these events[[582]](#footnote-582).
33. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
34. **Subsequent liabilities**
35. On February 8, Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit would have sued the leader of the opposition, Lennox Linton, and the radio station *Q95* for defamation and aggravated damages. According to the information available, the lawsuit was filed with the High Court and requested a "significant amount [of money] in damages", as a result of the statements made by Linton in several interviews, articles, and in a public meeting, where he allegedly indicated that the Prime Minister would be selling diplomatic passports or diverting money from a state program called CBI. For his part, Roosevelt Skerrit's lawyer, Tony Astaphan, detailed that Linton's declarations cause "damage to the country simply because [...] they are determined to circulate them in regional and international blogs" and provide erroneous information to stain the Prime Minister. In addition, Astaphan would have indicated that they would write letters to those responsible for the different media outlets to remind them not to "publish information inadvertently, intentionally, or negligently."[[583]](#footnote-583)
36. On April 27, the Privy Council Appeal sentenced the leader of the opposition, Lennox Linton, to pay the sum of £25 thousand 992 (approximately US$34 thousand 390) to Kieron Pinard-Byrne, after finding him responsible for defamation. In this regard, the matter would go back to 2002, when Pinard-Byrne sued Linton for an article that he had published on a website and for statements against him on a radio program, to which Linton, who at the time was journalist, would have been invited to. According to the information available, the matter had been addressed by the local courts, the Eastern Caribbean Court of Appeals, and finally the Appeals Council, which ruled that Linton defamed Pinard-Byrne[[584]](#footnote-584).
37. In accordance with Principle 10 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression, “privacy laws should not inhibit or restrict investigation and dissemination of information of public interest. The protection of a person’s reputation should only be guaranteed through civil sanctions in those cases in which the person offended is a public official, a public person or a private person who has voluntarily become involved in matters of public interest. In addition, in these cases, it must be proven that in disseminating the news, the social communicator had the specific intent to inflict harm, was fully aware that false news was disseminated, or acted with gross negligence in efforts to determine the truth or falsity of such news.”
38. Principle 11 of the IACHR´s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states: “[p]ublic officials are subject to greater scrutiny by society. Laws that penalize offensive expressions directed at public officials, generally known as "*desacato* laws," restrict freedom of expression and the right to information.” Furthermore, the IACHR has held repeatedly that the application of criminal law to sanction expressions about public officials is disproportionate when dealing with protected speech, such as information or expression regarding matters of public interest, and infringes the right to freedom of expression.[[585]](#footnote-585)
39. **Access to public information and restrictions on journalistic coverage**
40. On May 23, journalists and media workers from different media outlets would have joined the House of Assembly (HOA) to report on the third meeting of the ninth parliament of Dominica. According to the information available, despite the fact that the media workers presented their respective press credentials, security agents who provided services in the HOA would have proceeded to expel them from the premises, after affirming that only the Government Information Service (GIS) was allowed to cover the meeting. However, journalists and media workers from the different media indicated that they had received an invitation to participate in it[[586]](#footnote-586).
41. On June 22, journalist Carlisle Jno-Baptiste would have been banned from entering the HOA. According to the information available, the Speaker of the HOA, Alix Boyd Knights, would have prevented him from accessing the building until the journalist publicly apologized for "having disrespected the sanctity of this House." For his part, Jno-Baptiste would have indicated that he never received an explanation for not being granted access to the HOA, and that what could have bothered the Speaker would have been an event two weeks before the episode, in which Knights allegedly thought that the journalist had had a microphone in a meeting, an exaggeration the journalist denied.
42. This Office of the Special Rapporteur wishes to recall that in the Joint Declaration on the regulation of the media, restrictions on journalists, and the investigation of corruption, the Special Rapporteurs for Freedom of Expression of the United Nations, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), th and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), noted that accreditation schemes for journalists " are appropriate only where necessary to provide them with privileged access to certain places and/or events; such schemes should be overseen by an independent body and accreditation decisions should be taken pursuant to a fair and transparent process, based on clear and non discriminatory criteria published in advance. Accreditation should never be subject to withdrawal based only on the content of an individual journalist’s work"[[587]](#footnote-587).
43. **ECUADOR**
44. After the inauguration of President Lenín Moreno on May 24, the Office of the Special Rapporteur received information on the change in attitude of national government high-ranking authorities towards the media, journalists, and human rights defenders. According to civil society organizations and the media, the president has acknowledged to a greater extent the important role the press plays in Ecuadorian democracy and has mitigated most of the stigmatizing and criminalizing practices characteristic of the previous administration.
45. During the administration of former President Rafael Correa, which began in 2007 and ended with the handover of his last administration on May 24, 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur noted the significant increase in restrictions on journalistic activity in Ecuador, the constants and systematic stigmatizing practices against journalists and media which was executed and encouraged by the Government, and the use of criminal law to sue or threaten journalists or media outlets that published information that public officials considered offensive. The application of the Organic Law of Communication [*Ley Orgánica de Comunicación*], during the administration of President Correa, was a matter of concern for this Office of the Special Rapporteur since its approval. Through the Superintendence of Information and Communication [*Superintendencia de la Información y Comunicación*] (Supercom), the media was sanctioned, admonished, and ordered frequently to publish reproductions and official content. Likewise, the former President, through his periodic Saturday program (`*Enlace Ciudadano`*), persistently criticized and disqualified journalists, media, and civil society organizations not aligned with the ruling party.
46. At the hearing on the situation of freedom of expression in Ecuador, held on October 23 in the framework of the 165 period of sessions of the IACHR, civil society and media organizations enumerated the violations to freedom of expression that, in their opinion, occurred in the last years of Rafael Correa's government. The petitioners acknowledged that after the inauguration of the new Government there has been a "greater openness" and "tolerance" towards journalistic work, which has led to a "drastic fall in the number of attacks on freedom of expression." In any case, they maintained the need to implement "structural changes aimed at fully guaranteeing the practice of journalism and freedom of expression." "The legal and institutional structure of the Correa decade is intact, to the point that officials continue to use criminal law to sue journalists who publish information with criticism." The State of Ecuador did not attend the hearing, but sent a letter to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights indicating it was willing to discuss changes to the Organic Law of Communication in different forums and instances.
47. Throughout the year, indigenous communities claimed in international forums for the recognition of their rights, the end of the criminalization of their protest activities, and the violation of the right of association in Ecuador. It was also a matter of concern to civil society and to some political sectors a bill presented by the then President Rafael Correa to regulate acts of hatred and discrimination on the Internet.
48. This report also presents information received on political polarization during the months leading up to the elections, generating an increase in attacks against journalists during the coverage of press conferences and political events. Likewise, several Twitter accounts of journalists, opposition candidates, or critical citizens of the Government, as well as numerous news media websites were the target of cyber-attacks.
49. **Progress**
50. In June, the Constitutional Court processed the unconstitutionality appeals filed against Decree No. 16, which created the Rules of Procedures for the Operation of the Unified Information System of Social and Citizen Organizations [*Reglamento para el Funcionamiento del Sistema Unificado de Información de las Organizaciones Sociales y Ciudadanas*]. The remedies had been presented between July and December 2013 by the indigenous organization *Ecuarunari*, *Fundamedios*, the Unitary Confederation of Retail Merchants and Autonomous Workers of Ecuador [*Confederación Unitaria de Comerciantes Minoristas y Trabajadores Autónomos del Ecuador]*, and congress members Magali Orellana, Lourdes Tibán, and César Umaginga. The trial judge, Wendy Molina Andrade, notified on June 16 that she would hear the remedies and unify them in a single process[[588]](#footnote-588).
51. In July, congress members from different groups created a parliamentary group to promote reforms to the Organic Law of Communication [*Ley Orgánica de Comunicación*] (LOC). The initiative, called "Parliamentary Group for the Defense of Freedom of Expression" [*Grupo parlamentario por la defensa de la libertad de expression*], registered before the National Assembly on August 17, and is composed of legislators from various political sectors. The group will be in charge of analyzing the different bills to reform the LOC that have been presented to Congress, and then elaborating a single proposal[[589]](#footnote-589).
52. On August 23, the District Administrative Court of Guayaquil declared the nullity of the sanction imposed in January 2014 by the Superintendence of Information and Communication [*Superintendencia de la Información y Comunicación*] (Supercom) against the newspaper *El Universo* and the cartoonist Xavier Bonilla "Bonil", due to a cartoon published in December 2013 regarding the home raid of journalist Fernando Villavicencio in the context of a judicial investigation[[590]](#footnote-590). The Court held that the argument of the Superintendence "lacks the necessary strength for a pertinent and complete motivation to arise, since there is no typified conduct by *Diario El Universo*, meriting a sanction."[[591]](#footnote-591) The agency had sanctioned the newspaper with a fine equivalent to 2 per cent of the average turnover of the last three months, while ordering the cartoonist to rectify the publication. The measure was taken because, according to the agency, the cartoon presented the events in a way that "affects and delegitimizes" the actions of the authority and "supports the social turmoil that generates a wrong approach to the facts." On February 5, 2014, 'Bonil' published the rectification of his cartoon and *El Universo* paid the fine imposed[[592]](#footnote-592).
53. **Attacks, threats, and intimidation against journalists and the media**
54. On the night of December 11, 2016, the director of the *Ecuadorenvivo* site, Alfonso Pérez, was attacked by a vehicle and then physically assaulted. The media outlet reported in an editorial that the police authorities did not investigate the case and freed the aggressors[[593]](#footnote-593).
55. On February 16, journalist Janet Hinostroza (*Teleamazonas*) would have received a package containing an explosive device at her workplace[[594]](#footnote-594). The envelope, which had no return address, contained a DVD box with the text: "Who are behind corruption? The irrefutable evidence." The journalist suspected when she noticed that there were cables inside the box and alerted the police. The Police Intervention and Rescue Group [*Grupo de Intervención y Rescate*] (GIR) evacuated the building of the television station to inspect the package, and confirmed that it contained a detonating capsule, which was not activated, so there was no damage. The day before, Congressional president, Gabriela Rivadaneira, received a similar package. After the episodes, the Police detected in the post office another envelope with explosives that was directed to the journalist of *Ecuavisa* Estefaní Espín. As reported by the Interior Ministry, in addition to these three cases, another five packages with explosives would have been sent during those dates and, by the similar characteristics of the triggers, and would come from the same issuer, which would be a group with "advanced knowledge in the matter of explosives."[[595]](#footnote-595) The President, Rafael Correa, described the deliveries as "very serious" and linked them to alleged intentions of "altering the presidential elections" convened for February 19. So far, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has not received information on the identification of those responsible[[596]](#footnote-596).
56. Independent journalist Jairo Loor reported that he was a victim of physical attacks by presidential security detail, during the visit of then President Rafael Correa to Quevedo hospital, in Los Ríos province, on March 10. The communicator reported that he was attacked and his cell phone snatched when he tried to record the President after asking a question that would have bothered him[[597]](#footnote-597).
57. Photographer Marcos Pin, of the *AFP* agency, was physically attacked by alleged militants of the opposition movement *CREO*, while covering a demonstration outside the Provincial Delegation of the National Electoral Council [*Consejo Nacional Electoral*], in Guayaquil, after hearing the partial results of the presidential elections. Likewise, the journalist Rosa Elena Vásconez, of *Televicentro*, would have been pushed around while transmitting the incidents live[[598]](#footnote-598).
58. On June 6, former President Rafael Correa disclosed personal information on his Twitter account on the taxes paid by journalist Jean Cano, questioning the "few taxes he has paid". The publication was in response to a criticism tweet from the journalist about an editorial written by Correa in the state newspaper *El Telégrafo*, in which he wrote: "The propaganda media have withdrawal syndrome. @MashiRafael vs. @Lenin! There go our taxes."[[599]](#footnote-599)
59. On October 15, a Twitter user reportedly threatened to kill television journalist Janet Hinostroza, from the *Teleamazonas* channel. Through the account “@alerta\_911” the user wrote that he wanted to shoot the journalist to clean up "the dirty and corrupt press". The threat was in response to a conversation that the journalist had with a former official of the media regulatory body, the Council for Regulation and Development of Information and Communication [*Consejo de Regulación y Desarrollo de la Información y Comunicación*], through the social network[[600]](#footnote-600).
60. On September 26, at least five photographers and cameramen from the media outlets *El Comercio, Expreso, El Universo, Ecuavisa,* and *Gama TV*, would have been verbally and physically attacked by alleged supporters of former Vice President Jorge Glas, during the appearance of the former official at the General Prosecutor's Office in the framework of an investigation into alleged corruption linked to the construction company Odebrecht[[601]](#footnote-601). Several journalists went through similar attacks on October 15 on the part of alleged supporters of the former vice president, when they covered a hearing in the aforementioned trial[[602]](#footnote-602).
61. At the hearing on the situation of freedom of expression in Ecuador, held on October 23 in the framework of the IACHR’s 165 period of session, in Montevideo, Uruguay, the petitioners -Francisco Rocha, executive director of the Ecuadorian Association of Publishers of Newspapers [*Asociación Ecuatoriana de Editores de Periódicos*](AEDEP), and César Ricaurte, executive director of *Fundamedios*- said that during the decade of Rafael Correa's government (2007-2017) the conditions for freedom of expression and journalistic work "deteriorated severely" with the application of the Organic Law of Communication, physical and verbal attacks, and with an abusive use of State power. In addition, there were 23 criminal proceedings against citizens and journalists, and more than 200 cases of violation of the so-called digital rights, they said. The petitioners expressed particular concern over the cases of the journalist Fernando Villavicencio, who is being tried with restrictions to his personal freedom (under the obligation to carry an electronic shackle), in the context of a criminal trial for the publication of information on alleged acts corruption during the previous government, and that of Freddy Aponte, a journalist who for the last 10 years has been "harassed through the justice system" by the mayor of Loja, José Bolívar Castillo, due to his journalistic work[[603]](#footnote-603).
62. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
63. **Social Protest**
64. After the death of a policeman on December 14, 2016, during clashes between Shuar indigenous group and security forces,[[604]](#footnote-604) in the province of Morona Santiago, due to the mining activities of the Chinese company Exsa on land that they consider ancestral property, the Government declared a state of emergency. On January 12, by decree 1294, the Government extended for another 30 days the state of emergency, while the indigenous group reported that the police arrested and imprisoned five people, later declared innocent on January 13[[605]](#footnote-605). On January 18, 68 groups of national and international civil society petitioned President Correa to "put an end to the persecution of civil society and indigenous activists." They questioned that the Government had declared a state of emergency in the province as a reaction to the resistance measures of the communities against extractive activities in the area[[606]](#footnote-606).
65. The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon *[Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana*] (Confeniae) claimed that on the night of December 20, 2016 about 100 police officers raided the headquarters of the Interprovincial Federation of Shuar Centers [*Federación Interprovincial de Centros Shuar*] (FICSH), in Sucúa, Morona Santiago province, and detained its president, Agustín Wachapá. The police officers would have caused several damages to the facilities and furniture, and seized computers[[607]](#footnote-607). On January 6, the Provincial Court of Justice of Cotopaxi province denied the writ of habeas corpus filed by the indigenous leader's defense. Wachapá is being investigated for the alleged crime of incitement to discord "a call to violence by Shuar members to the public force and to generate confrontations between citizens", as a result of publications that he made on Facebook[[608]](#footnote-608). On April 20, after remaining in prison for four months, the indigenous leader was released on parole, with alternative measures and the payment of a bond of US$ 6 thousand[[609]](#footnote-609).
66. In April, the UN Human Rights Council held the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Ecuador in Geneva, Switzerland. According to a summary published by the agency, civil society organizations denounced the excessive use of force by security forces against demonstrators, violations of the rights to freedom of expression and association, and an insecure environment for human rights defenders[[610]](#footnote-610).
67. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[611]](#footnote-611) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[612]](#footnote-612)
68. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[613]](#footnote-613)
69. **Organic Law of Communication [*Ley Orgánica de Comunicación***]
70. In the Draft Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Ecuador, published on May 3, the UN Human Rights Council recommended the Ecuadorian Government to review and modify the Organic Law of Communication and relevant executive decrees so that the media, civil society organizations, and unions can operate freely, and are not arbitrarily sanctioned or dissolved[[614]](#footnote-614).
71. In the application of the aforementioned Organic Law of Communication, several media suffered sanctions during 2017 for failing to comply with its provisions. For example, on December 12, 2016, the Superintendence of Information and Communication [*Superintendencia de la Información y Comunicación*] (Supercom) issued a written warning to the newspaper *Expreso* for violating the provisions of Article 10, section 3 of that regulation, which refers to compliance with the constitutional mandates of verification, contextualization, and contrasting of information. The sanction was the result of a complaint filed by the state oil company Petroamazonas, which claimed that it had not been consulted for the publication of an article that allegedly referred to the company. The news report, gathered the report of the *Alianza País* congresswoman, Pamela Falconí, on the connection of some names mentioned in the investigation of "The Panama Papers" with oil exploitation in the Yasuní National Park. According to *Expreso*, the process began despite the fact that the news report did not mention the name of the state oil company[[615]](#footnote-615).
72. On February 24, 2017, Supercom warned the newspaper *El Nacional* from Milagro[[616]](#footnote-616) for disseminating the photograph of a car accident with a "morbid" focus. On March 2, the entity issued a warning against the newspaper *Extra* for the "repeated" dissemination of explicit images of a victim of an alleged femicide in that day’s edition. According to the regulatory body, "the dissemination of news events that can shock the public, such as the death of people, requires unrestricted respect for the dignity of those who are part of the news as well as the recipients of the information."[[617]](#footnote-617)
73. On March 22, the Superintendence of Information and Communication [*Superintendencia de Información y Comunicación]* (Supercom) ordered *Radio Impacto FM 98.9*, from Guayaquil, to apologize to paid house workers after determining that the station did not comply with articles 61 and 62 of the Organic Law of Communication , by disseminating content that the agency assessed as discriminatory[[618]](#footnote-618).
74. On March 24, Supercom fined the *Extra* newspaper with an equivalent to 10 per cent of its average turnover for the last three months (approximately US $153 thousand) for not publishing "enough intercultural content", in reference to the obligation to disseminate in their daily editions a 5 per cent intercultural content[[619]](#footnote-619).
75. Supercom fined seven media outlets with 10 base salaries because, according to their interpretation, they had incurred in "prior censorship", for not reporting an investigation published on April 15 by the Argentine newspaper *Página 12*, referring to assets in fiscal paradises that the former candidate for the Presidency of Ecuador for the opposition, Guillermo Lasso would possess. The fine imposed against the media outlets *El Comercio, El Universo, Expreso, La Hora, Televicentro, Teleamazonas* and *Ecuavisa* is equivalent to approximately US$ 3 thousand 750. Carlos Ochoa, director of the agency, explained that the sanction was due to the breach of article 18 of the Law of Communication, which orders the media to cover and disseminate facts of public interest. In the opinion of the Superintendence, the assets of a candidate for the Presidency, its origins, and where they are located, is of public interest and should have been informed by the Ecuadorian media[[620]](#footnote-620).
76. On April 28, the same Supercom issued a written warning against the television stations *Ecuavisa, Teleamazonas* and *Canal Uno* for having disseminated the results of the exit poll by Cedatos company, which anticipated as a winner the opposition candidate Guillermo Lasso[[621]](#footnote-621). That same day, Supercom sanctioned *Diario Expreso* with a written warning for "intentionally misrepresenting" an information in which Lasso was mentioned as the elected president[[622]](#footnote-622).
77. On May 31, Supercom issued a statement informing the radio to prioritize the dissemination of musical content in an attempt to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents, since it was sure of the high degree of influence that this type of music (in reference to the genre Reguetton) has nowadays in children, which could expose them to a behavior detrimental to their integral development[[623]](#footnote-623).
78. On the other hand, during the first months of 2017 the Ecuadorian Government continued with the practice of ordering the publication or transmission of the official opinion on various matters in private media, when the information disclosed by journalists did not coincide with the interpretations or assessments of state agencies. Thus, during the mandate of Rafael Correa, the government repeatedly ordered broadcastings in radio and television channels to reply to information and opinions, and to question journalists and organizations that have issued information with criticism to the state administration. Likewise, the media outlets are forced to publish replies to the information or reviews they publish that are not shared by the Government. The refusal to publish the state response is sanctioned with fines. Since the enactment of the Organic Law of Communication in 2013, media and civil society organizations have questioned the compatibility of this practice with the right to freedom of expression, since these contents were not regarding exceptional situations and of public interest, moreover, many of them would be stigmatizing messages against the media and the opposition[[624]](#footnote-624). In fact, the issuance and mandatory publication of content ordered by the Secretariat of Communication [*Secretaría de Comunicación*] (SECOM) increased during the first half of 2017. Among the affected media are *Ecuavisa*[[625]](#footnote-625), *La Hora*[[626]](#footnote-626), *Exa-Democracia,* and *Radio Visión*[[627]](#footnote-627)*, Teleamazonas*[[628]](#footnote-628), radio of the Amazon region of Sucumbíos, and *Pastaza[[629]](#footnote-629), Gama Tv[[630]](#footnote-630), El Universo. [[631]](#footnote-631)*
79. On January 23 the newspaper *El Universo* had to publish in its cover a correction imposed by the National Institute of Statistics and Census [*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos*] (INEC), after having disseminated news about unemployment in Ecuador that the agency considered that they had an "incorrect reading" and a "tendentious interpretation" of the employment statistics. The newspaper clarified that it carried out the publication "under protest"[[632]](#footnote-632). The newspaper *La Hora* also had to publish editorial replies on the cover of the editions of January 22 and 29 on reports that it had published on unemployment numbers. The newspaper informed its readers that they published the response under protest and clarified that the text of the INEC was not a journalistic note, but an imposed response that used typographies similar to those of the media outlet[[633]](#footnote-633). On February 3, the same newspaper had to publish a response imposed by the Central Bank of Ecuador, after a note on the economic slowdown, which, according to that entity, "misinforms its readers." The media outlet published the official content under protest[[634]](#footnote-634). On February 5, the newspaper *La Hora* again had to publish on its cover a response by the Superintendence of Information and Communication [*Superintendencia de la Información y Comunicación*] (Supercom) that questioned the media for not having contacted them with enough time to contrast a note regarding press freedom and ratings disclosed by the international organization Freedom House. The imposed response occupied a central space with four columns on the cover[[635]](#footnote-635).
80. In the context of the public hearing " Freedom of Expression andmReform of the Organic Law on Communications in Ecuador" held on October 23 during the 165 Regular Period of Session, the petitioners indicated to the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression that the implementation of this law would have had an inhibiting effect for the journalism and for that reason they raised the reform of this and other legal norms, as well as the restructuring of the Secretariat of Communication.
81. **Stigmatizing statements**
82. During the first months of 2017, President Rafael Correa - who was replaced by Lenin Moreno on May 24- continued with the practice of using public media and its weekly broadcasts on the *Enlace Ciudadano* program to criticize and stigmatize journalists and media outlets that report on State actions. The President also repeatedly criticized the opposition candidates during the months leading up to the presidential elections, as well as polling companies and non-governmental organizations.
83. On *Enlace Ciudadano* on January 7, Correa described the *Expreso* and *El Universo* media outlets and some columnists as "corrupt press", of "bad faith", and "ignorant", and accused them of making others "feel ashamed of them", after they published articles and opinions on the economic administration of the country[[636]](#footnote-636). On January 14, Correa tore up a copy of the newspaper *Expreso*, and described that newspaper and the newspaper *La Hora* as "corrupt and dishonest"[[637]](#footnote-637). On January 21, he questioned the media for not giving enough coverage to the celebration of the 10 years of his government and accused the newspapers *El Comercio* and *La Hora* of being "corrupt" and of committing "prior censorship" for not publishing the event in the cover of their editions[[638]](#footnote-638). On February 25, Correa accused several media of generating "chaos since the day of the elections" and criticized the "parade of opponents in commercial media"[[639]](#footnote-639).
84. During the electoral campaign for the presidential elections, Correa used on several occasions his Saturday programs to criticize the candidates of the opposition parties. Referring to the presidential candidate and former banker Guillermo Lasso of the *CREO* movement, he referred to the "corrupt bankers", the "greatest plunderers in the history of the country", and accused them of "stockpiling their fortune and toying with the pain" of the people[[640]](#footnote-640). On April 15, he criticized the *Ecuavisa* television station, the *Participación Ciudadana* organization, and the polling station Cedatos for disseminating results different from those delivered by the pollsters and pro-government media in the April 2 elections. He also questioned the press in general for "selling out" to the opponent candidate[[641]](#footnote-641).
85. On the other hand, Correa repeatedly accused the organization *Fundamedios*, which defends and promotes freedom of expression, of being part of a plan to destabilize his government[[642]](#footnote-642). He also criticized the organization for allegedly "defending the interests of the media lobby" and said that with their claims they try to "damage the country’s image"[[643]](#footnote-643).
86. On April 9, journalist Rafael Cuesta Caputi, who worked as news vice president of *Canal Uno*, announced his resignation after a controversy unleashed by the dissemination of polls with results that were not verified, and a series of questionings by President Correa through his program *Enlace Ciudadano*. The questionings against *Canal Uno* were due to the fact that the media disseminated results of polls and exit polls that gave as a winner the opposition candidate Guillermo Lasso, instead of Lenin Moreno, who effectively won in the presidential elections. Cuesta Caputi said that one of the channels, retransmitted in *Enlace Ciudadano*, manipulated and decontextualized their expressions, and stated that the media presented the corresponding apologies to its viewers for the mistake made[[644]](#footnote-644).
87. On *Enlace Ciudadano* on April 29, Correa called journalists José Hernández, Juan Carlos Calderón, and cartoonist Xavier Bonilla "Bonil" "cowards" and "effeminate" after they questioned him for his statements regarding a judicial investigation on the alleged corruption of a former high-ranking official of his government[[645]](#footnote-645).
88. On May 20, during the last edition of the *Enlace Ciudadano* program prior to the change of government, Correa again tore up a copy of a newspaper - in this occasion, the newspaper *La Hora*, being the ninth time he did so - and criticized the private media outlet, which he described as "scoundrels" and "corrupt". He also disqualified the journalists, whom he described as "jukebox journalists in which you put a coin in and they play the record you ask for." During the show, a review of what the Government considered "the lies of the corrupt commercial press" during the years of Correa's administration was presented[[646]](#footnote-646). His successor, Lenin Moreno, who took office on May 24, announced that he would not continue with the weekly programs[[647]](#footnote-647).
89. On June 19, former President Rafael Correa called on his followers of the social network Twitter to find out and expose the identity and personal information of those who insult and criticize him on social networks. "I propose that all the insulting ones, in addition to denouncing their trills, we find out and expose who they are ... where they live, work, etc., to see if they are capable of saying in person the crap they write in networks. Okay?" He wrote in a series of tweets[[648]](#footnote-648).
90. A context of marked confrontation in which journalists are constantly insulted and stigmatized creates a climate that prevents the reasonable and plural deliberation of public issues. Tension between the press and the government is a normal phenomenon that arises from the natural function of the press and occurs in many States. However, sharp polarization shuts down opportunities for calm debate and helps neither the authorities nor the press to better fulfill their respective roles in a vigorous, deliberate, and open democracy. In such cases, given its national and international responsibilities, it is the State’s job to help create a climate of greater tolerance and respect for the ideas of others, including when those ideas are offensive or disturbing.[[649]](#footnote-649)
91. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that public servants have the duty to ensure that their statements do not infringe upon the rights of those who contribute to public deliberation through the expression and dissemination of their thoughts, such as journalists, media outlets, and human rights defense organizations. They must be mindful of the context in which they express themselves in order to ensure that their statements do not constitute, in the words of the Court, “forms of direct or indirect interference or harmful pressure on the rights of those who seek to contribute with public deliberation through the expression and diffusion of their thoughts.”[[650]](#footnote-650)
92. **Subsequent Liabilities**
93. An oversight commission called by former President Rafael Correa and designated by draw by the Council of Citizen Participation and Social Control [*Consejo de Participación Ciudadana y Control Social*] investigated in 2011 the concessions of public contracts to companies linked to Fabricio Correa, brother of the former president, to determine if there were losses for the State. In February 2011 the oversight commission, composed of Pablo Chambers, Gerardo Portillo, Víctor Hugo Hidalgo, and José Quishpe, concluded that former President Correa knew of his brother's contracts with the State - despite the fact that the former president had denied it - and that these would have caused the country a loss of US $ 144 million. After the disclosure of the report, Correa filed a complaint against the oversight commission for false testimony. After that, the Prosecutor's Office requested that the oversight commission be prosecuted, who were called to trial in September 2012. In May 2014 the Eighth Court of Criminal Guarantees [*Tribunal Octavo de Garantías Penales* ] of Pichincha sentenced Chambers and Portillo to one year in prison, and acquitted Quishpe and Hidalgo, despite the fact that the report had the signature of the four members. In September of that year, the Appeal Court of the Criminal Chamber of the Provincial Court [*Tribunal de la Sala Penal la Corte Provincial*] of Pichincha confirmed the conviction. The convicted individuals filed a cassation remedy before the National Court of Justice [*Corte Nacional de Justicia*] (CNJ), who on 15 of December of 2016 rejected it and ratified the conviction of a year of prison[[651]](#footnote-651).
94. On December 19, 2016, the courts annulled a habeas corpus that ordered the freedom of journalist Fernando Villavicencio and former Congressman Clever Jiménez, following an appeal filed by the legal secretary of the Presidency, Alexis Mera. As a result, the arrest warrant against Jiménez and Villavicencio, issued on October 28, 2016 by Judge Jorge Blum of the National Court of Justice in the context of a trial for the alleged disclosure of confidential information, was again in effect[[652]](#footnote-652). On April 18, Villavicencio filed an asylum request with the Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, claiming that he suffers political persecution and that he has been ordered to serve a prison sentence[[653]](#footnote-653). On July 12, the judge of the National Court of Justice, Magally Soledispa, revoked the order of pretrial detention against Jiménez and Villavicencio, and replaced it with the obligation to use electronic wristbands and present themselves once a week in court[[654]](#footnote-654).
95. On June 10, the former Housing Minister, María de los Ángeles Duarte, threatened on her Twitter account to prosecute journalist Fernando Villavicencio due to his comments on the Odebrecht case, which would implicate Ecuadorian government officials in possible acts of corruption. Villavicencio published a tweet suggesting that Duarte would have left the country due to the arrest warrant issued against former minister Walter Solís, as part of the investigations into the Odebrecht case. In response, the former high-ranking official accused Villavicencio of "fake" and "defamatory" and warned him that he will face a lawsuit[[655]](#footnote-655).
96. On January 18, the manager of the newspaper *La Prensa* of Riobamba (Central Sierra), Patricio Lalama, and the editor of the newspaper, Lucy Freire, were sentenced to pay compensation of US $ 10 thousand, for publishing an ad payed by a third party. The lawsuit was filed by judge Nelson Cristobal Escobar Calderón in July 2015 due to what he considered "false and malicious statements" made against him in an ad payed for by lawyer Manuel Germán Zapater and published in *La Prensa* in July 2014, in which the judge was questioned for delaying the dispatch of the trials, "violating all rules", "trampling on dignity", and "not comply with legal provisions," among other things[[656]](#footnote-656).
97. On February 13, during a press conference, the vice president and then candidate for re-election by the ruling party, Jorge Glas, would have threatened to take legal action against the newspaper *Expreso* for the "dishonor" actions against him[[657]](#footnote-657). On March 1, Glas went to the State Attorney's Office to file a complaint for slander with the aim of "putting an end to" what he called "a systematic campaign to destroy his image and affect his honor" by the *Expreso* newspaper, which published several complaints against the vice president for alleged acts of corruption. In November, Glas was subjected to pretrial detention[[658]](#footnote-658).
98. On April 20, Judge Karen Matamoros declared the members of the National Anticorruption Commission [*Comisión Nacional Anticorrupción*] guilty of the crime of slander, in the context of a complaint filed by the State Comptroller General, Carlos Pólit[[659]](#footnote-659). The members of the commission Julio César Trujillo, Isabel Robalino, María de Lourdes Arboleda, Byron Celi, Simón Espinosa, Alfredo Rodas, Ramiro Román, Juan Fernando Vega, and Jorge Rodríguez were sentenced to one year in prison, to pay a compensation to Polit, and to present a public apology. However, immediately after hearing of the conviction, Polit’s lawyer announced that his client would revoke the complaint, after which the judge accepted the withdrawal and declared the criminal action prescribed. The case began in February 2016, when the commissioners filed a complaint in which they pointed out that Pólit was part of a list of officials responsible for an alleged overpricing in the appraisal of land acquired for the construction of the Pacific Refinery. In July of that year the judge of the National Court of Justice, Marco Maldonado, archived the complaint and described it as "malicious and reckless". After the case file was archived, the State Comptroller General filed a lawsuit against the commissioners for slander, for making a false accusation of an offense against him. Shortly before Judge Matamoros' sentence was known, Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno referred to the issue in his official Twitter account, where he encouraged Polit to "review the lawsuit" against the commissioners and said it was time for "greater tolerance", while asking social organizations "to proceed with greater thoroughness and responsibility"[[660]](#footnote-660).
99. On April 21, the political activist and director of the information site *Ecuadorenvivo*, Alfonso Pérez Serrano, was criminally accused by the Collective of relatives of the 'Hoguera Bárbara' martyrs, for allegedly "inciting discord among citizens", after giving a political speech weeks ago, while citizens and supporters of the opposition movement *CREO* gathered outside the headquarters of the National Electoral Council [*Consejo Nacional Electoral*] (CNE) to demand transparency in the results of the presidential elections. The activist later reported that the complaint against him contained a letter from the then legal advisor of the Presidency, Alexis Mera, who accuses him of uttering expressions against Rafael Correa. "The underlying issue is that the accuser is Rafael Correa, who apparently felt alluded to by descriptions I have made without even mentioning his name," he said[[661]](#footnote-661).
100. On June 5, as a former president, Rafael Correa filed a complaint against journalist Martín Pallares, from the *4Pelagatos* site, whom he accused of proffering "expressions of discredit and dishonor" against him, a violation typified in article 396 of the Organic Comprehensive Criminal Code [*Código Orgánico Integral Penal*] and is punishable by a prison term of 15 to 30 days. In an article published on April 25, the journalist questioned the president for a supposed "double speech" in relation to the case of former energy minister Alexksey Mosquera, who is under investigation for corruption[[662]](#footnote-662). On July 3, after a hearing held in the Northern Judicial Unit of Quito [*Unidad Judicial Norte de Quito*], Judge Fabricio Carrasco declared the journalist innocent[[663]](#footnote-663). The former president filed an appeal against the decision, which was admitted for processing on July 18 by the Judicial Contraventions Unit of Pichincha [*Unidad Judicial de Contravenciones de Pichincha*][[664]](#footnote-664).
101. The mayor of the city of Loja, José Bolivar Castillo, has been using criminal complaints on a regular basis to report attacks to his honor by journalists and opposition leaders, while stigmatizing those who criticize or investigate. In May, Judge Gladys Sarango would have banned activist and blogger Bolívar Loján from using "computer media" as part of a precautionary measure issued in the context of a judicial proceeding against him for the alleged crime of perjury. The activist was accused by the mayor , for allegedly committing perjury when he testified as a witness in the trial that the politician initiated against Councilwoman Jeannine Cruz. The precautionary measure bans the activist from "referring to or assaulting" the mayor, attending the meetings of the Mayor’s Office, or entering the facilities of the Municipality, and ordered him to appear every 10 days before the Office of the Prosecutor. The complaint against the Councilwoman was motivated, in turn, by alleged "expressions of discredit or dishonor" that she professed in social networks and that the mayor considered offensive[[665]](#footnote-665).
102. Indeed, on July 3, the Civil Judicial Unit of Loja [*Unidad Judicial Civil de Loja*] declared journalist Freddy Aponte bankrupt, in the context of a trial initiated in 2007 by the mayor José Bolívar Castillo, for moral damages and insults. Aponte was declared bankrupt after not being able to face the payment of a compensation of approximately US $ 55 thousand to Castillo. The media worker had already been tried and sentenced for "fraudulent bankruptcy" by the criminal justice system, due to the non-payment of that compensation, and was acquitted in April 2015 by the Criminal Chamber of the National Court of Justice. However, the mayor initiated a new civil process - the sixth one against the journalist - that led to the declaration of bankruptcy. As a result of the judicial decision, the journalist was unable to manage his assets and is banned from leaving the country. The journalist had already served a six-month prison sentence in 2008 as part of this process, as he was found guilty of making false accusations against the mayor in his opinion program "*Primer Plano*" on *Radio Zapotillo*. Aponte reported being the victim of a "systematic persecution" by the mayor due to the complaints he makes in his programs. He also reported that there are links between the high-ranking official and the local judges, which prevents his case from being impartially judged[[666]](#footnote-666). The harassment of the mayor of Loja against the journalist has not been limited to judicial proceedings. On April 26, the mayor burst into Aponte's radio program, "*Primer Plano*," demanding to go on air to refute comments made by the journalist about his administration[[667]](#footnote-667). On July 9, in the municipal program "*Nuestra ciudad en la semana*" Bolívar Castillo said that the media worker "vomits poison and hatred every day" against him through the program on *Radio Zapotillo*. Regarding the judicial processes, the mayor affirmed that it is a constant struggle in which he will not bend "for the general wellbeing" and because, in his opinion, the journalist "has a lot of power and believes he is untouchable"[[668]](#footnote-668).
103. Journalist Wilman Morocho reported that on April 7 he was fired from *Radio Satelital* de Loja, after alleged pressure exerted by the mayor of that town, José Bolívar Castillo, due to his criticism on his administration. The director of the station, Patricio Salinas, denied to the Fundamediosorganization that the dismissal was due to pressure from the mayor, although he did confirm that there were urgings a few months ago[[669]](#footnote-669).
104. The Army Commander, General Édison Narváez, asked the journalist Marlon Puertas, director of the journalistic website *La Historia*, to rectify expressions that he considered threaten the honor of the Armed Forces and question his leadership, and warned that otherwise the institution will take "measures under the law" against him. In his program "*Focus en Democracia*," from the *DemocraciaTV* Internet channel, Puertas said that "in the past a General inspired respect, and it would not have occurred to a politician to treat them like a shoe, as they are treated now"[[670]](#footnote-670).
105. In accordance with Principle 10 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression, “privacy laws should not inhibit or restrict investigation and dissemination of information of public interest. The protection of a person’s reputation should only be guaranteed through civil sanctions in those cases in which the person offended is a public official, a public person or a private person who has voluntarily become involved in matters of public interest. In addition, in these cases, it must be proven that in disseminating the news, the social communicator had the specific intent to inflict harm, was fully aware that false news was disseminated, or acted with gross negligence in efforts to determine the truth or falsity of such news.”
106. Principle 11 of the IACHR´s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states: “[p]ublic officials are subject to greater scrutiny by society. Laws that penalize offensive expressions directed at public officials, generally known as "*desacato* laws," restrict freedom of expression and the right to information.” Furthermore, the IACHR has held repeatedly that the application of criminal law to sanction expressions about public officials is disproportionate when dealing with protected speech, such as information or expression regarding matters of public interest, and infringes the right to freedom of expression.[[671]](#footnote-671)
107. **Legal reforms**
108. On May 23, then President Rafael Correa presented a bill to regulate "acts of hatred and discrimination in social networks and the Internet." The project creates obligations for "providers of social network services," such as preparation of quarterly reports and management of illegal content. In view of the latter, the providers of said services must remove or block access to manifestly illegal content within 24 hours after receiving a complaint or report, and eliminate or block access to any illegal content within 72 hours after receiving the complaint. In case of non-compliance, the bill provides for sanctions from 100 to 1,000 unified basic salaries. The bill has generated rejection among civil society organizations and some political sectors[[672]](#footnote-672).
109. **Censorship of journalistic material / Prior censorship / Direct and indirect censorship**
110. On December 13, 2016, the First Instance Resolution Commission [*Comisión de Resolución de Primera Instancia*] (CRPI) of the Superintendence of Market Power Control [*Superintendencia de Control de Poder del Mercado*] (SCPM) issued a resolution ordering the Association of Private Banks [*Asociación de Bancos Privados*] and its subsidiaries to implement the creation of electronic money accounts. In this resolution, the Superintendence ordered that, as a preventive measure, the entities refrain from carrying out and disseminating by any printed, televised, or social media outlet "slanderous allusions to the means of payment Electronic Money [*Dinero Electrónico*]"[[673]](#footnote-673).
111. On August 2, the Ministry of Culture of the Municipality of Quito reported that the mural titled "*El Milagroso Altar Blasfemo*" would be removed from the exhibition "*La intimidad es política*" at the Metropolitan Cultural Center of Quito [*Centro Cultural Metropolitano de Quito*]. The municipal authorities would have made the decision a day after the Ecuadorian Episcopal Conference issued a statement expressing their "concern and discomfort" for the exhibition, considering it promotes mockery and phobia against believers, particularly against Catholic Christians[[674]](#footnote-674). The municipality would have argued that the reason would be the lack of permits to work in a government structure, and would have assured that the position of the Church is not related to the decision to withdraw the work. They also informed that the work would be photographed and relocated to another place in the Metropolitan Cultural Center of Quito. The mural, by the Bolivian group *Mujeres Creando*, was shown with a warning to the public that its content could be offensive to those who profess the Christian faith. The work integrated a sample of works of national and international artists who presented reflections on sex, gender, social class, or ethnicity[[675]](#footnote-675).
112. According to Principle 5 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression “Prior censorship, direct or indirect interference in or pressure exerted upon any expression, opinion or information transmitted through any means of oral, written, artistic, visual or electronic communication must be prohibited by law. Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression.
113. **Freedom of expression in electoral contexts**
114. On January 25, the *Avanza* party, led by Ramiro González, denounced the censorship of a radio advertisement that promoted their nominations to the Assembly and the Andean Parliament. On January 20, the National Electoral Council [*Consejo Nacional Electoral*] (CNE) suspended the spot on the grounds that it violates Article 19 of the Constitution and Article 277 of the Code of Democracy [*Código de la Democracia*], which refer to the prohibition of issuing advertisements that induce violence or discrimination. The censored spot makes a representation of a legislative session, where, instead of human voices, lambs are heard and the howl of a wolf who, after decision of his companions and by disposition of a legislative authority, is sanctioned for being different. In a press conference, González described the decision as "attack" against the rights to freedom and democracy. His party had to modify the spot to continue promoting their nominations[[676]](#footnote-676).
115. Journalists from different media reported aggressions in the framework of the electoral campaign. On February 9, supporters of the opposition political party *CREO* allegedly physically and verbally assaulted the journalist Patricio Carrera, of the state media *El Telégrafo* during the coverage of a conference of Andrés Páez, candidate for vice-presidency for that movement[[677]](#footnote-677). On February 20, an *Ecuavisa* news team and a photojournalist from *El Comercio* were attacked by a group of people outside the headquarters of the National Electoral Council in Quito, in the face of the uncertainty generated by the delay in the delivery of the presidential elections results held the day before[[678]](#footnote-678).
116. On March 15, Venezuelan activist Lilian Tintori, wife of opposition leader Leopoldo López, who is a prisoner in Venezuela, was prevented from entering Ecuador for allegedly not having justified "her immigration status." The Deputy Minister of the Interior, Diego Cifuentes, assured that "there were inconsistencies between the tourist visa and the proselytizing activities that she indicated she was going to carry out." The activist had been invited by opposition presidential candidate Guillermo Lasso[[679]](#footnote-679).
117. On April 2, the director of the Citizen Participation Corporation [*Corporación Participación Ciudadana*], Ruth Hidalgo, received a death threat through two phone calls, one to her cellphone and the second to her home phone. Other members of the organization were also threatened. The incident occurred after announcing the results of the rapid count that the organization carried out after the presidential elections, where she declared the existence of a technical tie[[680]](#footnote-680).
118. In the framework of the electoral process, different incidents related to the exercise of freedom of expression occurred. On April 5 the Superintendence of Information and Communication [*Superintendencia de la Información y Comunicación*] (Supercom) issued, under Article 57 of the Organic Law of Communication [*Ley Orgánica de Comunicación*] (LOC), a "severe call for attention" against Diego Oquendo Silva, legal representative of *Radio Visión*, for opening the microphones of the station to the listeners so that they could express themselves regarding the electoral results proclaimed by the National Electoral Council [*Consejo Nacional Electoral*] (CNE)[[681]](#footnote-681). On April 7, a mandatory broadcast was transmitted on the news programs of *Ecuavisa, Televicentro, Ecuador TV* and *TC*, in which protesters who, in the days following the presidential elections, demanded a more transparent electoral process on the streets, were disqualified[[682]](#footnote-682). On April 11, dozens of supporters of the opposition candidate Guillermo Lasso, who lost the elections on April 2, were evicted from the outskirts of the CNE in Quito, where they demanded a recount of votes. The demonstrators had remained for nine days in front of the headquarters of the electoral body and had blocked the circulation on the avenue *6 de diciembre*. The police disarmed the tents installed on the streets and seized donations that the protesters received[[683]](#footnote-683). The Ministry of Interior reported in a statement that the police action was carried out in order and with no excesses[[684]](#footnote-684).
119. The Secretariat of Communication [*Secretaría de Comunicación*] (Secom) disqualified in a broadcast the polling Center for Studies and Data [*Centro de Estudios y Datos*] (Cedatos) and the Citizen Participation Corporation for the results of the exit poll released after the April 2 elections, which were favorable to the opposition candidate Guillermo Lasso[[685]](#footnote-685). The Citizen Participation Corporation was also questioned for having announced a technical tie and not pronouncing as the winner the official candidate[[686]](#footnote-686). Likewise, the pro-government *Alianza PAIS* movement threatened to file lawsuits against Cedatos, and the *Ecuavisa* and *Canal UNO* television channels for having proclaimed a "false result"[[687]](#footnote-687). In this context, Cedatos reported in a press release having been the victim of illegal information interception and violations to the privacy of their emails, and filed a complaint with the Prosecutor's Office[[688]](#footnote-688).
120. On May 4, Judge María Elena Lara ordered the opening of a prosecution for the alleged crime of forgery and use of false documents against Cedatos. The decision was made after the Prosecutor's Office argued that there were enough elements of conviction to presume that officials of that company made changes in the results of the polls to benefit the presidential candidacy of the opponent Guillermo Lasso. The defense of the company rejected the decision and affirmed that there were several violations to due process[[689]](#footnote-689). On May 25, at the request of the Prosecutor's Office, the judge decided to link the director of Cedatos, Ángel Polibio Córdova, to the investigation being carried out against the consultant[[690]](#footnote-690).
121. The offices of the pollster in Quito were raided on April 7 to seize information contained in the computer equipment and physical files of the company, in the framework of an investigation initiated following a complaint filed by the congresswoman of the ruling party and vice president of the Assembly, Rosana Alvarado, who accused the pollster of having mistakenly announced a favorable outcome to candidate Lasso in the exit polls in the presidential elections on April 2[[691]](#footnote-691). On April 13, within the framework of this investigation, the Provincial Prosecutor's Office of Pichincha called 19 people to render a statement, among them, Polibio Córdova, Lasso, Andrés Páez, and Alfonso Espinosa de los Monteros, a journalist from *Ecuavisa*[[692]](#footnote-692). The call was made after the then President Rafael Correa expressed, during his *Enlace Ciudadano* program of April 8, that both *Ecuavisa* and Cedatos should answer before the law, since in his opinion they had "civil, administrative, and all kinds of responsibilities", due to the disclosure of the polls that gave an alleged advantage to the opposition candidate[[693]](#footnote-693).
122. In electoral contexts, freedom of expression is directly connected to political rights and their exercise, and both types of rights mutually strengthen one another.[[694]](#footnote-694) Reasoned democratic debate requires the greatest possible circulation of ideas, opinions and information about the candidates, their parties, and their platforms during the period preceding an election, principally through the media, the candidates, and others who wish to express themselves. Everyone must be able to question and investigate the capacity and suitability of the candidates, disagree with and confront their ideas and opinions, so that voters can form their opinions.[[695]](#footnote-695) As the IACHR has underscored, free speech and political debate are essential for the consolidation of the democratic life of societies, and therefore are of compelling social interest.[[696]](#footnote-696)
123. **Internet and freedom of expression**
124. Throughout 2017, and particularly in the previous weeks and during the presidential elections, several websites were victims of cyber-attacks that temporarily suspended access to their contents. Several Twitter accounts of candidates by opposition parties, political activists, journalists, and the media also suffered hackings.
125. On January 15, six Twitter accounts of opposition politicians, political activists, and independent media journalists would have been hacked; among them the account of the candidate for the Presidency of the Republic, Abdalá Bucaram Pulley and of his movement, *Fuerza Ecuador*, the account of the candidate for the vice presidency Andrés Páez, and the account of the director of the *Plan V* magazine, Juan Carlos Calderón[[697]](#footnote-697). The news site *Ecuadorenvivo* would have suffered cyber-attacks on January 19 and 25[[698]](#footnote-698). The journalistic research site *Milhojas.is* would also have been the target of attacks on January 24[[699]](#footnote-699) and February 3[[700]](#footnote-700). On January 25 the website of the organization Fundamedios, the site *Ecuadorchequea.com* (a fact-checking site that verifies the speech of the candidates for the Presidency), and the digital radio *Rayuelaradio* would have been victims of a hack that took them off the air for many hours[[701]](#footnote-701). On February 7, the official *Ultimas Noticias* account on the Twitter social network would have been hacked[[702]](#footnote-702). On February 12 and 16, two Twitter accounts of *El Comercio* newspaper would have been hacked[[703]](#footnote-703). On August 14, the *Fundamedios* site again suffered a cyber-attack[[704]](#footnote-704). In April Twitter would have suspended the account of user @Aliciadorada, which had almost 10 thousand followers. The tweeter said that the social network notified her that her account was permanently suspended because she shared private information[[705]](#footnote-705).
126. The organization Fundamedios, reported in August that the company Twitter would keep suspended and blocked the accounts of at least eight users who comment on issues of economic situation and are critical of the government of Ecuador. Among them would be the satirical account @CrudoEcuador, and others like @mi\_rinkon, @LeonardoHumbolt, @AliciaDorada, @skueffner, @FDavid\_92, @EcuadorTwitter, and @GaloLara. In turn, according to the organization *Digital Users*, 14 accounts would have been blocked and suspended by Twitter between July 29 and August 6[[706]](#footnote-706).
127. On February 6, the journalistic site *Ubicatv.com*, which often publishes information with criticism of government, was taken off the air following a claim of copyright infringement filed by the Secretariat of Communication [*Secretaría de Comunicación*] (SECOM), due to the use of photographs of the candidate for the presidency by the government party, Lenin Moreno, and of the former minister of hydrocarbons, Carlos Pareja Yannuzzelli, a public official allegedly implicated in a corruption case with the state oil company. SECOM alleged that the material belongs to it and complained to the servers that host the site, who took it down. Hours later, the site was working again[[707]](#footnote-707).
128. **Communications surveillance**
129. On September 15, President Lenin Moreno publicly reported that he had found an activated hidden camera in his presidential office. Moreno reported that the former president Rafael Correa had ordered the installation of the hidden camera years ago, during his administration, and that he monitored it from his cellphone. The president questioned the fact that he had not been informed of the existence of the camera and affirmed that it was an "offense of violation to privacy". He also ordered an internal investigation to determine the reasons why security personnel did not report on the installation of the device[[708]](#footnote-708). Correa responded to the accusations in his Twitter account, calling Moreno "ridiculous" and challenged him to present evidence[[709]](#footnote-709).
130. A few days after the discovery reported by Moreno, the Ecuadorian newspaper *Expreso* published an investigation revealing that the National Intelligence Secretariat [*Secretaría Nacional de Inteligencia*] (Senain) of Ecuador had monitored civil society during the term of former President Rafael Correa. According to the publication, dated September 21, Senain would have monitored people in the personal, familiar, and professional circles of opposition politicians, journalists, businesspersons, social, and indigenous organizations, tweeters, and even members of the Correa government[[710]](#footnote-710).
131. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has also observed that the decisions to conduct surveillance operations that invade the privacy of persons must be authorized by independent judicial authorities who must explain the reasons why the measure is ideal for achieving the goal sought in a specific case, whether the measure is restricted enough not to affect the person’s right any more than necessary, and whether it is proportionate to the interest being furthered. Investigations that involve an invasion of privacy that is authorized by law and ordered by a judge having jurisdiction must also uphold other guarantees related to due process. States must guarantee that the judicial authority is specialized and has jurisdiction to make legal decisions regarding the lawfulness of communications surveillance, the technology used and its effect on rights that may be compromised, and that they provide enough guarantees to act appropriately. Finally, the Office of the Special Rapporteur notes that at least the criteria for decisions made by courts must be public.[[711]](#footnote-711)
132. **Community broadcasting**
133. On July 7, the Telecommunications Regulation and Control Agency [*Agencia de Regulación y Control de las Telecomunicaciones*] (Arcotel) declared the allocation of 553 radio and TV frequencies deserted, as part of a public bid initiated in 2016. 539 were vacant due to lack of applicants and 14 frequencies for local radios were disqualified for not reaching the minimum score required in the bidding rules. The 553 frequencies were left open for future bids. According to resolution 0654 of Arcotel, applicants who were disqualified or who for any reason did not participate in the bid for the award of frequencies and are making use of the radio spectrum may continue operating as long as the frequencies are not allocated[[712]](#footnote-712).
134. On various occasions, the IACHR and the Office of the Special Rapporteur have recognized that community media in our region fulfill a fundamental function for the exercise by diverse sectors of society of freedom of expression and access to information.[[713]](#footnote-713) In that sense, it is necessary for the states to legally recognize community media and to consider fair spectrum reserves for this type of media, along with adequate conditions of access to licenses that would take into account the circumstances. Similarly, community media must benefit from fair and simple procedures for obtaining licenses, must not have to comply with technological or other types of requirements that involve disproportionate barriers for access to licenses, and in their operation must not be the target of differentiated treatments that are not adequately justified.[[714]](#footnote-714)
135. **EL SALVADOR**
136. In 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur registered serious threats and intimidation against two journalists through social networks, the incursion into the newsroom of the media outlet, and attacks on vehicles of certain media. The existence of a microphone in the offices of a civil society organization that works on issues related to the rule of law and access to public information was also reported. Additionally, a preliminary bill that would guarantee protection mechanisms for journalists and social media workers was presented in Parliament, although no progress has been made in its approval so far.
137. During the present year, a defamation lawsuit was filed by the mayor of the city of San Salvador, Nayib Bukele against *La Prensa Gráfica*. However, the court decided to strike the complaint on the understanding that the journalistic investigation was of public interest and was based on various documentary and testimonial sources.
138. The Office of the Special Rapporteur also highlights a decision of a Court of Appeals that acquitted the director of *Revista Factum* who, in 2016, had been accused of slander by a businessman who was interrogated and then arrested for the crimes of fraud and bribery.
139. **Progress**
140. On January 19, President Salvador Sánchez Cerén announced that his country will adopt the ISDB-TB standard for the transmission of digital radio and television. In this regard, Sánchez Cerán explained that through a hardworking process of consultation, technical research, and dialogue with organizations, unions, and concessionaires, the General Superintendence of Electricity and Telecommunications [*Superintendencia General de Electricidad y* Telecomunicaciones*]* (SIGET), would have established the National Plan of Digital Terrestrial Television [*Plan Nacional de Televisión Digital Terrestre*], for which reason "the country moves towards Central American integration and joins the same communication technology established throughout the region." The measure would begin to take effect towards the end of 2018.[[715]](#footnote-715) According to the information available, the announcement of the beginning of the digitalization of Salvadoran television takes place within the framework of the reforms to the Telecommunications Law, which now recognizes the operation of community radio and television as part of the system of media that should work in El Salvador. Likewise, it would be expected that, with the result of the "digital dividend" that would result from the process of technological convergence, the passage to the authorization of community television media will be generated. In addition, the selected technical standard "represents multiple advantages for the country, such as greater coverage, better sound and image quality, interactivity, the possibility of generating early warnings in the event of disasters, and mobility in portable devices"[[716]](#footnote-716).
141. **Murders**
142. On November 16, cameraman Samuel Rivas, of the *Grupo Megavisión*, was murdered in the city of Ilopango, department of San Salvador, after being shot several times allegedly by gang members. According to the information available, Rivas was painting the facade of a church he regularly attended, when two men got off a motorcycle and shot him. According to the police personnel that would guard the area, the alleged gang members who attacked the cameraman "operate in the area" and an investigation was opened to find those responsible. In this regard, the news director of the *Grupo Megavisión*, Roberto Hugo Preza, reportedly indicated that the cameraman had never received threats and, therefore, he could not assure that his murder was linked to his status as a media worker . For its part, the Association of Journalists of El Salvador [*Asociación de Periodistas de El Salvador*] (APES), condemned what happened in the social network Twitter and requested "a thorough investigation of the incident"[[717]](#footnote-717).
143. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
144. **Attacks, threats, and intimidation to journalists and the media**
145. Regarding attacks, threats, and intimidation to journalists and the media, on May 22, in the municipality of San Miguel, journalist Marcela Rivera and cameraman Marcos Rivera, both from *Tropivisión*, reported that Mario Arévalo, councilor and director of *TVO*, would have interfered and obstructed their journalistic work during the coverage of an incident between personnel of the Corps of Municipal Agents [*Cuerpo de Agentes Municipales*] (CAM) and members of the political party *GANA.* The councilman would have simulated to record them and threatened them. According to available information, the events were witnessed by members of the National Civil Police [*Policía Nacional Civil*] (PNC) and CAM agents who would have not intercede in the matter[[718]](#footnote-718).
146. On June 30, in the municipality of Santa Tecla, journalists from *4 Visión* and *Canal 1*2 would have been assaulted by vendors in the area while they were preparing to record the riots that occurred in the San Martín park between vendors and members of the Municipal Agent Corps [*Cuerpo de Agentes Municipales*] (CAM). According to available information, the media workers Alejandra Arévalo and Juan Arriaga would have been injured[[719]](#footnote-719).
147. On August 22, the journalist Jorge Omar Beltrán published through his Twitter account that his car was painted with a blue acid and that on the windshield there was a sign with the letters "SOB" [*HDP]*. The media worker, who covers security issues, gangs, and corruption, reported that the National Civil Police [*Policía Nacional Civil*] (PNC) wrote down the complaint for damages and not for threats[[720]](#footnote-720).
148. Following the publication on August 22 of a report titled "In the privacy of the police death squad," which revealed that four agents of the Special Reaction Forces of El Salvador [*Fuerzas Especiales de Reacción de El Salvador*] (FES), a specialized unit of the National Police Civil [*Policía Nacional Civil*] (PNC), would have killed gang members simulating a confrontation, two journalists from the news outlets *Revista Factum* and *El Faro* would have received threatening and intimidating messages through Twitter and Facebook[[721]](#footnote-721). One of the intimidating comments made via Twitter, alluded to the different investigations carried out by the journalist *Revista Factum* "against the PNC."[[722]](#footnote-722) On the same day, the Office of the Prosecutor for the Defense of Human Rights [*Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos*] (PDDH) ordered through a precautionary measure of protection that the Director of the PNC, Howard Cotto, guaranteed the safety of the journalists involved, along with the protection of the facilities, equipment, materials, and all useful instruments necessary to carry out their activities[[723]](#footnote-723).
149. On August 26, four people would have arrived at the offices of *Revista Factum*, in a blue bus, without carrying official distinctions and identifying themselves as members of the PDDH, with the intention of obtaining information related to the entry and exit schedules of journalists[[724]](#footnote-724). Hours later, the PDDH denied having sent any delegates[[725]](#footnote-725). According to available information, two days later the movement of suspicious cars in the vicinity of the newsroom would’ve been observed[[726]](#footnote-726). On August 28, the Vice President of El Salvador, Oscar Ortiz, would have publicly declared the following: "you have to knock on wood nothing happens to a journalist", while referring to the research conducted by *Revista Factum* and *El Faro*[[727]](#footnote-727). For his part, the Attorney General of the Republic, Douglas Meléndez, told a local media that "[A]ny journalist who feels threatened should go to the Prosecutor's Office and we are going to give them the corresponding support", while pointing out that he had given orders so that the Specialized Prosecutor's Unit against crimes by Organized Crime investigates the complaint made by *Factum*[[728]](#footnote-728). On October 27, the IACHR granted precautionary measures in favor of the journalists of *Revista Factum*, requesting, among others, that the State adopt the necessary measures to protect the life and personal integrity of the beneficiaries.
150. On November 28, Friederick Meza, a photojournalist at *La Prensa Gráfica*, reported to the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman [*Procuraduría para la Defensa de Derechos Humanos*] (PDDH) that he received threats and intimidation against himself and his family through a publication that was made in the social network Facebook, from the profile "*Fuerzas Policiales El Salvador*", where he was accused of having taken some photographs that would have reached the hands of gang members. According to the information available, the publication contained Meza's personal information, a photograph of him, and incited to take action against him[[729]](#footnote-729).
151. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
152. According to available information, in May the Association of Journalists of El Salvador [*Asociación de Periodistas de El Salvador*] (APES) together with the president of the Legislative Assembly, Guillermo Gallegos, and other members of the parliamentary body, would have initiated deliberations aimed at reaching a consensus on a law that guarantees adequate conditions for carrying out journalistic activity, along with the creation of a social welfare institute for journalists. In July, the new president of APES, Dalila Arriaza, would have indicated that the efforts to elaborate a preliminary draft of the law continued, following the progress made by her predecessor, Serafin Valencia[[730]](#footnote-730).
153. At the close of this report, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has not received information on further progress towards concluding the aforementioned bill that establishes the necessary means to guarantee the protection of journalists and social media workers in El Salvador.
154. The IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur have defined some of the requirements for protective mechanisms to be effective. For example, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has recommended placing emphasis on: 1) the importance of guaranteeing the necessary personnel and financial resources for the adequate implementation of the mechanism; 2) the need to ensure effective coordination among the entities responsible for the implementation of measures of prevention, protection and procurement of justice; 3) the need to adequately define protective measures called for in the mechanism and the procedure for their adoption; 4) the need to guarantee the full participation of journalists, civil society and beneficiaries in the implementation and operation of the mechanism; and 5) the benefits of seeking support from the international community for the mechanism’s operation.[[731]](#footnote-731)
155. **Social protest**
156. On May 1, *Telecorporación Salvadoreña* and *Teleprensa* vehicles who were covering the demonstrations that took place during Labor Day, would have been attacked and stained by a group of protesters who were heading to Plaza Libertad, in the city of San Salvador. According to available information, agents of the National Civil Police [*Policía Nacional Civil*] (PNC) who were present on site would not have intervened to avoid these attacks[[732]](#footnote-732).
157. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[733]](#footnote-733) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[734]](#footnote-734)
158. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[735]](#footnote-735)
159. **Stigmatizing statements**
160. According to available information, on June 13, Violeta Menjivar, Minister of Health, would have supported the decision taken by the director of the Rosales National Hospital [*Hospital Nacional Rosales*], located in the city of San Salvador, to prevent the media from entering said hospital[[736]](#footnote-736). Days later, on June 28, the Minister of Health would have established a ban on access to journalists and media workers to all hospitals in the country and on that occasion allegedly indicated that the "media cause terror in the population."[[737]](#footnote-737)
161. Also, on July 24, the Vice Minister of Justice and Security, Raúl Antonio López, declared that the media "seeks to sell a story" when they report acts of violence and added "We ask the media vehemently [to] highlight the positive news of our country." This would have taken place in the Forum "Protection of journalists: guarantee of freedom of expression" organized by the Association of Journalists of El Salvador [*Asociación de Periodistas de El Salvador*] (APES) together with the Legislative Assembly[[738]](#footnote-738).
162. For its part, on September 11, Jaime Martinez, director of the National Public Security Academy [*Academia Nacional de Seguridad Pública*] (ANSP) had expressed on the television program *Noticiero Hechos* of *Canal 12* that "there are journalists who are at the service of gangs’ intentions to present themselves as victims."[[739]](#footnote-739) Days later, on September 14, *El Faro Magazine* published an interview with Jaime Martínez where he was consulted about his statements. On this particular, he allegedly said "Yes, there is one called, I think it's Bryan, who according to information from the Police is a young man. According to the police, is not me saying this." When asked if he was referring to Bryan Avelar, the journalist who would have participated in a joint publication between members of *Revista Factum* and *El Faro* in which the existence of an "extermination group" within the ranks of the National Civil Police [*Policía Nacional Civil*] (PNC)[[740]](#footnote-740), had been revealed, he allegedly indicated that "they say it’s a guy named Bryan, who is a journalist and reveals information, and that he is involved in this because he’s the brother of a gangster who is in prison, a gang leader (*palabrero*). That's what they say. So, if it is so, there are very specific situations that must be investigated."[[741]](#footnote-741)
163. A context of marked confrontation in which journalists are constantly insulted and stigmatized creates a climate that prevents the reasonable and plural deliberation of public issues. Tension between the press and the government is a normal phenomenon that arises from the natural function of the press and occurs in many States. However, sharp polarization shuts down opportunities for calm debate and helps neither the authorities nor the press to better fulfill their respective roles in a vigorous, deliberate, and open democracy. In such cases, given its national and international responsibilities, it is the State’s job to help create a climate of greater tolerance and respect for the ideas of others, including when those ideas are offensive or disturbing.[[742]](#footnote-742)
164. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that public servants have the duty to ensure that their statements do not infringe upon the rights of those who contribute to public deliberation through the expression and dissemination of their thoughts, such as journalists, media outlets, and human rights defense organizations. They must be mindful of the context in which they express themselves in order to ensure that their statements do not constitute, in the words of the Court, “forms of direct or indirect interference or harmful pressure on the rights of those who seek to contribute with public deliberation through the expression and diffusion of their thoughts.”[[743]](#footnote-743)
165. **Subsequent liabilities**
166. On January 25, the mayor of San Salvador, Nayib Bukele, declared that he considered that the publications made by *La Prensa Gráfica* on the project to implement the video surveillance system in the municipality caused "damage to the honor, morals, and integrity" of the councilors of his sector who voted for the project. Under that argument, the mayor confirmed that "the council voted to sue *La Prensa Grafica* for defamation."
167. The lawsuit was filed with the Santa Tecla Court on July 4, requesting US$ 5 million in reparations. On June 27, the Antiguo Cuscatlán Court rejected Bukele's lawsuit, considering that the information published by *La Prensa Gráfica* was based on interviews with experts and official documents and that the published article did not contain offensive or offensive words against the plaintiff[[744]](#footnote-744). According to the information available, the judge stated that the capital mayor, like any public official, is obligated to provide information to journalists on the management of their entities; He confirmed the absence of inaccurate data since the newspaper article was based on "public information on which any person can have access". He also added that the note cites sources of individuals and that, if the mayor disagrees with them, there is a "right of reply"; concluding the judgment stating that there was no reason to sustain the falsehood, inaccuracy, or defamatory sense of the news[[745]](#footnote-745).
168. On the other hand, on July 27, Judge Cruz Antonio Pérez Granados of the Court of Santa Tecla acquitted the journalist and co-editor of *Revista Factum* website, Héctor Silva Ávalos, after he was charged in April 2016 for the crimes of slander and insult by businessman José Enrique Rais López, after publishing an article titled "The house of cards is falling.[[746]](#footnote-746) On that occasion, the Court of Santa Tecla had received from the complainant various publications made by the journalist in which it was reported the alleged relationship of the businessman with the former Attorney General of El Salvador, Luis Martínez, to whom the former would have facilitated his planes for multiple trips, presumably in exchange for favoring him in the investigation of a complaint lodged against him by a couple of Canadian citizens with whom he had previously been associated in a company dedicated to solid waste management.
169. However, on October 5, the Criminal Chamber of the Fourth Section of Santa Tecla [*Cámara de lo Penal de la Cuarta Sección de Santa Tecla*] revoked the judgment of the Santa Tecla Court, arguing that the ruling judge violated the legal security of the plaintiff. Furthermore, they indicate that the ruling judge did not adopt a resolution in accordance with the criminal procedural rules and that he did not rule on petitions made by the accusing party, issues that would have created a scenario of uncertainty for the accusing party. According to the information available, the Chamber ordered the separation of the judge who intervened in the previous instance, and ordered the hearing of the evidence to be repeated, along with the other proceedings and successive hearings[[747]](#footnote-747).
170. In accordance with Principle 10 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression, “privacy laws should not inhibit or restrict investigation and dissemination of information of public interest. The protection of a person’s reputation should only be guaranteed through civil sanctions in those cases in which the person offended is a public official, a public person or a private person who has voluntarily become involved in matters of public interest. In addition, in these cases, it must be proven that in disseminating the news, the social communicator had the specific intent to inflict harm, was fully aware that false news was disseminated, or acted with gross negligence in efforts to determine the truth or falsity of such news.”
171. Principle 11 of the IACHR´s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states: “[p]ublic officials are subject to greater scrutiny by society. Laws that penalize offensive expressions directed at public officials, generally known as "*desacato* laws," restrict freedom of expression and the right to information.” Furthermore, the IACHR has held repeatedly that the application of criminal law to sanction expressions about public officials is disproportionate when dealing with protected speech, such as information or expression regarding matters of public interest, and infringes the right to freedom of expression.[[748]](#footnote-748)
172. **Legal reforms**
173. On June 19, the government presented before the Legislative Assembly of the Republic of El Salvador a bill for the prevention of violence which establishes that the media must self-regulate when publishing content that reflects the violence the country is experiencing, among other subjects.
174. According to article 30, "[t] he media should contribute to the promotion of the prevention of violence, coexistence, and a culture of peace in the population, seeking ethical self-regulation of information and non-violent content tp not affect the mental health of the population, notwithstanding the respect for freedom of expression, press, and information"[[749]](#footnote-749).
175. In this regard, the president of the Association of Journalists of El Salvador [*Asociación de Periodistas de El Salvador*] (APES), Dalila Arriaza, rejected that it be regulated by a law, because, whether its wanted or not, that leaves an open door that could lend itself to control later on ". On the other hand, the Editorial Director of *La Prensa Gráfica*, Gabriel Trillos, reported that "It is the typical formula used by antidemocratic or populist governments, to look for a good argument or excuse such as the prevention of violence, to end up imposing and controlling" . Likewise, referring to the final section of the article, which mentions that it will be "notwithstanding the respect for freedom of expression, press, and information," *Telecorporacion Salvadorena* spokesperson Charlie Renderos, said that "Putting this in a law makes it, I believe, a state regulation"[[750]](#footnote-750).
176. **Indirect censorship**
177. On June 27, journalist Rafael Domínguez, host of the program *Así estamos* broadcasted on *Agape TV Canal 8*, announced through a video posted on social networks that the television station under his leadership would soon end, and denounced pressures on the media to end the program due to its journalistic line. "There are many people who do not like to be told things as they are, they do not like the way we approach the issues, and they do not like to be told the truth of what is happening. We're leaving because those people are the ones that are pushing for us to get out of the air, just like that."[[751]](#footnote-751) Days later, the show stopped broadcasting. This would have been questioned and condemned by different social and political actors that would have blamed the government for exerting pressure to censure *Así estamos*[[752]](#footnote-752).
178. However, on July 19, Rafael Dominguez reportedly indicated that the program would be broadcasted on the *TVO Oriente* channel starting July 24 and ruled out taking legal action for what happened[[753]](#footnote-753). According to the information available, the program *Así estamos* critically analyzes current events nationwide and allows viewers to communicate to express their opinions about it.
179. According to Principle 5 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression “Prior censorship, direct or indirect interference in or pressure exerted upon any expression, opinion or information transmitted through any means of oral, written, artistic, visual or electronic communication must be prohibited by law. Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression.
180. **Freedom of Expression in an electoral context**
181. On June 11, different media outlets could not access the departmental assembly of the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN), held in the city of San Salvador, where the candidates for the legislative and municipal elections of 2018 would be elected. According to the information available, the personnel responsible for the security of the location would have indicated that they had "precise orders" not to allow the entry of journalists or communicators[[754]](#footnote-754).
182. Likewise, on June 25, different media outlets were once again prevented from covering the process of internal election of candidates belonging to the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN). This ban would have occurred both in the city of San Salvador and in the neighboring municipality of Santa Tecla, department of La Libertad[[755]](#footnote-755).
183. On July 3, in the city of Usulután, department of the same name, journalist Mauricio Menotty would have been attacked by the wife and daughter of Romeo Sánchez, a precandidate for the *Partido de Concertación Nacional* (PCN). Menotty was preparing to record the act where Sanchez launched his candidacy for mayor of the city in which the event would have occurred[[756]](#footnote-756).
184. In electoral contexts, freedom of expression is directly connected to political rights and their exercise, and both types of rights mutually strengthen one another.[[757]](#footnote-757) Reasoned democratic debate requires the greatest possible circulation of ideas, opinions and information about the candidates, their parties, and their platforms during the period preceding an election, principally through the media, the candidates, and others who wish to express themselves. Everyone must be able to question and investigate the capacity and suitability of the candidates, disagree with and confront their ideas and opinions, so that voters can form their opinions.[[758]](#footnote-758) As the IACHR has underscored, free speech and political debate are essential for the consolidation of the democratic life of societies, and therefore are of compelling social interest.[[759]](#footnote-759)
185. **Access to information and restrictions on journalistic coverage**
186. On January 25, members of the security of the mayor of San Salvador, Nayib Bukele, would have prevented the entrance to a press conference to journalists of the morning newspapers *El Diario de Hoy* (EDH), *La Prensa Gráfica* (LPG) and *El Mundo* newspaper (DEM), under the argument that said media publish "wrong" and "malicious" information about his management[[760]](#footnote-760).
187. On August 15, the chief communications officer of the Attorney General's Office [*Fiscalía General de la República*] (FGR), Salvador Martínez, reportedly expelled the team of institutional media workers from the Ministry of National Defense [*Ministerio de Defensa Nacional*] (MDN) from a press conference. In this context, Salvador Martinez would have said to one of the expelled journalists: "I think that they’re taking up space, the press room is quite small, so I decided to take them out, I don’t see what is weird about expelling someone from a press conference, tell me what’s weird about that"(sic). The MDN reported the Chief of Communications of the FGR to the Office of the Prosecutor for the Defense of Human Rights [*Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos*] (PDDH) and the Government Ethics Tribunal [*Tribunal de Ética Gubernamental]* (TEG) [[761]](#footnote-761). It has not been possible to obtain information on the status of the investigation.
188. This Office of the Special Rapporteur wishes to recall that in the Joint Declaration on the regulation of the media, restrictions on journalists and the investigation of corruption, the Special Rapporteurs for Freedom of Expression of the United Nations, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), noted that accreditation schemes for journalists “are appropriate only where necessary to provide them with privileged access to certain places and/or events; such schemes should be overseen by an independent body and accreditation decisions should be taken pursuant to a fair and transparent process, based on clear and non discriminatory criteria published in advance. Accreditation should never be subject to withdrawal based only on the content of an individual journalist’s work”[[762]](#footnote-762).
189. **Internet and freedom of expression**
190. On July 21, 2015, *La Prensa Gráfica* filed a criminal complaint with the Office of the Attorney General [*Fiscalía General de la República* ](FGR) for the cloning of the newspaper's website on July 7. The publication tried to circulate a false interview with the president of the media, José Roberto Dutriz, titled "Dutriz: We are the owners of the newspapers and we can publish whatever we want". On November 12 of the same year, the FGR reported that it had captured Andrés Ricardo Ortiz Lara, allegedly responsible for cloning the newspaper's website. According to the information available, as of that capture, on February 16, 2016, the FGR carried out nine operations in which it arrested four more people who would be involved in the operation of a supposed marketing company that actually operated as "Troll center" Similarly, in the investigations, the mayor of San Salvador, Nayib Bukele, would have been connected as the material author of the cyber attacks against the newspaper. The mayor denied his participation in the events and accused his political rivals, the *ARENA* party, as well as the "de facto powers" of El Salvador, among whom he has mentioned the newspaper *La Prensa Gráfica*, of having launched a campaign against him creating a "nonexistent" case[[763]](#footnote-763).
191. In February 2017, the Second Court of Instruction of Santa Tecla [*Juzgado Segundo de Instrucción de Santa Tecla*] received the evidence presented by the Office of the Prosecutor and a few days later, the same Court ordered that José Carlos Navarro Martínez, Andrés Ortiz Lara, Mayra Lisseth Morán, Óscar Domínguez and Sofía Medina, had to go to the trial stage for the commission of the crimes of material falsehood, violation of copyright, violation of trademarks, and illicit association. Between September 12 and 13, the attorneys for the defendants filed appeals to separate the judges of the court due to lack of impartiality in the incorporation of new procedural evidence. [[764]](#footnote-764).
192. On December 1, the last day of the trial, three documents that the Prosecutor's Office requested from the United States Department of Justice would have been included, in which it would have been revealed that two of the defendants, Morán and Ortiz Lara, bought a site with the address [www.laprensagrafica.com](http://www.laprensagrafica.com), paying so that their identity remained hidden. However, the Sentencing Court of Santa Tecla *[Tribunal de Sentencia de Santa Tecla*] acquitted the five defendants of carrying out the cyber attacks to the detriment of *La Prensa Gráfica*. Guilds and civil society organizations spoke about the case and expressed their disappointment as they expected the judicial outcome to set a precedent in El Salvador[[765]](#footnote-765).
193. **Communications surveillance**
194. On January 7, during maintenance work at the headquarters of the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development [*Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social*] (Fusades), it would have been found a hidden microphone in one of their meeting rooms, which allowed listening in to everything that happened in said venue, and also the phone calls. The incident was formally reported to the Attorney General's Office, requesting the investigation of these facts, which are typified in the Salvadoran Criminal Code under the crimes of intervention and interference of telecommunications, search of workplace, and seizure of communications[[766]](#footnote-766).
195. Likewise, on January 17, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of El Salvador reported to the FGR that it had been the victim of espionage in its facilities. In this regard, they indicated that when carrying out a review of their facilities as a result of what happened to Fusades, a hidden microphone was found, of approximately four centimeters, in one of the offices of the main building of the institution[[767]](#footnote-767).
196. For its part, on January 26, the Salvadoran Banking Association [*Asociación Bancaria Salvadoreña*] (ABANSA) filed a complaint with the FGR reporting being a victim of espionage, after discovering a wireless device for the intervention of conversations and telephone communications in the offices of the Executive Directorate. In this regard, the president of ABANSA, Raul Cardenal, reportedly indicated that the device was discovered thanks to the hiring of a group of specialists in tracking spy microphones. According to the available information, the technical specialists would have indicated that this type of device is of controlled sale and that "generally they are sold with permission from one authority to the other". For its part, also on January 26, the National Foundation for Development [*Fundación Nacional para el Desarrollo*] (FUNDE) reported that a phone audio device was found a few days before, placed as part of the direct telephone wiring of the Executive Office's office. On this matter, FUNDE indicated that a specialized company was hired to perform a device search and, as a result, was found an artifact that was described as "an audio device of wireless transmission over a telephone line, with a power regulator and built-in frequency"[[768]](#footnote-768).
197. The Office of the Special Rapporteur reiterates that surveillance programs must be designed and implemented in accordance with international human rights standards. Notably, States must guarantee that the interception, collection and use of personal information are clearly authorized by law in order to protect individuals from arbitrary or abusive interference with their privacy. Moreover, the decision to undertake surveillance activities that intrude upon individual privacy must be authorized by an independent judiciary and justified in terms of the objectives pursued in the specific case and the proportionality of the measure in relation to necessity and the interests pursued. States must ensure that the judicial authority is specialized and competent to make decisions on the legality of the communications surveillance, the technologies used, and its impact on the sphere of rights that could be involved, and that they have sufficient guarantees to fulfill its duties in an adequate manner. Finally, the Office of the Special Rapporteur observes that States should establish independent oversight mechanisms over the authorities in charge of conducting surveillance in order to ensure transparency and accountability.[[769]](#footnote-769)
198. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has also observed that the decisions to conduct surveillance operations that invade the privacy of persons must be authorized by independent judicial authorities who must explain the reasons why the measure is ideal for achieving the goal sought in a specific case, whether the measure is restricted enough not to affect the person’s right any more than necessary, and whether it is proportionate to the interest being furthered. Investigations that involve an invasion of privacy that is authorized by law and ordered by a judge having jurisdiction must also uphold other guarantees related to due process. States must guarantee that the judicial authority is specialized and has jurisdiction to make legal decisions regarding the lawfulness of communications surveillance, the technology used and its effect on rights that may be compromised, and that they provide enough guarantees to act appropriately. Finally, the Office of the Special Rapporteur notes that at least the criteria for decisions made by courts must be public.[[770]](#footnote-770)
199. **Other relevant situations**
200. On July 25, the former president of the Association of Journalists of El Salvador [*Asociación de Periodistas de El Salvador*] (APES), Serafin Valencia, would have met the Minister of Labor and Social Security [*Ministra de Trabajo y* Previsión *Social*] (MTPS), Sandra Guevara, with the aim of working together to guarantee the rights of the people who practice journalism in El Salvador. In this regard, the representative of MTPS would have been concerned about the 56 complaints of precarious working conditions of journalists and social media workers that were lodged between August 2016 and July 2017, while in the same period, APES would have identified a growing presence of labor irregularities for the union, such as unjustified dismissals, unpaid overtime, or unreported wage withholdings.
201. On September 5, the new president of APES, Dalila Arriaza, would have condemned again the unjustified dismissals of at least 50 journalists during the course of the year while reiterating the absence of *improvements* in working conditions together with the degree of exploitation faced by many media workers "due to the saturation of work, unpaid overtime, censorship by heads of offices, mistreatment, low wages, sexual harassment, and lack of payment of social benefits." [[771]](#footnote-771)
202. **UNITED STATES**
203. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has observed that, from the time he took office, President Donald Trump has encouraged the polarization of the media landscape, and has promoted—in public appearances as well as on social media—stigmatizing speech toward different media outlets and journalists that have disseminated information about his administration, to whom he ascribes an alleged role of opposition or political partisanship. As various international organizations, media associations,[[772]](#footnote-772) and civil society groups have noted, the President’s statements and attacks on the press are particularly serious, insofar as they can intensify the risk of threats and violence against journalists in the country and erode the public trust in journalism as an institution of democracy. In addition, the current administration made numerous direct threats of possible government action or legal proceedings against media outlets, demonstrators, and whistleblowers, taking a particularly hostile stance toward the latter.
204. During 2017 the criminalization of social protest and the escalation of penalties regarding felonies associated to various forms of protest through legal reforms has been a trend in many of the country’s states, although not enforced in all cases. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has also documented multiple acts of violence and intimidation by private individuals and public servants against journalists and demonstrators during protests. In this context, this Office is especially concerned over the case of journalist Aaron Cantu, who was charged with rioting and conspiracy to riot after being arrested while covering a protest in Washington, DC; and by the murder of Heather Heyer during a demonstration in Charlottesville, Virginia.
205. With respect to the protection of freedom of expression on the internet, this Office has noted with concern the decision undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on revoking its rules on net neutrality, which previously had set a relevant regional precedent to the protection of free and non-discriminatory access to contents offered over the internet. By revoking the rules on net neutrality adopted in 2015, FCC now allows telecommunication and cable companies to resume old practices such as content blocking, paid priorization and throttling.
206. **Progress**
207. The Office of the Special Rapporteur notes several measures taken in 2017 by the federal judiciary that have advanced freedom of expression in the United States. Two that stand out in particular are: the judgment handed down by the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in the case of *Turner v. Driver,* recognizing the right to film or record police personnel in the performance of their duties;[[773]](#footnote-773) and the decision of the United States District Court for the District of South Dakota—Southern Division in the case of *United States v. Robert John Hulscher*, reaffirming the importance of cell phones as a means of communication that, in addition to encouraging freedom of expression, contain immense amounts of personal information that can only be subject to investigation through a lawfully obtained search warrant[[774]](#footnote-774). This Office also observed the relevance of a decision of the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals in the case *Signature Management Team, LCC v. Doe*, in which it recognizes the right to anonimity[[775]](#footnote-775).
208. **Attacks, Threats, and Intimidation of Journalists and Media Outlets**
209. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has noted a spike in incidents of violence, threats, and harassment against journalists in the United States in 2017 over previous years. Additionally, this Office observed with concern complaints of collective and coordinated acts of bullying, harassment, and threats—mostly through social media—toward journalists who publicly criticized President Donald Trump.
210. Journalist Rosa Brooks was reportedly the victim of a campaign of harassment, insults, and death threats by President Trump sympathizers after publishing an article in *Foreign Policy* on January 30 that was critical of measures undertaken by the president. Similar incidents were reported during the 2016 presidential campaign with other journalists like David French, Bethany Mandel, and Megyn Kelly.[[776]](#footnote-776)
211. On different occasions, President Donald Trump threatened to order government actions or legal proceedings against media outlets. On October 5, he suggested that the United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, which is overseeing an investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 United States presidential election, should investigate media outlets for their alleged “fake” and “made-up” news coverage.[[777]](#footnote-777)
212. Later, on October 11, President Donald Trump suggested that certain broadcast media outlets critical of his government could be subject to proceedings to challenge and revoke their licenses, posting the following remarks on Twitter: "With all of the Fake News coming out of NBC and the Networks, at what point is it appropriate to challenge their License? Bad for country!" Network news has become so partisan, distorted and fake that licenses must be challenged and, if appropriate, revoked. Not fair to public!”[[778]](#footnote-778)
213. Journalist Dan Heyman of the Public News Service was reportedly arrested on May 9 in Charleston, West Virginia, on charges of “willful disruption of governmental processes” after trying to repeatedly ask a question to Health and Human Services Secretary,Tom Price, during an event about the opioid crisis. Heyman was reportedly released on US$ 5,000 bond.[[779]](#footnote-779) On August 16, journalist J.B. Nicholas was arrested by school security guards while interviewing students at the Bronx Community College of the City University of New York and charged with trespassing*.*[[780]](#footnote-780) In addition, on June 14, journalist Douglass Dowty of the *Syracuse Post-Standard* was reportedly briefly detained, handcuffed, and had his cell phone seized by a security guard from the Onondaga County Courthouse in New York State[[781]](#footnote-781) while photographing police officers as they arrested a man.
214. Local Gallatin County Police conducted an investigation into the May 24 assault of journalist Ben Jacobs of *The Guardian* by then-candidate Greg Gianforte of Montana, who was running for a seat in the United States House of Representatives. June 12 Gianforte was sentenced to 40 hours of community service and 20 hours of anger management classes. The candidate also paid US$ 4,464 in restitution to Jacobs for his glasses, which were damaged in the incident, and emergency hospital treatment.[[782]](#footnote-782) On October 19, a Montana Republican Party official said on a local radio station in reference to the incident that he “would have shot” Ben Jacobs if he had been in Gianforte’s shoes.[[783]](#footnote-783)
215. On June 13, the Office of the Special Rapporteur sent a letter to the State pursuant to Article 18 of the IACHR Statute to request information about the status of the legal proceedings in the case of the assault of journalist Ben Jacobs, the charge filed against reporter Dan Heyman, and the measures taken by the State to prevent attacks and stigmatizing actions against media outlets and journalists in the United States. On July 12, the State replied to the request for information, asserting that “the U.S. Constitution protects even the most offensive and controversial speech from government suppression (…) The U.S. system is built on the idea that the free and open exchange of ideas encourages understanding, advances truth-seeking, and allows for the rebuttal of falsehoods.”[[784]](#footnote-784)
216. On May 2, journalist Nathaniel Hertz was reportedly assaulted by Alaska Senator David Wilson after asking him, in the local capitol building in Juneau, about his impression of an article Hertz had published days earlier. The case was filed by the Juneau Police Department with the Alaska Office of Special Prosecutions for review.[[785]](#footnote-785) On July 24, an individual reportedly walked into a New York event that *Fox News* journalist Katherine Timpf was attending, and intentionally dumped a bottle of water on her, preventing her from giving a talk she was set to deliver at that event.[[786]](#footnote-786)
217. On March 17, a man was arrested on charges of cyberstalking for allegedly sending a Twitter message containing an animated strobe image to a journalist with epilepsy. The image was reportedly sent to Kurt Eichenwald, a writer for *Newsweek* magazine and a *Vanity Fair* contributor, on December 15, 2016, together with an aggressive and threatening message.[[787]](#footnote-787)
218. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has documented several cases of journalists of Arab descent being detained, questioned, and searched by immigration authorities upon entering the country, which could be directly related to the new immigration policies pursued by the current administration. Isma’il Kushkush was reportedly detained for nearly an hour upon his arrival at Dulles International Airport Washington D.C. on January 3, 2017, after a trip to Israel;[[788]](#footnote-788) *CNN* editor and producerMohammed Tawfeeq was reportedly detained on January 29 at the Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport and subject to secondary screening;[[789]](#footnote-789) on January 29, *BBC* journalist Ali Hamedani was reportedly detained at O'Hare Airport in Chicago and interrogated for more than two hours.[[790]](#footnote-790)
219. White House Correspondents' Association President Jeff Mason reported that the White House asked him to criticize an article published by *Politico* correspondentTara Palmeri about the President Donald Trump. On July 16, Palmeri said that she was reportedly informed by her editor that the White House had threatened to remove her from the WHCA.[[791]](#footnote-791)
220. On July 26, then-White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci reportedly made an intimidating phone call to journalist Ryan Lizza, of *The New Yorker,* pressuring him to reveal a journalistic source for a tweet published on July 26 that reported on a closed meeting with President Donald Trump. In addition, after Lizza published their telephone conversation, Scaramucci made numerous offensive statements about the reporter on Twitter, despite having been fired from the White House.[[792]](#footnote-792)
221. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
222. **Social protest**
223. The Office of the Special Rapporteur views with concern the recent efforts of different state legislatures and governments to increase penalties related to social protest. According to the information available, 51 legislative initiatives were introduced in different states around the country between November 2016 and December 2017, seeking to disproportionately restrict or criminalize activities inherent to the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly. These bills were introduced after the intensification of protests in the country led by social movements involving some of the most vulnerable groups, such as the *Black Lives Matter* movement and the indigenous movement against the Dakota Access Pipeline.[[793]](#footnote-793)
224. Of these 51 legislative initiatives, 8 have already been approved by the legislatures of various states. For instance, on January 3, 2017, the Legislative Assembly of North Dakota passed three laws that could have a disproportionate impact on the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and assembly.[[794]](#footnote-794) HB 1293,[[795]](#footnote-795) expanding the definition of the criminal offense of “trespassing” to include public demonstrations and meetings held on private property; HB 1304,[[796]](#footnote-796) prohibiting the wearing of masks, hoods, and face coverings during the commission of a criminal offense to evade or escape discovery, recognition, or identification, and HB 1426,[[797]](#footnote-797) increasing the criminal penalties for engaging in a riot to up to one year in prison. In March 2017, the South Dakota Legislature passed SB 176,[[798]](#footnote-798) which broadens the governor’s power to restrict gatherings of more than 20 people on public property “if the gathering might damage the land or interfere with the renter’s use of the land.” This law also authorizes the enactment of regulations to prohibit or restrict the blocking of a public highway. In April 2017, the Legislature of Tennessee enacted SB 902,[[799]](#footnote-799) which imposes a fine on any person who intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly obstructs public highways and streets where the obstruction restricts emergency vehicle access, defined as “any vehicle of a governmental department or public service corporation when responding to an emergency, any vehicle of a Police or Fire department, and any ambulance.”
225. 22 other bills were rejected by local legislatures or vetoed by the governors in Arizona,[[800]](#footnote-800) Arkansas,[[801]](#footnote-801) Colorado,[[802]](#footnote-802) Florida,[[803]](#footnote-803) Georgia,[[804]](#footnote-804) Indiana,[[805]](#footnote-805) Kentucky,[[806]](#footnote-806) Louisiana,[[807]](#footnote-807) Michigan,[[808]](#footnote-808) Minnesota,[[809]](#footnote-809) Mississippi,[[810]](#footnote-810) Missouri, [[811]](#footnote-811) New Jersey, [[812]](#footnote-812) North Carolina,[[813]](#footnote-813) Oregon,[[814]](#footnote-814) Rhode Island,[[815]](#footnote-815) Tennessee,[[816]](#footnote-816) Texas,[[817]](#footnote-817) Virginia,[[818]](#footnote-818) and North Dakota.[[819]](#footnote-819) Among other things, those bills had attempted to disproportionately increase the penalties for blocking roads, make protestors liable for the costs incurred by public safety in responding to unlawful protests, and inappropriately broaden the definition of terrorism to include conduct related to social protest. As of the date of this writing, 21 such bills are pending debate in the state legislatures.[[820]](#footnote-820)
226. Acts of violence committed by demonstrators have also been a matter of special concern for the IACHR,[[821]](#footnote-821) including the various assaults on journalists and the murder of Heather Heyer during the August 12 protest in Charlottesville, Virginia.[[822]](#footnote-822)
227. On August 28, 2017, President Trump issued Executive Order 13809 “Restoring State, Tribal, and Local Law Enforcement's Access to Life-Saving Equipment and Resources.”[[823]](#footnote-823) The executive order revoked Order 13688 of January 16, 2015, approved during Barack Obama’s administration, which had prohibited the acquisition of certain types of military equipment by the country’s police.[[824]](#footnote-824) In 2015, the Inter-American Commission indicated that one of the main concerns related to the excessive or arbitrary use of force by Police “is focused on militarization of the police in terms of the equipment used, the type of training they receive, the action protocols they use, and the difficulty with which police officers who are guilty of abuse or excessive use of force are held criminally liable and prosecuted.”[[825]](#footnote-825) With the revocation of Executive Order 13688, police departments will once again received armored vehicles, high-caliber weapons and ammunition, grenades, camouflage uniforms, and other military-grade equipment that can be used in response to protests.[[826]](#footnote-826)
228. On January 10, three Code Pink activists were evicted from Congress and detained for disturbing the confirmation hearing of the new attorney general appointed by President Donald Trump, Jeff Sessions. According to the information available, activist Desiree Fairooz was reportedly arrested for laughing during the hearing. Activists Tighe Barry and Lenny Bianchi were reportedly arrested for wearing clothing that identifies with the Ku Klux Klan, with the aim of parodying the supposedly racist profile of Sessions. The arrests were made under the charges of "disorderly or disruptive conduct" and "parading or demonstrating on Capitol grounds," which provide for penalties of up to 12 months in prison and/or a fine of US $ 2 thousand. On May 3, a jury from the District of Columbia Superior Court convicted Fairooz on both counts. Barry and Bianchi were acquitted of a charge of disorderly conduct, but were convicted on charges of parading or demonstrating[[827]](#footnote-827). On July 14, Fairooz's conviction was overturned by a judge of the District of Columbia Superior Court, who ordered a new trial for September. Barry and Bianchi were sentenced to 10 days in jail, suspended under the condition of successfully completing six months of probation[[828]](#footnote-828). The trial against Fairooz was then re-scheduled for November 13, but a few days before that date the US Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia decided to drop the case[[829]](#footnote-829).
229. Similarly, according to the information available, more than 200 people were detained during protests held on the day of President Donald Trump’s inauguration, January 20, 2017.[[830]](#footnote-830) The District of Columbia Police have been sued by human rights groups for unlawfully arresting peaceful demonstrators and holding them in custody for up to 16 hours without food, water, or access to bathroom facilities.[[831]](#footnote-831) Most of the detainees were reportedly being prosecuted on charges of property damage and felony rioting in connection with those protests. On April 27, the defendants and their representatives asked the Superior Court of the District of Columbia to dismiss the charges based on the inapplicability of the rioting statute to constitutionally protected political protests and because the indictment treated the defendants as one big group rather than as individuals, among other grounds. In July, it was learned that the Federal Bureau of Investigation(FBI) had managed to unlock mobile phones seized from the demonstrators in order to use the content of their communications, navigation history, photos, and videos as evidence in their trials.[[832]](#footnote-832) On September 14, the judge Lynn Leibovitz dismissed the defense arguments and ordered the defendants to stand trial.[[833]](#footnote-833) Eight journalists were arrested on charges of “rioting” during the January 20 protests. Although the charges against seven of them were later dropped, freelance journalist Aaron Cantu, who was also charged with “conspiracy to riot,” “inciting to riot,” and five other charges related to the destruction of property, is scheduled to stand trial on October 15, 2018.[[834]](#footnote-834)
230. As part of this criminal case, on July 12, a D.C. Superior Court judge granted the request of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for a search warrant against the Internet service provider DreamHost, ordering it to disclose information in its possession, custody, or control related to the domain Disprupt20j.org, which was allegedly used to disseminate information about the demonstrations and protests held on January 20 during President Donald Trump’s inauguration. The order covered stored information, records, documents, codes, and data related to operators, visitors [reported to be some 1.3 million visitor IP addresses], or persons associated with that domain name. The company refused to comply with the order and argued before the D.C. Superior Court that the order jeopardized interests protected by the First and Fourth Amendments.[[835]](#footnote-835) In response, the Department of Justice filed a motion with the Superior Court to amend the initial order narrowing its content. On August 24, a Superior Court judge approved the government’s request, but with the caveat that the government needed to develop a “minimization” plan to ensure, to the extent possible, that the information to be handed over does not include data or information related to lawful activities protected by the First Amendment.[[836]](#footnote-836) According to the information disclosed, the Department of Justice also obtained search warrants requiring Facebook to turn over 90 days’ worth of content from the accounts of three activists who allegedly organized mobilizations and protests during the president’s inauguration.[[837]](#footnote-837) The activists involved challenged the constitutionality of those warrants.[[838]](#footnote-838)
231. On November 9, Judge Robert E. Morin of the Superior Court for the District of Columbia objected to the Justice Department’s order on the grounds that “the risk for disclosure of private political speech and association of innocent persons to the government cannot be ignored and therefore additional protections are necessary.” Morin ordered Facebook to redact the identity of nearly 6,000 people who followed the DisruptJ20 page on social media and to limit the production of photographs. However, he dismissed the defense attorneys’ request to limit the disclosure of the private content of the page administrators, Lacy Macauley and Legba Carrefour.[[839]](#footnote-839)
232. In 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur continued to hear reports of mass arrests of demonstrators and journalists from the beginning of the protests in opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline. In January and February, journalists Jenni Monet (*Indian Country Today, The Center for Investigative Reporting),* Jenifer Stum, Tonita Cervantes, Jack Smith (*Mic*), Jahnny Lee (*Sundance Institute*), and Tracie Williams were reportedly detained while covering or documenting the events[[840]](#footnote-840) They were charged with different offenses, including physical obstruction of a government function, criminal trespassing, and rioting, and are scheduled to stand trial in 2018. Almost 80 demonstrators were also arrested by Morton County Police in February 1, 2017.[[841]](#footnote-841) In its 2016 Annual Report, the Office of the Special Rapporteur had already documented cases involving excessive force and arrests of demonstrators and journalists at Standing Rock[[842]](#footnote-842). It is estimated that some 700 people have been arrested since the protests began in 2016.[[843]](#footnote-843)
233. On April 15, photojournalist Nebyou Solomon of *8 News Now* was reportedly detained while covering a protest against President Donald Trump at the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. Nebyou was charged with trespassing and obstructing a public officer. The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department released a statement alleging that Solomon was filming the event from private property, although witnesses said that he was doing so from the sidewalk.[[844]](#footnote-844)
234. On June 16, the Minnesota State Patrol reportedly detained 16 demonstrators during protests held on an interstate highway in Saint Paul. Two journalists were also arrested. Susan Du (*City* Pages) and David Clarey (*Minnesota Daily)* were reportedly arrested on charges of unlawful assembly and public nuisance, which were later dropped.[[845]](#footnote-845)
235. There have been complaints that law enforcement officers have engaged in the disproportionate use of force at some of the social protest events, resulting in injuries to demonstrators and journalists. On January 18, journalist Jon Ziegler was reportedly struck by three rubber bullets while filming local Police actions at the Standing Rock protests in the State of North Dakota.[[846]](#footnote-846) During the protest held on President Donald Trump’s inauguration day, January 20, a photographer from WJLA covering the event, Vanessa Koolhof, was reportedly injured in an altercation between Police and demonstrators.[[847]](#footnote-847) At the same event, *Washington Post* cameraman Dalton Bennet was assaulted by Metropolitan Police officers.[[848]](#footnote-848)
236. On August 22, local Phoenix, Arizona police attempting to disperse a protest against President Donald Trump used tear gas and pepper spray against demonstrators and at least 17 journalists from the *Arizona Republic* who were covering the event.[[849]](#footnote-849)
237. During the different protests organized in September and October in St. Louis, Missouri over the 2011 murder of Anthony Lamar Smith by police officer Jason Stockley, the Office of the Special Rapporteur documented a number of assaults on journalists who were covering the events. On September 17, documentary filmmaker Jennifer Burbridge was reportedly physically assaulted and taken into custody on charges of “failure to disperse” by local police officers while filming a protest. During the same event, *Getty* photographer *S*cott Olson and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter Mike Faulk were reportedly detained on the same charges. According to the information available, at the time of the arrests, law enforcement officers used a police tactic known as “kettling,” to encircle the demonstrators and deny them the opportunity to disperse before being arrested. Journalists Heather DeMian and photographer Christian Gooden, of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* were reportedly pepper sprayed by local police while covering a demonstration on September 29. On October 3—also in St. Louis—journalist Al Neal, of *People’s World,* was reportedly detained by police on charges of trespassing while covering a protest. Journalists Jon Ziegler, Jordan Chariton, and Ty Bayliss, of *The Young Turks,* and Daniel Shular and Aminah Ali, of *Real STL News,* were similarly detained.[[850]](#footnote-850)
238. On March 25, during a pro-Trump rally, photographers Brian Feinzimer and Julie Leopo, and journalist Frank Tristan, of *OC Weekly,* were reportedly assaulted by a group of demonstrators in Huntington Beach, California.[[851]](#footnote-851) On August 11, reporter Christopher Schiano of *Unicorn Riot* was physically attacked while interviewing participants in a march of white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia.[[852]](#footnote-852) On August 12, Heather Heyer was murdered when James Alex Fields Jr., a Neo-Nazi sympathizer, plowed his car into a crowd. At least 19 other people were injured in the attack.[[853]](#footnote-853) Journalist Taylor Lorenz, of *The Hill,* was reportedly struck in the face while filming the crime scene by a man who was reportedly detained by police and released on US$ 1,000 bond[[854]](#footnote-854). On August 13, two unidentified journalists were assaulted while covering counter-protests held in in Charlottesville, Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, and Asheville, North Carolina following Heather Heyer’s murder during the white supremacists’ march.[[855]](#footnote-855)

The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[856]](#footnote-856) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[857]](#footnote-857)

1. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[858]](#footnote-858)
2. **Stigmatizing Statements**
3. On various occasions, President Donald Trump has accused the press—especially media outlets like *CNN*, *The New York Times,* and *The Washington Post*—of being the “enemy of the American people,” saying that it “speaks not for the people but for the special interests.”[[859]](#footnote-859) He has similarly stated that the media “is distorting democracy,”[[860]](#footnote-860) that it is “dishonest,”[[861]](#footnote-861) that “the level of dishonesty [of the press] is out of control,”[[862]](#footnote-862) and that it publishes “fake news.”[[863]](#footnote-863) President Donald Trump’s statements have also called into question the veracity of anonymous journalistic sources used by those media outlets,[[864]](#footnote-864) calling them “made up,” and claiming that they “do not exist.”[[865]](#footnote-865) He even urged the Senate Intelligence Committee to investigate the media for supposedly spreading fake news.[[866]](#footnote-866)
4. The repeated use of the term “fake news” to disparage certain media outlets is particularly serious given that it aims to equate the professional work of the press and journalists with the growing phenomenon of disinformation and propaganda, about which experts on freedom of expression of the UN, OSCE, IACHR and the African Commission on Human Rights issued a joint declaration.[[867]](#footnote-867) Authorities should respond to criticism they find unfair, or information they consider to be erroneous, by creating the conditions for better and more debate and information—not through measures that can inhibit or disparage the role of journalists and the media in a democratic society, or stifle robust deliberation. In turn, as Principle 6 of the Declaration of Principles adopted by the IACHR establishes, journalistic activities must be guided by ethical conduct, which should in no case be imposed by the State.
5. Between January 28 and February 28, 2017, the president issued at least 17 messages through his Twitter account, calling the information disseminated by some media outlets about the initial weeks of his presidency “fake news.” On January 28, he stated that “The failing @nytimes has been wrong about me from the very beginning. Said I would lose the primaries, then the general election. FAKE NEWS!”[[868]](#footnote-868) The next day, he tweeted, “Somebody with aptitude and conviction should buy the FAKE NEWS and failing @nytimes and either run it correctly or let it fold with dignity!”[[869]](#footnote-869) On February 3, he indicated that the news disseminated by some media outlets about his conversation with the Australian prime minister were false. “[…] FAKE NEWS media lied,” he affirmed.[[870]](#footnote-870) On February 4, he tweeted “the FAKE NEWS @nytimes is still lost!”[[871]](#footnote-871) On February 6, he asserted that “Any negative polls are fake news, just like the CNN, ABC, NBC polls in the election,”[[872]](#footnote-872) and that “Some FAKE NEWS media, in order to marginalize, lies!”[[873]](#footnote-873) On February 9, he accused CNN journalist Chris Cuomo of spreading “FAKE NEWS!”.[[874]](#footnote-874) On February 10, he accused the “failing @nytimes” of publishing another fake story.[[875]](#footnote-875) On February 12, he stated that “the FAKE NEWS media” “refuse to mention” that he was welcomed by many supporters in Florida. “Very dishonest!” he stated.[[876]](#footnote-876) On February 12, he once again accused CNN of being a “FAKE NEWS” channel.”[[877]](#footnote-877) On February 15, he stated that “The fake news media is going crazy with their conspiracy theories and blind hatred. @MSNBC & @CNN are unwatchable. @foxandfriends is great!”.[[878]](#footnote-878) On February 16, he tweeted about “FAKE NEWS media, which makes up stories and ‘sources.’”.[[879]](#footnote-879) On February 17, he said, “the FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!”[[880]](#footnote-880) On February 18, he called on his supporters not to believe “the main stream (fake news) media” reports about his administration.[[881]](#footnote-881) On February 20, he accused the media of disseminating fake news about immigration,[[882]](#footnote-882) and on February 24 the President reiterated that “FAKE NEWS media knowingly doesn't tell the truth.”[[883]](#footnote-883) On February 26, he asserted that “Russia talk is FAKE NEWS put out by the Dems, and played up by the media, in order to mask the big election defeat and the illegal leaks!”[[884]](#footnote-884). Statements of the same nature continued during the following months.[[885]](#footnote-885)
6. Some of the president’s stigmatizing and offensive statements have also been aimed directly at media professionals; on July 1, he tweeted that journalist Mika Brzezinski, host of the program ‘Morning Joe,’ is “dumb as a rock.”[[886]](#footnote-886) On July 2, the president shared a video in which he is physically attacking a figure with the logo of the news network CNN superimposed over its head.[[887]](#footnote-887)
7. On November 6, the Special Rapporteur of the IACHR, Edison Lanza, and the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression of the United Nations, David Kaye, forwarded a communication to the State, in accordance with the faculties established in Article 18 of the Statute of the IACHR and resolution 34/18 of the Human Rights Council, with the objective of requesting information on the multiple cases of threats, harassment, and stigmatization of the media by President Donald Trump and reminding the State of the need to adopt measures to strengthen freedom of expression; the compatibility of the actions described with international standards on freedom of expression; the measures adopted by the federal administration to encourage freedom of expression and the independence of the press in the country through public statements, institutional practices, and policies; and, finally, requested information on the measures eventually adopted by the regulatory bodies in relation to the president's suggestions to evaluate the revocation of the licenses of certain media outlets by federal authorities. At the closing date of this report, the State had not replied to said letter[[888]](#footnote-888).
8. A context of marked confrontation in which journalists are constantly insulted and stigmatized creates a climate that prevents the reasonable and plural deliberation of public issues. Tension between the press and the government is a normal phenomenon that arises from the natural function of the press and occurs in many States. However, sharp polarization shuts down opportunities for calm debate and helps neither the authorities nor the press to better fulfill their respective roles in a vigorous, deliberate, and open democracy. In such cases, given its national and international responsibilities, it is the State’s job to help create a climate of greater tolerance and respect for the ideas of others, including when those ideas are offensive or disturbing.[[889]](#footnote-889)
9. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that public servants have the duty to ensure that their statements do not infringe upon the rights of those who contribute to public deliberation through the expression and dissemination of their thoughts, such as journalists, media outlets, and human rights defense organizations. They must be mindful of the context in which they express themselves in order to ensure that their statements do not constitute, in the words of the Court, “forms of direct or indirect interference or harmful pressure on the rights of those who seek to contribute with public deliberation through the expression and diffusion of their thoughts.”[[890]](#footnote-890)
10. **Publication of Classified Information, Protection of Sources and Whistleblowers**
11. The Office of the Special Rapporteur observes with concern the stance taken by Donald Trump’s administration with respect to the protection of sources and whistleblowers. The White House has criticized the media’s dissemination of information based on government leaks.[[891]](#footnote-891) The IACHR observes with concern the August 4 announcement by Attorney General Jeff Sessions that the Department of Justice will review its policies on issuing subpoenas to journalists and media outlets as part of their efforts to stop government leaks. He also announced that the FBI had created a new counterintelligence unit specializing in cases involving leaks to the press.[[892]](#footnote-892)
12. On May 16, it was learned that during a private conversation at the White House, President Donald Trump reportedly suggested to then-director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), James Comey, that he consider jailing journalists who publish classified information.[[893]](#footnote-893)
13. On January 26, Donald Trump said that whistleblowerChelsea Manning was a “traitor,” who had benefitted months earlier from the commutation of her sentence by then-President Barack Obama. The president added that Manning “should never have been released from prison.”[[894]](#footnote-894) On numerous other occasions, President Donald Trump has openly displayed a hostile attitude toward anonymous sources of information within United States government agencies. On August 4, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions stated that the Department of Justice was pursuing three times as many leak investigations than the previous administration.[[895]](#footnote-895)
14. On June 3, Reality Winner, a contractor with the Pluribus International Corporation of Georgia assigned to the National Security Agency (NSA) as a cryptologic language analyst, was arrested and charged with “willful retention and transmission of National Defense information to a person not entitled to receive it,” in violation of 18 U.S. Code, Chapter 37, Espionage and Censorship § 793(e) on “Gathering, transmitting or losing Defense information.” The document supposedly sent to the media outlet *The Intercept* had reportedly been used as the basis for an article about cyberattacks carried out by the Russian State against VR Systems, a U.S. company responsible for managing electronic voting in the states of California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, New York, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia in 2016. The State of North Carolina reportedly opened an investigation into the matter based on the revelations contained in the document published by *The Intercept*.
15. According to the information available, Winner, who pleaded not guilty on June 8 in a federal court in Augusta, could face up to 10 years in prison and a fine of up to US$ 250,000. On August 29, Winner’s attorneys filed a brief with the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Georgia in Augusta, alleging that her Miranda rights were violated when she was questioned by FBI agents prior to her arrest, and therefore arguing that the statements she made at that time should not be used against her at trial. On August 30, Judge Brian Epps continued Winner’s trial to March 2018, as her defense lawyers had still not been given permission to access a number of classified records related to the case. Judge Epps twice dismissed defense requests for Winner to be release on bond, first on the grounds that she might still be in possession of classified United States government material, and later, on October 5, on the grounds that Winner “admires Edward Snowden and Julian Assange” and that “she hates the United States and desires to damage national security.”[[896]](#footnote-896)
16. On April 13, during a presentation at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the new director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Mike Pompeo, insulted and threatened *Wikileaks* publisher Julian Assange, stating that “Assange is a narcissist who has created nothing of value. He relies on the dirty work of others to make himself famous. He is a fraud—a coward hiding behind a screen. (…) we have to recognize that we can no longer allow Assange and his colleagues the latitude to use free speech values against us. To give them the space to crush us with misappropriated secrets is a perversion of what our great Constitution stands for. It ends now.”[[897]](#footnote-897)
17. At the same event, director Pompeo characterized *Wikileaks* as a “non-state hostile intelligence service.”[[898]](#footnote-898) On July 20, he affirmed that statement and advocated using espionage laws to prevent *Wikileaks* from continuing to publish classified information about the United States government.[[899]](#footnote-899) The same day, Attorney General Jeff Sessions stated that the arrest of *Wikileak*s editor Julian Assange is a priority for the Department of Justice, after the press informed that an indictment against him is being prepared.[[900]](#footnote-900)
18. **Restriction on Media Coverage and Access to Information, Public Servants, and Public Places**
19. Donald Trump’s administration at one point banned video and audio recordings at official press conferences, hindering the media’s ability to cover those events.[[901]](#footnote-901) In addition, media professionals and press organizations have reported an increase in restrictions on journalistic coverage inside the United States Capitol, which houses the country’s legislative chambers. This has reportedly made it more difficult to spontaneously interview members of congress.[[902]](#footnote-902)
20. On February 3, Congress voted to repeal a Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) rule requiring oil, gas and mining companies to disclose payments made to foreign governments. The purpose of that rule was to apply transparency and accountability standards to U.S. companies to keep them from financing corruption in countries where mineral extraction activities make it more likely. President Donald Trump signed the repeal on February 14.[[903]](#footnote-903)
21. On November 2, the Department of the Interior announced its decision to withdraw the United from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). The EITI Standard is a global standard for the good governance of oil, gas and mineral resources industries, which provides accountability mechanisms governing property owners, contracts, and tax and legal procedures related to the extractive sector. The withdrawal of the United States from EITI as well as the repeal of the aforementioned SEC rule were observed with concern by civil society organizations, which thought that these moves could weaken transparency standards and anti-corruption efforts in the country.[[904]](#footnote-904)
22. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has received information about different incidents where relevant portions of informational United States government web pages were deleted and no longer available to the public. These include pages and content related to the humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico, climate change, LGBT minorities, and civil rights.[[905]](#footnote-905)
23. On January 10, Texas Congressman Louie Gohmert reportedly attempted to physically prevent photographer Jim Lo Scalzo of the *European Pressphoto Agency* from taking pictures of demonstrators protesting during the nomination of Jeff Sessions as Attorney General of the United States.[[906]](#footnote-906)
24. On February 24, certain media outlets were barred from attending an off-camera press conference at the White House. The outlets excluded from the event were *The* *New York Times, Politico, Buzz Feed, BBC, The Guardian, Daily Mail, CNN*, *The Hill* and the *Los Angeles Times*. When journalists from those news organizations attempted to enter the gaggle, they were told that they could not because their names were not on the list of attendees.[[907]](#footnote-907) On July 24, during a photo session with White House interns, President Donald Trump mocked and then ordered journalist Catherine Lucey of the *Associated Press* to be quiet after she asked a question about Jeff Sessions, the Attorney General of the United States.[[908]](#footnote-908)
25. On January 28, private security officers at John F. Kennedy Airport, assisted by the New York Police, reportedly blocked people from entering Terminal 4, keeping journalists from covering a protest event being held at the airport after the announcement of the initial immigration restrictions of Donald Trump’s administration on citizens from certain countries, known as the “first travel ban*.*”[[909]](#footnote-909)
26. After interviewing an alleged victim of sexual abuse and the alleged perpetrator of the crime at United States Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune on February 5, Marine Corps veteran and journalist James LaPorta, contributor of *The Daily Beast* received a letter on February 10 from Camp Lejeune commander Coronel M. L. Scalise, informing him that he was indefinitely barred from accessing the base for having “violated” the rules of the institution.[[910]](#footnote-910)
27. On April 14, the Office of the President announced that it would no longer publish the White House visitors’ log. Although it was not mandatory, the publication of those records was an important resource for transparency and accountability, providing relevant information to society about the president’s activities and relationships.[[911]](#footnote-911)
28. On July 11, the Knight First Amendment Institute filed suit against President Donald Trump in the Southern District of New York for blocking United States citizens on Twitter. The organization, representing seven individuals, contends that online forums are covered by the First Amendment just as physical spaces are, and that the president’s Twitter account has become an important source of news and information about the government and its administration.[[912]](#footnote-912)
29. On September 4, journalist Terry J. Allen of *These Times* was temporarily detained in the state of Vermont by U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers as she was leaving the country, and was forced to delete photos that she had taken of the Canadian border region.[[913]](#footnote-913)
30. **Legal reforms**
31. On August 1, Republican Senator Rob Portman introduced a draft amendment to the Communications Act, entitled “Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act” (SESTA), S. 1693, for debate in the Senate. On November 3, Republican Senator John Thune proposed a substitute amendment to the replace the one introduced initially. Although bill S. 1693 has been supported by the Internet Association (a group of high-profile Internet companies including Facebook, Google, Twitter, and Microsoft), diverse members of civil society have expressed criticism, specifically because the bill would extend the subsequent liability of service providers to user-generated content; because of its broad and vague definition of the phrase “assist, support, or facilitate” sex trafficking, and because of its retroactive enforcement. Experts further criticized the proposal because it appeared to ignore infrastructure differences between small and large service providers, which could lead to significant disparities in the enforcement of the law, given the different technical capacities among companies. On November 8, Senator Thune’s amended version of the bill was approved by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.[[914]](#footnote-914)
32. **Freedom of Expression on the Internet**
33. On December 14, 2017, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), in a split vote of 3-2, overturned the net neutrality rules adopted by the agency in 2015. According to an official press release[[915]](#footnote-915), the measure was adopted with the purpose of "restoring the long-standing light and bipartisan regulatory framework that has fostered the rapid growth, openness, and freedom of the Internet for almost 20 years". The FCC maintained that the 2015 standards imposed "substantial costs to the entire Internet ecosystem." It indicated that "instead of that rigid framework," the new rules "will protect consumers at a much lower cost for investment than with the rigid and broad standards of prior public services." The adopted regulation contemplates transparency requirements "that will empower consumers and facilitate effective government oversight of broadband providers’ conduct," the agency said. In particular, the measure reinstates the classification of the mobile broadband Internet access service as a private mobile service and mandates "that ISPs disclose information about their practices to consumers, business owners, and the FCC, including any blockage, regulation, paid prioritization, or affiliate prioritization. The FCC determined that "transparency, combined with market forces, and antitrust and consumer protection laws, achieve benefits comparable to the previous rules at a lower cost."
34. Previously, on August 17 Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza of the IACHR and United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, David Kaye, sent a document to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) entitled “Restoring Internet Freedom,” commenting on the Commission's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM). The Special Rapporteurs recalled the obligations arising from the international agreements signed by the State, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, and expressed their concern regarding proposed changes to FCC regulations related to the repeal or weakening of rules against blocking, throttling, and the arbitrary prioritization of Internet content, as well as the potential weakening of the Internet Conduct Standard and the Transparency Rule. Both rapporteurs concluded that the changes announce by the FCC could significantly roll back protections for net neutrality and unduly interfere with freedom of expression online in the United States, and called upon the Commission to take the necessary steps to ensure compliance with the applicable international standards.[[916]](#footnote-916)
35. **Surveillance of Communications**
36. Communications surveillance continued to be a topic of extensive debate in the United States. Although the country has made progress in regularizing surveillance activity following the 2013 revelations of former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden, new publications on the surveillance practices and programs of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 2017 have criticized the lack of public scrutiny in the use of cyber-surveillance tools in the U.S.[[917]](#footnote-917)
37. On November 8, the House Committee on the Judiciary passed the USA Liberty Act, creating a new framework for transparency protections and mechanisms related to the surveillance of communications of U.S. citizens and foreigners by government security agencies, and reauthorizing Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) for 6 more years. Section 702, established in 2008 through the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 Amendments Act of 2008, and previously scheduled to sunset on December 31, 2017, allows the government to intercept the communications of foreign nationals outside the United States. On September 25, NSA officials confirmed that they are monitoring the communications of more than 100,000 people pursuant to Section 702.
38. Changes to the law most notably include: stricter mechanisms for the authorization of criminal and national security investigations under Section 702; transparency measures for cases in which the identity of U.S. citizens is revealed after their communications are intercepted because of their interactions with foreign nationals under surveillance (“unmasking”); the prohibition of gathering information about the communications of U.S. citizens when those communications mention foreign nationals targeted for surveillance (“abouts”); more binding procedures to delete all information gathered under Section 702 that does not contain foreign intelligence information; the strengthening of the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board (PCLOB), which is responsible for monitoring the government’s national security tools.
39. Additionally, the legal reform extended whistleblower protections for employees of intelligence community contractors, in cases where they reveal corruption and infraction. On the other hand, it increased penalties (from one to five years in prison) for the offense of unauthorized removal or retention of classified information.[[918]](#footnote-918)
40. In addition, the leaks by *Wikileaks* and Shadow Brokers, an anonymous group that has leaked an extensive amount of National Security Agency (NSA)codes exposing espionage and surveillance programs, have brought to light the government’s lack of control over its own cyber arsenal, and the problems that entails.[[919]](#footnote-919) This issue was evidenced in the case of the ransomware [a computer virus that blocks access to files on a computer or network and requests the payment of ransom to restore them] known as *Wannacry,* which affected the Windows XP operating system. Microsoft—the manufacturer of Windows XP—said that the virus was developed based on leaked NSA codes.[[920]](#footnote-920) In this context, the legitimacy of defense and intelligence authorities producing and using such programs, as well as the potential impact and consequences of “stockpiling” software vulnerabilities that are unknown to the software manufacturers themselves (zero-day attacks), have been subject to public debate.[[921]](#footnote-921)
41. The Office of the Special Rapporteur reiterates that surveillance programs must be designed and implemented in accordance with international human rights standards. Notably, States must guarantee that the interception, collection and use of personal information are clearly authorized by law in order to protect individuals from arbitrary or abusive interference with their privacy. The Office of the Special Rapporteur observes that States should establish independent oversight mechanisms over the authorities in charge of conducting surveillance in order to ensure transparency and accountability.[[922]](#footnote-922)
42. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has also observed that the decisions to conduct surveillance operations that invade the privacy of persons must be authorized by independent judicial authorities who must explain the reasons why the measure is ideal for achieving the goal sought in a specific case, whether the measure is restricted enough not to affect the person’s right any more than necessary, and whether it is proportionate to the interest being furthered. Investigations that involve an invasion of privacy that is authorized by law and ordered by a judge having jurisdiction must also uphold other guarantees related to due process. States must guarantee that the judicial authority is specialized and has jurisdiction to make legal decisions regarding the lawfulness of communications surveillance, the technology used and its effect on rights that may be compromised, and that they provide enough guarantees to act appropriately. Finally, the Office of the Special Rapporteur notes that at least the criteria for decisions made by courts must be public.[[923]](#footnote-923)
43. **Diversity, Pluralism, and Community Broadcasting**
44. On September 26, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) assessed a monetary forfeiture in the amount of US$ 144,344 against Fabrice Polynice, Harold Sido, and Veronise Sido for the alleged violation of Section 301, chapter 47 of the U.S. Code, which prohibits willful, intentional, and repeated radio broadcasting without a license granted by a federal authority, pursuant to its interpretations of 47 U.S. Code Sections 503(b)(1)(B) and 312(f)(1).
45. According to the information available, Polynice was allegedly operating radio *Touche Douce* in Miami, Florida, for an audience consisting mainly of Haitian immigrants. Veronise Sido and Harold Sido reportedly allowed transmitters and radio equipment to be installed in the yard of their house. The fine is the highest amount permissible under section 503(b)(2)(D) for violations of this nature and is adjusted for inflation. In his statement on the measure, FCC Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn acknowledged that foreign-born Haitians represented 4% of the population in the Miami/Fort Lauderdale metropolitan area, and that, of some 60 radio stations in southern Florida, only one, *Touche Douce*, served that group. Nevertheless, Clyburn affirmed: “I will end my official statement the way in which I began: pirate radio stations are illegal.” For his part, Commissioner Michael O’Rielly welcomed the decision, but noted the inadequacy of the potential fines, and suggested the need to increase their amount for these types of cases.[[924]](#footnote-924)
46. On October 25, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Ajit Pai, announced during his appearance before the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology of the United States House of Representatives, the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and the Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission that he planned to eliminate FCC regulations that would restrict or limit media concentration in the United States.
47. Specifically, Pai stated that he would ask the FCC to review the restrictions on the ownership of various mass media outlets in a single market and the rule that prevents a single company from owning two of the four largest television channels in a region, or two channels if the local market does not have at least 8 independent channels, among others. [[925]](#footnote-925)
48. Principle 12 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression establishes that “monopolies or oligopolies in the ownership and control of the communication media must be subject to anti-trust laws, as they conspire against democracy by limiting the plurality and diversity which ensure the full exercise of people’s right to information. In no case should such laws apply exclusively to the media. The concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies should take into account democratic criteria that provide equal opportunity of access for all individuals.”
49. **Disinformation campaigns**
50. Reports from the intelligence community and social network service providers denounced the deliberate dissemination of false news during the presidential election process that ended on November 8, 2016. In a report published on January 6, 2017, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence concluded that sponsored content in the press and on social networks by the Russian Federation influenced the presidential campaign, especially through the *RT* and *Sputnik* channels and a "network of almost-government trolls. "[[926]](#footnote-926)
51. On September 6, Facebook announced that it had identified more than US $100 thousand spent on divisive and controversial ads between June 2015 and May 2017 in this network, operated by around 470 inauthentic accounts related to each other and probably operated from Russia. According to the company, most of the 3,000 ads mentioned did not refer to specific candidates or the electoral process in a specific way, but were focused on issues that generate division and controversy in the country such as racial equality, LGBTI rights, control of weapons, and immigration.[[927]](#footnote-927) A study, published in 2017 in the Journal of Economic Perspectives, by academics from Stanford University and New York University observed at least 156 fake news articles during the three months leading up to the presidential election, which were promoted and disseminated in different web pages and social networks. According to the same study, they were shared 37.6 million times on Facebook.[[928]](#footnote-928)
52. On October 26, Twitter announced the cessation of all ads on the social network sponsored by users accounts owned by *RT* and *Sputnik*[[929]](#footnote-929). In a report published in April 2017, Facebook admitted to being a constant victim of disinformation campaign attempts, consisting of creating false accounts and promoting false stories, coordinated news expansion with the intent to manipulate political discussions, information theft of users and distribution of stolen information to third parties, and massive collection of user data for better control of public discourse, among others[[930]](#footnote-930).
53. In November 2017, the Department of Justice ordered T&R Productions, the company that operates the news portal and the RT television channel in the United States, to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). FARA was a regulation set in motion in 1938 to force organizations representing foreign interests in the country to disclose the relationship of their activities and finances with foreign governments. T&R Productions complied with the order and registered as an organization representing the interests of the Russian Federation in US territory on November 13[[931]](#footnote-931).
54. **Other Relevant Situations**
55. Mexican journalist Martín Méndez Pineda crossed the border on February 5, to request asylum in the United States because of threats he had reportedly received due to his journalistic work in the State of Guerrero. U.S. authorities didn’t grant him asylum and Méndez Pineda spent over 100 days in detention. He returned to Mexico voluntarily on May 23 after U.S. authorities denied his request earlier that month to be released pending the adjudication of his case.[[932]](#footnote-932) On July 13, the immigration judge in El Paso, Texas, Robert S. Hough, denied the asylum request of Mexican journalist Emilio Gutiérrez Soto. After the journalist appealed the decision, on November 16 the judge rejected the appeal and Soto was informed by officers of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement that they planned to deport him. Soto filed a stay of removal request and would still await approval of it[[933]](#footnote-933).
56. On October 29, Juli Briskman made a gesture in protest as President Donald Trump’s motorcade passed by the Trump National Golf Club in Sterling, Virginia. On October 31, Briskman’s employer Akima LCC, a United States government contractor, reportedly fired her for violating the company’s social media policy by disseminating content published by media outlets about the incident on her personal social media.[[934]](#footnote-934)
57. On November 16, the Federal Communications Commission authorized broadcasters to use the new ATSC 3.0 digital television technology. The technology would allow more precise geolocation of television signals, better image definition, interactive programming, and better accuracy in advertising. The decision of FCC has been criticized by legislators because such measure could be outside the constitutional attributions of the body; the absence of subsidies forecast for users to make the transition of their recipients towards the new standard and not having a testing period for the new technology, in which it could detect implications of the same in privacy, the use of encryption, and the risks of hacking*[[935]](#footnote-935)*.
58. On December 3, the ABC News television station reported that the journalist Brian Ross had been suspended for four weeks, because he had erroneously reported that Michael Flynn, a former presidential advisor on matters of national security, would have affirmed that Donald Trump had allegedly ordered him to hold meetings with representatives of the Russian Federation during the 2016 election campaign, within the framework of the investigations carried out by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for months on the alleged Russian intervention in the last electoral campaign[[936]](#footnote-936). In fact, the journalist read a rectification on the same night he made the mistake, on the ABC channel, to specify that the guidelines that Trump gave Flynn on contacts with the Russian government would have occurred after the election, as president-elect.
59. **GRENADA**
60. **Progress**
61. Like the other States parties of the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority (ECTEL), Grenada would have approved the Electronic Communications Bill (ECB) [[937]](#footnote-937), which, among its objectives, would seek to introduce changes in issues related to the management of electronic communications, without discrimination between licenses that do not have similar circumstances or the access of retail clients to information and its dissemination. The ECB would also have among its purposes to guarantee fair and equal access to the public network of electronic communications or the adoption of antitrust measures that favor the plurality of licenses, while aiming at guaranteeing open access to the Internet and to specify the guidelines that should guide the consumer defense of electronic communications. According to the information available, each member state of ECTEL must adopt the electronic communications law in its internal legislation[[938]](#footnote-938).
62. **GUATEMALA**
63. **Situation of journalists and attacks on freedom of expression**
64. During the *in loco* visit conducted in 2017, the IACHR verified significant levels of violence against journalists in Guatemala, characterized by murders, threats, and speech that aims to stigmatize media outlets and journalists engaged in the fight against corruption and the abuse of power. According to reports, journalists and media workers are “highly vulnerable” to violence in the practice of their profession, especially in areas outside the nation’s capital. These journalists, in addition to confronting the scourge of drug trafficking and organized crime, are also subject to attacks from some public servants allegedly linked to corrupt acts.[[939]](#footnote-939) According to the information received, Quetzaltenango is one of the areas where the greatest number of attacks on journalists have been reported in recent years.[[940]](#footnote-940)
65. Article 35 of the 1985 Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala, amended in 1993, establishes that “The expression of thought through any means of dissemination, without censorship or prior permission, is free [...].” Notwithstanding this broad constitutional protection of the right to freedom of expression, the Commission has “constantly received information to the effect that the full exercise of that right has been obstructed by acts of intimidation against independent media and journalists.”[[941]](#footnote-941) Additionally, in recent years the IACHR has noted “with particular concern the attacks against [journalists] covering investigations into public administration, acts of corruption, and human rights.”[[942]](#footnote-942) During its *in loco* visit, the Commission verified that, in addition to attacks and stigmatization, there are persistent structural problems in Guatemala that prevent citizens from receiving information from a variety of sources, such as the high degree of concentration in the ownership and control of both free-to-air and subscription-based radio and television channels. There are also serious obstacles that keep the community media outlets of indigenous peoples from accessing the radio spectrum and the public resources needed to achieve sustainability.
66. The IACHR notes in particular the announcement made by President Jimmy Morales during the *in loco* visit, regarding the imminent approval of a Program for the Protection of Journalists and Media Workers, on which he is reportedly working in consultation with journalists’ organizations. Nevertheless, the IACHR also notes with concern that there has been no tangible progress since that time toward the establishment of that program.
67. The IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression would like to underscore that journalism in Guatemala is currently playing a fundamental role in denouncing abuses of power and following up on investigations into cases of corruption. The IACHR observed that journalists and media workers continue to be, throughout Guatemala, the main source of information and debate concerning the serious human rights problems, institutional crisis, and corruption affecting the country. Nevertheless, a smear campaign against journalists and news media was evident on social media in 2017. According to Human Rights Ombudsman [*Procurador de los Derechos Humanos*] (PDH) Augusto Jordán Rodas Andrade, there is “an intent to disparage journalists in these times of so much uncertainty in Guatemala, which may jeopardize [its] fragile democracy.”[[943]](#footnote-943)
68. Principle 9 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression of the IACHR establishes that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
69. Based on the inter-American case law and doctrine, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur remind the Guatemalan State, in relation to violence and attacks on journalists and media outlets, of the importance of meeting the three positive obligations that emanate from the rights to life, humane treatment, and freedom of expression, to wit: the obligation to prevent, the obligation to protect, and the obligation to criminally investigate, prosecute, and punish the perpetrators of these crimes. Violence against journalists must be combated through a comprehensive policy of prevention, protection, and the pursuit of justice. These obligations are mutually complementary in order for free, democratic, and robust speech to exist without restrictions.[[944]](#footnote-944)
70. **Murders of journalists and reporters, and impunity for these crimes**
71. In 2016, and thus far in 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression received information about the murder of 10 journalists in Guatemala. Eight journalists were reported to have been murdered in 2016; nevertheless, it has not been determined whether their murders were connected to the exercise of the right to freedom of expression.[[945]](#footnote-945) According to the information available, the authorities opened investigations in those cases, but no answers have yet been provided with respect to the logical line of investigation into whether these crimes were connected to the work the victims were performing as journalists and media workers.[[946]](#footnote-946) The Office of the Special Rapporteur has received information about two other cases in 2017, which it is monitoring in order to establish whether they are related to the victims’ journalistic work.[[947]](#footnote-947) In its comments to the draft of this report, the State indicated that between 2012 and June 2017, the Public Prosecutor’s Office received 372 reports related to threates, violent attacks and murders of journalists, which lead to 17 judicial sentences: two acuittals and six convictions for crimes against life, as well as one acquittal and eight convictions for other crimes.[[948]](#footnote-948)
72. Journalist Manuel Salvador Villagrán, who worked with different local media outlets in the municipality of San Jorge, Department of Zacapa, was murdered on January 19, 2017. He was also reportedly the head of the Department of Public Relations of the Municipality of San Jorge. Sources revealed that the journalist was shot several times while riding his motorcycle.[[949]](#footnote-949) According to publicly available information, significant progress has been made in the investigation of this crime.[[950]](#footnote-950)
73. On July 8, 2017, journalist and presenter Johnny Javier Guardado’s body was found in the municipality of El Chal, Department of Petén. According to the information available, he had been stabbed.[[951]](#footnote-951)
74. Additionally, according to the information gathered by the Office of the Special Rapporteur and received during the *in loco* visit, Guatemala continues to have high levels of impunity for crimes involving the murder of journalists. Given the slow pace of the investigations, in most cases the authorities reportedly have not been able to determine whether these crimes are related to the journalistic work of the victims.[[952]](#footnote-952) According to Guatemalan freedom of expression organizations, that situation gives rise to self-censorship among journalists who do not know why they might be attacked.[[953]](#footnote-953)
75. Despite this situation, the IACHR acknowledges the progress of the investigation into the murder of two journalists which shook the country in 2015. In January 2017, the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala [*Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala*] (CICIG) and the Public Ministry (MP) filed a request for a preliminary impeachment hearing against Representative Julio Antonio Juárez Ramírez for the March 10, 2015 death of journalists Danilo Efraín Zapón López and Federico Benjamín Salazar Gerónimo in Mazatenango, Suchitepéquez. Ramírez is alleged to have been the mastermind of the murders, and reportedly viewed Zapón López as “a threat to the consolidation of his candidacy as district representative and a challenge to his power in the area.” In January 2017, two individuals were reportedly arrested for their participation in the journalists’ deaths.[[954]](#footnote-954) Another four individuals were reportedly apprehended at an initial phase.[[955]](#footnote-955) In February, the Guatemalan Supreme Court (CSJ) heard the request for a preliminary impeachment hearing against Representative Juárez Ramírez.[[956]](#footnote-956) In November, the Investigative Judge appointed by the Supreme Court of Justice [*Corte Suprema de Justicia*] (CSJ) in the case against Representative Juárez Ramírez, would have recommended to the plenary of judges of the CSJ to withdraw the immunity of the parliamentarian to be investigated for the murder of journalists[[957]](#footnote-957).
76. In June 2017, it was learned that through its Office of the Special Prosecutor against Impunity [*Fiscalía Especial contra la Impunidad*], the Public Ministry was able to get High-Risk Court “B” to admit 81 items of evidence against the alleged murderers of Danilo López and Federico Salazar. It was also determined that the trial will be held in High-Risk Court “A.”[[958]](#footnote-958)
77. Additionally, during the first half of 2017, through the actions of the Public Ministry’s Unit for Crimes against Journalists [*Unidad de Delitos contra Periodistas*], two individuals were convicted of crimes committed against journalists during 2016. On May 30, Byron Eduardo Felipe Morales was sentenced to 40 years for the June 2016 murder of journalist Víctor Hugo Valdez Cardona. Similarly, on June 2, Rolando Antonio Jiménez Cruz was sentenced to 23 years for the September 4, 2016 death of journalist Felipe David Munguía Jiménez. The investigation is reportedly ongoing in an effort to establish the identity of the masterminds of the crime against Jiménez. [[959]](#footnote-959)
78. The IACHR received information about the May 2017 inauguration of a Prosecution Unit for Crimes against Journalists in Quetzaltenango. According to reports, the Prosecutor’s Office in Quetzaltenango is composed of one prosecutor, three assistant prosecutors, one prosecution officer, and an administrative assistant.[[960]](#footnote-960) This agency has territorial jurisdiction over the departments of Suchitepéquez, Retalhuleu, San Marcos, Huehuetenango, Totonicapán, Sololá, and Quetzaltenango.[[961]](#footnote-961) In addition, according to information provided by the State, a division of the Unit for Crimes against Journalists that operates in Guatemala City was established in 2017, which includes: an agency that handles common crimes, made up of one prosecutor, 5 assistant prosecutors, and one prosecution officer; and another agency that investigates crimes against the person committed against journalists, comprised by one prosecutor, 4 assistant prosecutors, and one prosecution officer. A driver has also reportedly been assigned to provide assistance in investigative proceedings.[[962]](#footnote-962) This staffing increase represents a strengthening of the Unit’s human resources, which in 2015 had only five prosecutors to handle over 100 cases.[[963]](#footnote-963) The State additionally reports that a general instruction from the Attorney General and Head of the Public Ministry that contains general guidelines for investigating cases in which the victims are human rights defenders (including journalists) is currently at the approval stage.[[964]](#footnote-964)
79. The IACHR notes in particular the efforts made by the Public Ministry to address the obligation to pursue full justice for murdered journalists, bearing in mind the specificities of these types of investigations. However, it also takes note of the delay in prosecuting the masterminds in some of these cases, due to the lack of coordination among the different state agencies with jurisdiction over the matter.
80. The IACHR has reiterated that the murder of journalists constitutes the most extreme form of censorship and States have a positive obligation to identify and punish the perpetrators of these crimes. For the Inter-American Commission, it is essential that the Guatemalan State investigate in a complete, effective, and impartial manner the murders of journalists and clarify their motives and judicially determine the relationship they may have with journalism and freedom of expression. The authorities should not rule out the exercise of journalism as a motive for murder and/or aggression before the investigation is completed. The omission of logical lines of investigation or the lack of diligence in collecting evidence in this regard can have serious repercussions on the development of the processes in stages of prosecution or trial[[965]](#footnote-965). Not having exhausted completely the logical lines of investigation affects, above all, that the intellectual authors can not be identified[[966]](#footnote-966).
81. As established by the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations (UN) for the Protection and Promotion of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression and the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of the American States (OAS), the State " has the duty to ensure that journalists and media workers reporting on public demonstrations are not arrested, threatened, assaulted, or limited in any manner in their rights as a result of practicing their profession. Their work materials and tools must not be destroyed or confiscated by the authorities." Moreover, the authorities must not stigmatize or stereotype demonstrators and their demands. They must refrain from making generalizations based on isolated events or the conduct of particular groups." [[967]](#footnote-967)
82. **Threats, arrests, harassment, and attacks on journalists and media outlets**
83. In its report entitled *Situation of Human Rights in Guatemala: Diversity, Inequality, and Exclusion*, the IACHR observed that, given their difficult working conditions, some journalists are said to have opted for self-censorship to protect themselves from attacks and threats. Between January and August of 2015, the Office of the Prosecutor for Crimes against Journalists [*Fiscalía de Delitos contra Periodistas*] received 81 complaints—a figure that surpassed the numbers recorded in each of the three previous years.[[968]](#footnote-968)
84. More recently, during the *in loco* visit, journalists and organizations that defend freedom of expression reported to the IACHR a spike in threats and stigmatization on social media, assaults by law enforcement officers, and a climate of sharp social and political polarization that also permeates the practice of journalism, especially opinion journalism. According to press organizations, local politicians, members of the National Police, and organized crime are sources of intimidation in areas of the country outside the capital. Under the difficult working conditions, some journalists have reportedly continued to engage in self-censorship to protect themselves from attacks and threats. In 2017, between January and August, the Office of the Prosecutor for Crimes against Journalists reportedly received 53 complaints, 24 of which alleged threats.[[969]](#footnote-969) Additionally, 170 complaints are reportedly at the initial criminal investigation phase in the common crimes unit, including the Department of Quetzaltenango, and 24 complaints are pending in the unit for crimes against the person. Some of the most notable cases of 2017 are detailed below.[[970]](#footnote-970)
85. On March 1, photojournalist Alex Cruz and driver Ernesto Hidalgo, of the newspaper *elPeriódico*, were reportedly intercepted by two unknown men who threatened them with firearms and confiscated their cell phones and photography equipment.[[971]](#footnote-971)
86. In June, it was learned that journalist Marielos Monzón, a columnist for *Prensa Libre,* filed a complaint with the Public Ministry’s Prosecution Unit for Crimes against Journalists alleging that she had been subject to threats and intimidation. According to the information available, a list had reportedly been distributed in recent weeks to members of organized crime blaming her and other journalists for the legal proceedings brought against individuals involved in drug trafficking crimes. According to Cerigua, "[t]his would not be the first time that Monzón is mentioned in lists of people labeled "communists", in 2011 she was accused along with 5 other people, of committing numerous crimes during the Internal Armed Conflict, when she was just a girl, the claim was later dismissed by the prosecution"[[972]](#footnote-972).
87. The same month, it was reported that Edgar Rubio Castañeda, an Infantry Colonel in the Guatemalan Army, had been interrogated by military authorities because of his book *Desde el cuartel, otra visión de Guatemala* [“From the Barracks: Another View of Guatemala”]. A Military Honor Board, which was reportedly established specifically to question him about the publication of the aforementioned book, reportedly demanded that Rubio Castañeda present defense evidence. Additionally, the Board reportedly accused him of insubordination to the Army and of failing to conform to the institution, both of which are punishable under the Military Code.[[973]](#footnote-973)
88. In July, *Centro Pen* [PEN Center] Guatemala condemned the assaults committed against various reporters from *Prensa Libre* in the capital and Quetzaltenango, and from *Nuestro Diario*. According to the organization, reporters Rigoberto Escobar, Carlos Paredes, Edwin Pitán, Carlos Ventura, and Byron Bravo were assaulted by members of the security details of politicians and private electric power generation companies in outlying areas of the country.[[974]](#footnote-974) Similarly, on September 7, Rony Rolando Castillo, the *Nuestro Diario* correspondent for central-north Santa Rosa, was reportedly assaulted and had his photography equipment stolen by a group of tuk-tuk drivers while photographing a demonstration outside the Cuilapa National Hospital in Santa Rosa.[[975]](#footnote-975)
89. As previously indicated, the sharp social and political polarization permeating the practice of journalism in Guatemala was reflected in the reports of threats, harassment, and the stigmatization of journalists, media workers and media outlets, among other things. Some of the most notable cases from 2017 are detailed below.
90. On February 28, during a press conference, President Jimmy Morales reportedly blamed the media for spreading rumors of a coup d'état in Guatemala.[[976]](#footnote-976) According to reports, the president himself was the one who raised the issue on February 16, when he alleged that he had heard “well-founded rumors” of a possible coup in Guatemala.[[977]](#footnote-977)
91. According to the information available, on August 28, *Guatevisión* denounced the publication of a fake Facebook page, which accused the media outlet of being a “traitor to the nation,” manipulating information, and placing the country in foreign hands. According to reports, that message was apparently replicated by accounts with few posts in their history, with few contacts, or contacts that were hidden or created within the past two or three years—which in turn attacked the channel on its own Facebook page, as well as in the comment sections of articles that had been shared. This reportedly occurred in reaction to the channel’s uninterrupted coverage the previous day of President Jimmy Morales’s decision to declare Iván Velázquez *persona non grata*.[[978]](#footnote-978)
92. Following the smear campaign that had been waged on social media against journalists and the news media, the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (PDH) opened a file on September 2, as Ombudsman Augusto Jordán Rodas Andrade had indicated that, “there is an intent to disparage journalists in these times of so much uncertainty in Guatemala, which may jeopardize our fragile democracy.”[[979]](#footnote-979)
93. On August 29, various media outlets complained of the restrictions placed on their coverage of the Regional Intelligence Conference in which President Jimmy Morales took part. According to the information available, a group of journalists was reportedly assaulted by members of the Secretariat of Administrative and Security Affairs [*Secretaría de Asuntos Administrativos y de Seguridad*] (SAAS). At the same event, SAAS staff reportedly tried to grab a camera that the reporters were using to film the incident. The president reportedly left without making any statements to the press.[[980]](#footnote-980)
94. In October, it was learned that members of the citizen committee of the department of Quetzaltenango had threatened to initiate criminal proceedings against the journalist Óscar de León, *of Radio Sigo 104.7 FM*, because of a publication he made on social networks with regard to the remodeling of the El Carmen park in the municipality of Salcajá that involved local authorities[[981]](#footnote-981).
95. All types of threats, agressions, or harassment against journalists, media workers, or the media themselves must be investigated by the courts, and the authorities should not rule out the exercise of journalism as a motive for the crime before the investigation is completed. States have an obligation to take effective measures to prevent attacks against journalists and others exercising their right to freedom of expression and to combat impunity, in particular by vigorously condemning such attacks when they do occur, by investigating them promptly and effectively in order to duly sanction those responsible, and by providing compensation to the victims where appropriate. States also have an obligation to provide protection to journalists and others exercising their right to freedom of expression who are at a high risk of being attacked[[982]](#footnote-982).
96. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
97. **Censorship**
98. During 2017, the IACHR and the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression also received information about alleged cases of pressure over media and censorship in Guatemala. In February, a group of journalists working for the newspaper *Contrapoder* reportedly complained that an article about Iván Velásquez, head of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), was censored. The article, entitled “*Emboscada contra Iván Velásquez*” [“Ambush of Iván Velásquez”] was supposedly withdrawn moments before the magazine went to press.[[983]](#footnote-983) According to the information available, the reason given by the vice president of the publishing group for its withdrawal was a lack of “journalistic rigor.”[[984]](#footnote-984)
99. According to reports, *Guatevisión’s* signal was reportedly blocked in several departments of the country between 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., and 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. on August 27, while it was airing uninterrupted coverage of President Jimmy Morales’s decision to declare Iván Velázquez, head of the International Commission against Corruption in Guatemala (CICIG), *persona* *non grata*. The blocking of *Guatevisión’s* signal, which was allegedly done by cable companies tied to certain political groups, occurred during the broadcast of “news that affected [certain] interests.**It happened to us in Petén, Retalhuleu, Quetzaltenango, and Sololá.**”[[985]](#footnote-985)
100. Article 13.2 of the American Convention explicitly states that the exercise of freedom of expression cannot be subject to prior censorship. Additionally, Principle 5 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression establishes that, “Prior censorship, direct or indirect interference in or pressure exerted upon any expression, opinion or information transmitted through any means of oral, written, artistic, visual or electronic communication must be prohibited by law. Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression.”
101. **Program for the protection of journalists and media workers**
102. In October 2012, during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Guatemala agreed to create a Program for the Protection of Journalists. That commitment was reiterated on November 28, 2013 by then-President of Guatemala, Otto Pérez Molina.[[986]](#footnote-986) Nevertheless—nearly five years later—the implementation of such a program continues to be under discussion, despite the repeated recommendations of the IACHR, its Office of the Special Rapporteur, UNESCO, and OHCHR to move forward with its creation. In 2014, a High-Level Committee and a Technical Committee were established, consisting of the Presidential Commission coordinating the Executive's Policy on Human Rights (COPREDEH), the Ministry of the Interior [*Ministerio de Gobernación*], the Public Ministry, and the Social Communication Secretariat of the Presidency[*Secretaría de Comunicación Social de la Presidencia de la República*] (SCSPR). Their objective was to design and implement a program for the protection of journalists.[[987]](#footnote-987)
103. The following year, the government made progress on the design of the mechanism, in consultation with civil society and human rights organizations. Together, the High-Level Committee and the Technical Committee worked to design and implement the protection mechanism for journalists. This work was also supported by UNESCO and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). An initial document entitled “Preliminary Proposal - Program for the Protection of Journalists” was drafted, and the institutions that should make up the Program, their powers with respect to protection, and the mechanisms for coordination were identified. In this context, after being debated by journalists and defenders of the right to freedom of expression, a set of observations, recommendations, and comments was submitted to the Technical Committee for its consideration and incorporation into the conceptual design of the System to Protect the Practice of Journalism [*Sistema de Protección al Ejercicio Periodístico*] (SPEP).[[988]](#footnote-988) Nevertheless, various journalists’ associations claimed that they had little to no participation in preparing the proposal. Finally, in 2016, after the new government came to power, President Jimmy Morales’s administration decided to suspend the process and begin a new process for establishing the mechanism.[[989]](#footnote-989)
104. More recently, on different occasions in 2017, then-Human Rights Ombudsman Jorge de León Duque urged the government to implement the Program for the Protection of Journalists without delay. On February 7, the PDH expressed his concern over the vulnerable situation of the country’s journalists, especially those who carry out their activities in areas outside Guatemala City, and urged the government to implement the program soon.[[990]](#footnote-990) De León Duque reiterated that need on May 3, in a statement released for World Press Freedom Day.[[991]](#footnote-991)
105. In February, the Press Alliance [*Alianza de Entidades de Prensa*] reportedly denounced the Guatemalan State for failing to keep its promise to adopt a Program for the Protection of Journalists. In the joint statement signed by the Association of Journalists of Guatemala (APG), the Guatemalan Chamber of Journalism [*Cámara Guatemalteca de Periodismo*] (CGP), the Guatemalan Chamber of Professional Broadcast Announcers [*Cámara de Locutores Profesionales de Guatemala*] (CLPG), and Guatemalan Sports Reporters [*Cronistas Deportivos Guatemaltecos*] (CDG), the Alliance condemned the Guatemalan government’s apparent lack of will to fulfill its promises with respect to the Program.[[992]](#footnote-992) On June 1, after Representative Sandra Morán announced her willingness to work on a legislative bill for the protection of journalists, the Press Alliance reportedly dismissed the intent of some congressional representatives who support such a law, alleging that they did not enjoy public confidence and credibility, and that the intent of the initiative was not just to protect journalists but also to create opportunities and processes for regulation that would include a general media law.[[993]](#footnote-993)
106. On May 2, Guatemalan Vice President Jafeth Cabrera and his communications team met with the Press Alliance to address the establishment of the Program for the Protection of Journalists, which reportedly has made no progress since July 2016. Jafeth Cabrera was said to have offered to look into the reasons for the alleged delay, and indicated that if the President would delegate the proposal to him, he would make the effort to move it forward.[[994]](#footnote-994)
107. On this point, the IACHR took note of President Jimmy Morales’s announcement during the *in loco* visit to the effect that the Government was working on a Program for the Protection of Journalists and Media Workers in consultation with journalists’ organizations, and that he would approve it as soon as possible.
108. During the *in loco* visit, the IACHR again heard complaints from various civil society organizations, including Cerigua and other member organizations of the Press Alliance,[[995]](#footnote-995)regarding the government’s lack of political will to move forward with the creation, funding, and implementation of a protection mechanism, despite the long-standing assurances offered by the Executive Branch. The IACHR also received a letter signed by a number of active journalists demanding a public and participatory consultation in the process for the creation of the protection mechanism not limited to a few civil society organizations.[[996]](#footnote-996)
109. The IACHR observes, according to information provided by the State, that the Ministry of the Interior, through the National Civil Police and its Personal Protection and Security Division [*División de Protección a Personas y Seguridad*], is responsible for providing security to human rights defenders, journalists, trade unionists, and others pursuant to Government Order 97-2009, which has been in force since April 3, 2009. According to the Guatemalan State, supplemental protection measures are provided through personal security, permanent security posts, and perimeter security. Additionally, the Presidential Commission coordinating the Executive's Policy on Human Rights (COPREDEH) published the “Protocol for the Protection of Journalists,” detailing a number of situations and rules that provide individuals who practice journalism with an overview of situations of risk. It also published the “Protection Manual for Journalists and Media Workers,” addressing national and international laws, permissible restrictions, and other material.[[997]](#footnote-997)
110. More recently, the Guatemalan news agency *Centro de Reportes Informativos sobre Guatemala* [Center for News Reports on Guatemala] (Cerigua), launched a campaign in Geneva with members of the diplomatic missions of different States in order to express their concern over the lack of progress on the establishment of the Program for the Protection of Journalists. The organization underscored that advances were made in the protection of the press, such as the establishment of the Body for the Analysis of Attacks on Human Rights Defenders [*Instancia de Análisis de Ataques contra Defensores de Derechos Humanos*], an entity coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior whose participants include the Public Ministry (MP), the Presidential Commission coordinating the Executive's Policy on Human Rights (COPREDEH), and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as well as a variety of social actors, including Cerigua. Nevertheless, Cerigua indicated that the Ministry of the Interior had refused to approve the order that would enable the entity to continue operating. It further alleged that the advisor in question needlessly blocked the approval of the government order to proceed with the creation of the Program for the Protection of Journalists, despite the existence of an order from the Office of the President.[[998]](#footnote-998)   In its comments to the draft of this report, the State of Guatemala stated that in November 2016 the President pushed for the creation of a Governmental Agreement that would create the Program for the Protection of Journalists and Social Communicators. According to the State, this program:

“[W]ill be implemented in the office of Human Rights of the Minister of the Interior, who will define the legal procedures of the program, will establish its process within its jurisdiction, and will encompass any harm to the physical or psychological integrity, threat, harassment or intimidation against journalists and social communicators due to their profession. The Ministry of the Interior will issue the regulations for the specific activities of the program and will provide the necessary resources for its functioning. Currently, the Governmental Agreement that creates the program for the protection of journalists has been submitted to the consideration of various unionized sectors and journalists’ organizations.”[[999]](#footnote-999)

1. Based on the foregoing, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression remind the Guatemalan State some of the guidelines it has developed, and that should be taken into account in the design and operation of protection programs for journalists, among them: i) political commitment from the State, that must include an adequate legal framework, sufficient human resources, trained and prepared, capable of establishing trust with the persons who seek protection; with corresponding resources with a view to covering the costs of the personnel who work in the program and the specific expenses related to the protective measures provided; adopt rules clearly spelling out the authorities and responsibilities of the officials who will play a role in either implementing or monitoring the protection measures; ii) that it include the adequate identification of potential beneficiaries and an adequate recognition of the grounds on which a potential beneficiary can seek protection; iii) a proper risk assessment, considering the gender perspective, that enables the State to determine the best way to fulfill its obligation to protect, taking into account contextual and specific circumstances and providing for the active participation of the beneficiary; iv) the provision of suitable and effective protection measures that are tailored to both protect beneficiaries’ life and integrity corresponding to journalists’ needs and allow them to continue their professional activities; v) clear criteria and procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of the selected measures, and if the measures of protection are ineffective they will have to be adjusted to comport with the situation that the beneficiary is experiencing; vi) assess the risk in order to decide whether the measures of protection should be lifted with the beneficiaries’ participation in order to get their view on the question of whether the measures should be lifted; and vii) material protective measures shall be linked to exhaustive and independent investigations by the pertinent authorities to prevent and reduce the sources of the risk[[1000]](#footnote-1000).
2. **Situation of broadcasting**
3. Durante its *in loco* visit, the Inter-American Commission verified the lack of progress with regard to the obligation that the State assumed on multiple occasions to legally recognize the community broadcasting sector and effectively allocate permission for this sector to use frequencies. It additionally verified that, although Guatemala has no regulatory framework of policies for the incorporation of indigenous peoples into the broadcasting sector, it continued to persecute so-called “illegal” radio stations, which in some cases provide a service to the communities. While in some cases this persecution has been aimed at unauthorized commercial radio stations, in others it has also included the small radio stations of indigenous communities that broadcast in spite of the obstacles to accessing frequencies.
4. In February 2016, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur learned that the Guatemalan Congress was in the third phase of studying draft law 4087, the “Community Media Act” [“*Ley de Medios de Comunicación Comunitaria*”]. The bill, backed by civil society and the country’s indigenous peoples, sought to guarantee “access to media for indigenous communities and socially excluded minority sectors,” promoting international standards. At the time, the Office of the Special Rapporteur stated that the legislative debate on the bill represented an extraordinary opportunity for the State to effectively comply with its international obligations in this area.[[1001]](#footnote-1001) Nevertheless, the bill was defeated in an expedited procedure by the majority of a congressional Technical Committee, on the grounds that it lacked technical support and was an “untimely” and “unconstitutional” initiative.
5. More recently, during the *in loco* visit, the IACHR received with concern information about the application by analogy of the criminal offense of “frequency theft” [“*hurto de fluidos*”] and “theft” to community radio stations in order to bring criminal charges against them. The Guatemalan Association of Mayan Lawyers and Notaries reported that 46 community journalists have been convicted of this offense at this point.[[1002]](#footnote-1002) In addition, César Gómez, a representative of the Community Radio Movement, reported that the State continues to harass these media outlets, and that at least 12 of them have been shut down in the past two years. He also reportedly stated that the Office of the Prosecutor for Crimes against Journalists and Trade Unionists stopped going after the community broadcasters once the situation was denounced before the IACHR; however, since then, the Office of the Prosecutor for Environmental Crimes [*Fiscalía de Delitos contra el Ambiente*] has reportedly been responsible for harassing them, despite the fact that the matter is not within its purview. Gómez further alleged that the Prosecutor’s Office violated the right to due process because criminal proceedings were brought against community broadcasters without the administrative proceedings before the Superintendency of Telecommunications (SIT) first being exhausted, as required under the General Telecommunications Act [*Ley General de Telecomunicaciones*].[[1003]](#footnote-1003)
6. According to the information available, various operations were carried out in the first half of the year to dismantle alleged “pirate radio stations”—the term used to refer to broadcasters that are not authorized to operate by the Superintendency of Telecommunications (SIT). According to information provided by the State, “Requests have been filed with the competent courts of Guatemala to conduct 165 evidentiary searches and inspections of premises where investigations have yielded evidence of the unlawful use of radio frequencies. […] The seizure of the broadcasting equipment used as an instrument of the crime being prosecuted has also been requested.” The State additionally indicated that, “Sixty-five convictions have been handed down to date, ordering the seizure of the broadcasting devices used in those unlawful activities.”[[1004]](#footnote-1004) Some of the most notable cases from 2017 are detailed below.
7. According to the information available, on February 15, authorities raided the radio station *La Jocosa* 104.7 FM,[[1005]](#footnote-1005) and on February 22, in the municipality of Palencia, Guatemala, raids were carried out against 87.9 FM, *Promesa Stereo, Señal de Salvación*[[1006]](#footnote-1006)and radio 104.7 MHz, resulting in the arrest of Eduardo Ortega Santos, who was subsequently charged with the offense of “theft.”[[1007]](#footnote-1007) Similarly, on March 8, in the municipality of Táctic, Department of Alta Verapaz, raids were conducted against stations using the frequencies 104.7 and 92.7, respectively.[[1008]](#footnote-1008) The following day, a search was conducted at a property located in the municipality of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa associated with the frequency 95.9 FM.[[1009]](#footnote-1009) Subsequently, on March 15, the Public Ministry (MP) announced the seizure of equipment used on three “illegal frequencies”: radio station *Adoración Estéreo* in the municipality of Táctic, which operated on frequency 95.5 FM; radio station *Éxitos* in the municipality of Chamelco, which operated on frequency 104.3 FM, where Franklin Caz Caal was reportedly arrested and charged with “theft”; and finally, radio station *La Voz de Pocola* 105.5 FM, in the municipality of Pocola de Carchá.[[1010]](#footnote-1010) On June 15, two raids were reportedly carried out in the municipalities of Patzicia and Patzún, Department of Chimaltenango, in connection with frequencies 91.9 and 107.9. José Lorenzo Choc Pérez was reportedly arrested and charged with theft in one of those raids.[[1011]](#footnote-1011)
8. On July 25, in the municipality of San Miguel Chicaj, Department of Baja Verapaz, staff from the Metropolitan District Prosecutor’s Office and National Civil Police (PNC) officers carried out a raid on a radio station that was using frequency 107.5, which is reportedly assigned to *Radio TGW*, owned by the Guatemalan State. The operation reportedly resulted in the seizure of the equipment used to conduct the radio activity.[[1012]](#footnote-1012) Additionally, on August 31, in the municipality of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, Department of Alta Verapaz, the Agency for Crimes Committed through the Unlawful Use of Radio Frequencies [*Agencia de Delitos Cometidos por el Uso Ilegal de Frecuencia Radioeléctricas*] reportedly seized the equipment used by frequency 92.5, including an amplifier, a CPU, an exciter, and various consoles. In the same incident, National Civil Police (PNC) officers reportedly arrested Santos Yaxcat Yat on suspicion of theft.[[1013]](#footnote-1013)
9. In spite of the situation described above, the IACHR took note of the fact that the community radio station *Snuq’ Jolom Konob’* in Santa Eulalia—which it visited—reopened on December 2, 2016.[[1014]](#footnote-1014) Previously, the Office of the Special Rapporteur had noted the harassment of the station, which was shut down by local authorities on January 20, 2015. There was an attempt to reopen it on March 19, 2016, but the attempt was blocked by the mayor and marred by violent incidents.[[1015]](#footnote-1015) The IACHR takes particular note of the decision of the local authorities of Santa Eulalia in favor of the resumption of activities by *Snuq’ Jolom Konob’,* and of its journalists and media workers for their efforts to ensure that the population of Santa Eulalia has the means to access the right to freely seek, receive, and disseminate information and opinions.
10. According to information of public knowledge, on 17 October, community journalist Williams Mazariegos, of the community radio station *Radio Cima* in El Tumbador, department of San Marcos, received death threats, through an anonymous note left in his home, that would indicate "you are going to die for speaking." The journalist would believe that said threat could be related to news about scams and public resources that the radio has disclosed[[1016]](#footnote-1016).
11. Since 2000, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression have issued recommendations to the State of Guatemala in two aspects, namely: the need for a fairer and more inclusive legal framework for broadcasting and the decriminalization of broadcasting without a license[[1017]](#footnote-1017) The use of criminal law to punish violations to the broadcasting regime can be problematic in the light of the American Convention on Human Rights, and the establishment of criminal penalties for commercial or community broadcasting, which they may faced due to the absence or misuse of the license, could constitute a disproportionate reaction[[1018]](#footnote-1018).
12. **Improper concentration of media ownership**
13. During its *in loco* visit to Guatemala, the IACHR confirmed that the State has made no progress with respect to the excessive degree of concentration in the ownership and control of audiovisual media, especially free-to-air television. In December 2012, Decree 34-2012 entered into force, amending the General Telecommunications Act to extend by 20 years the titles to the usufructuary rights to the radio spectrum.[[1019]](#footnote-1019) One of the main beneficiaries of the reform was Mexican businessman Ángel González, who holds rights to the frequencies and is the owner of four private VHF channels that broadcast in Guatemala. In addition, according to the report on Campaign Finance in Guatemala published by the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) in July 2015, “There is probably no other case in the world where a single individual owns the four existing private VHF channels. But this has been possible in Guatemala, and Mr. Ángel González has no VH[F] competition.”[[1020]](#footnote-1020) According to various actors from both civil society and the State, the businessman is responsible for promoting an agenda tied to sectors that oppose institutional anti-corruption reforms and the investigation and punishment of serious human rights violations.
14. According to the State, as far as the market and ownership in the country’s communications sector are concerned, the Superintendency of Telecommunications (SIT) does not apply a specific allocation process to audiovisual media outlets, “the most usual process being the one established in Article 61 of the General Telecommunications Act, which provides for a public competition, under equal conditions, for all who wish to acquire [frequencies] in accordance with the law.” It stated with respect to the announcement of public competitions and/or processes for the allocation of frequencies to the community sector, “We must clarify that there are no community radio stations, and thus prevent any discretionary power with respect to the matter; all that exists is what is established in Article 61 of the General Telecommunications Act, which provides for a public competition, without limitation on the participation of any person or entity.”[[1021]](#footnote-1021) Even though the law prescribes public competitions for the adjudication of titles to the usufructuary rights to frequencies, competition by auction would do little to encourage the plurality and diversity of voices in Guatemala. That method is provided in Article 62 of the General Telecommunications Act, which establishes that “the Superintendency will determine the manner in which the public auction will be conducted. All offers must be submitted as a sealed bid, including a performance bond equivalent to the sum offered or any other form of guarantee that the Superintendency determines.”[[1022]](#footnote-1022) As the IACHR has stated, “auctions based solely on economic criteria or that grant concessions without equal opportunity to all sectors are not compatible with democracy and with the right to freedom of expression and information guaranteed in the American Convention on Human Rights and the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression.”[[1023]](#footnote-1023)
15. Additionally, during the *in loco* visit, the IACHR was informed that the government had begun a process for the implementation of free-to-air digital terrestrial television, reportedly involving important regulatory decisions. The State reported that the discussion of a Draft Government Order on the Implementation of Digital Television was currently underway, and was under analysis at the Ministry of Communications, Infrastructure, and Housing [*Ministerio de Comunicaciones, Infraestructura y Vivienda*]. It emphasized that the Superintendency of Telecommunications [*Superintendencia de Telecomunicaciones*] of Guatemala (SIT) was attempting to “create major opportunities for the application of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and multimedia services, with the transition from analog to digital television broadcasting. It is also working to ensure that the digital dividend (freed-up spectrum) will allow for the introduction of mobile wireless broadband communications.”[[1024]](#footnote-1024)
16. In view of the above, the IACHR expresses its concern over the absence of a plan for organizing the spectrum and the allocation of frequencies to allow for the entrance of new operators. Guatemala should not pass up this historic opportunity to democratize its media system and promote greater media pluralism and diversity, bearing in mind the existence of a group that dominates television in Guatemala—a group that, according to the recent criminal investigation conducted by CICIG and the MP, allegedly used its dominant position to illegally finance the campaign of former President Pérez Molina, having privileged access to funds earmarked for government advertising and influencing the State’s decisions on broadcasting.
17. As indicated on previous occasions, the IACHR recalls that the concentration of media in a few hands has a negative impact on democracy and freedom of expression, as expressly stated in principle 12 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression. of the IACHR: “Monopolies or oligopolies in the ownership and control of the communication media must be subject to anti-trust laws, as they conspire against democracy by limiting the plurality and diversity which ensure the full exercise of people’s right to information”. Since its first statement on the issue, the Inter-American Court has ruled that the existence of any monopoly on the ownership or administration of the media, whatever the form it intends to adopt, is prohibited, and acknowledged that States must actively intervene to avoid concentration of ownership in the media sector[[1025]](#footnote-1025).
18. In this regard, the IACHR has indicated that, “If the media is controlled by a reduced number of individuals, or by only one individual, this situation would create a society in which a reduced number of individuals, or just one, would exert control over the information and, directly or indirectly, on the opinion received by the rest of the people.  This lack of plurality in sources of information is a serious obstacle for the functioning of democracy.  Democracy requires the confrontation of ideas, debate and discussion.  When this debate does not exist, or is weakened by the lack of sources of information, the main pillar for the functioning of democracy is harmed” [[1026]](#footnote-1026).
19. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has also said that the States should take measures to ensure that all groups in society have access to opportunities to make their voices heard, both within their communities and in wider social debates, including through measures to promote media diversity, public service broadcasting and community media. The promotion of media and digital literacy and citizen journalism, including the capacity to make effective use of online communication tools, are also important[[1027]](#footnote-1027).
20. The future regulation on digital television "should aim to ensure that the new digital dividend makes optimal use of the spectrum to ensure the greatest plurality and diversity possible"[[1028]](#footnote-1028) and become an opportunity to limit and reduce, or at least not increase, the undue concentration of existing media in the analogue environment by people, companies, or linked economic groups, either through ownership or control of the operation and programming of new television services.
21. **Government Advertising**
22. The investigation conducted by Guatemala’s Public Ministry and the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), called “Co-optation of the State,” revealed a corruption scheme set up to finance the election campaign of *Partido Patriota* that carried its leader Otto Pérez Molina to the Presidency and Roxana Baldetti to the Vice Presidency. The unlawful activities to obtain funds for *Partido Patriota* were reportedly conducted between 2008 and 2011, and remained in place during the party’s administration (2012-2015). In a press release, the CICIG detailed that the “unlawful election campaign financing” was obtained through a network of corporations controlled by Baldetti that had no real business activity, since they were “instruments to channel the money secretly handed over by the representatives” of Radiotelevisión Guatemala S.A. (*Canal 3*) and Televisiete S.A. (*Canal 7*), owned by Mexican businessman Ángel González.[[1029]](#footnote-1029)
23. González’s two companies, according to the documents seized during the investigation, contributed a total of 17,679,200 *quetzales* (approximately US$ 2,300,000 million) to *Partido Patriota* between 2008 and 2011. The CICIG concluded that, “this money was not reported to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal” as campaign contributions, and “was used to purchase the latest-model vehicles.” The aforementioned television companies reportedly benefitted from million-dollar contracts for government advertising, beginning when Pérez Molina and Baldetti came to power. The investigation revealed that the value of the contracts entered into between 2012 and 2015 was in excess of 200,000,000 *quetzales* (approximately US$ 26,000,000 million), which means that the two companies received 69% of all government television advertising purchased during that period.[[1030]](#footnote-1030) González’s wife, Alba Elvira Lorenzana, is the subject of an international arrest warrant for her alleged involvement in the unlawful financing of *Partido Patriota* in exchange for the million-dollar contracts for state advertising.[[1031]](#footnote-1031) Former President Pérez Molina and former Vice President Baldetti resigned in 2015 amid various accusations of corruption, and both are being held in pretrial detention awaiting trial.
24. In connection with this group, in March 2017, the head of the Office of the Solicitor General [*Procuraduría General de la Nación*] (PGN), Anabella Morfín, filed a criminal complaint with the Public Ministry (MP) against the Superintendency of Telecommunications of Guatemala (SIT) for its alleged failure to turn over documents concerning the titles to the usufructuary rights to television frequencies granted to the company Albavisión, owned by Mexican businessman Ángel González, requested of the SIT in 2016. The complaint was reportedly filed together with a report on the 85 frequencies said to be held by Ángel González’s channels. According to the information available, the Solicitor General has indicated on a number of occasions that she was not given the complete documentation on those titles to usufructuary rights for purposes of verifying whether they were granted lawfully or unlawfully. For its part, the SIT reportedly replied that it had turned over all of the documents on record in the Telecommunications archives.[[1032]](#footnote-1032)
25. In May, the Guatemalan Prosecutor’s Office filed an indictment in the “Co-optation of the State” case, naming 46 individual defendants, including former President Pérez Molina.[[1033]](#footnote-1033) The same month, based on testimony offered by Salvador González Álvarez, it was learned that, during the period she served as Vice President (2012-2015), Roxana Baldetti allegedly controlled 70 per cent of the *Corporación de Noticias* media group, which owned the newspapers *Siglo21* and *Al Día*, and used it to present information favorable to her and to the administration.[[1034]](#footnote-1034)
26. During the visit, the Communications Secretariat of the Presidency [*Secretaría de Comunicación de la Presidencia*] reported that it had ended the practice of using government advertising to reward media outlets for favorable coverage and punish critical media.
27. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that Article 13.3 of the American Convention establishes that "[t]he right of expression may not be restricted by indirect methods or means, such as the abuse of government or private controls over newsprint, radio broadcasting frequencies, or equipment used in the dissemination of information, or by any other means tending to impede the communication and circulation of ideas and opinions." In this sense, also the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, in principle 13 indicates that "the exercise of power and the use of public funds by the state, the granting of customs duty privileges, the arbitrary and discriminatory placement of official advertising and government loans; the concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies, among others, with the intent to put pressure on and punish or reward and provide privileges to social communicators and communications media because of the opinions they express threaten freedom of expression, and must be explicitly prohibited by law".
28. **Excessive use of force at social protests**
29. According to the information gathered by the Office of the Special Rapporteur and received during the *in loco* visit, the interests and presence of corporations on traditional indigenous lands and territories has led to serious tensions and disputes in different regions of Guatemala, giving rise to social protest and—on occasion—triggering episodes of violence. There have been protests in some communities in view of the implementation of extractive projects, which have reportedly been repressed by the National Civil Police (PCN) and the army, as well as by private security personnel.
30. In its visits to the cities of Ixquisis and Santa Eulalia, the IACHR received with concern information about the situation of violence and criminalization to which human rights defenders are reportedly exposed. Reports included allegations of the excessive use of force during social protests against hydroelectric projects in the region. In Ixquisis, in particular, the IACHR heard the testimony of relatives of Sebastián Alonso Juán, who was shot to death on January 17 during a peaceful protest outside the company *Proyectos de Desarrollo Hídrico S.A*., in San Mateo Ixtatán. According to the information available, citizens from different communities of the Chuj and Q’anjob’al peoples were protesting against a hydroelectric project in Ixquisis, when armed individuals reportedly fired shots at them.[[1035]](#footnote-1035)
31. At the March 20 hearing it held on the criminalization of rights defenders who are opposed to hydroelectric projects in Guatemala, the Commission received information about violent evictions of the communities that opposed the operation of corporations in their territories, as well as attacks, threats, and constant harassment, particularly against female rights defenders. They alleged patterns of criminalization in the Guatemalan system through the statutory creation of criminal offenses to be used against them, as well as through malicious prosecution by prosecutors from the Public Ministry and lawyers from the transnational corporations. They condemned, among other things, the murder of rights defender Sebastián Alonso Juan. At that same hearing, the Guatemalan State explained that it was seeking to gradually replace its current energy sources with renewable energy like hydroelectric power. It also stated that it was developing a National Plan on Business and Human Rights, which will include the monitoring and oversight of business activities, the protection of human rights, and measures of reparation.[[1036]](#footnote-1036)
32. More recently, at the September 7 hearing about reports of attacks on human rights defenders by extractive corporations in Guatemala, the Commission received information about an alleged State policy of persecuting individuals who defend the environment, resources, water, and land and territory in general. The requesting organizations stated, among other things, that this was an “unwritten” policy, implemented through defamation cases, stigmatization, and criminalization, carried out principally by the National Civil Police (PCN), and by the Public Ministry in some cases. They also reported attacks by extractive industries against them and against communities. For its part, the State indicated, among other things, that the *in loco* visit was the starting point for reaching consensuses, dialogues, negotiations, and taking account of the communities. It indicated that the recommendations made by the IACHR after the *in loco* visit had been received by COPREDEH and the Guatemalan Foreign Ministry, and that they are being considered for this sustainable dialogue with the communities and the corporations. The Guatemalan State expressed its willingness to engage in ongoing, sustainable dialogue, and to conduct these types of negotiations. Finally, it stated that it strives to ensure strict compliance with the law, and the application of “conventionality control” with respect to the investigation that is incumbent upon the Public Ministry. It asserted that a very low percentage of the complaints lodged with the Human Rights Prosecutor’s Unit for Crimes against Activists [*Unidad de delitos contra activistas de la Fiscalía de Derechos Humanos*] by human rights defenders stem from attacks by the extractive corporations.[[1037]](#footnote-1037)
33. According to publicly available information, on May 27, members of the Artisanal Fishermen's Guild [*Gremial de Pescadores Artesanales*] (GPA) of El Estor, Department of Izabal, reportedly blocked the route to Panzós, Alta Verapaz, in response to the authorities’ refusal to establish a dialogue roundtable to address the alleged pollution of the El Estor Lake by the *Compañía Guatemalteca de Niquel* [Guatemalan Nickel Company] (GNC). In order to clear the way, National Civil Police (PNC) anti-riot forces reportedly fired ammunition, rubber bullets, and tear gas canisters at the demonstrators. Carlos Maaz Coc, a member of the Maya-Q’eqchi indigenous community, reportedly died in the incident after being shot, and at least four police officers were wounded.[[1038]](#footnote-1038) The same day, the Ministry of the Interior reported the death of one individual, although that statement was subsequently denied.[[1039]](#footnote-1039)
34. On June 22, a group of residents of the municipality of Casillas, Department of Santa Rosa, reportedly blocked traffic heading toward the San Rafael Las Flores Mine. This was done to protest the mining company, which they held responsible for a number of tremors in the area that had caused cracks to form in residents’ houses. According to the information available, riot control officers from the National Civil Police (PNC) arrived on the scene and launched tear gas to break up the protest. Eleven people were reportedly injured, including a four-month-old baby and a two-year-old who were sickened by a tear gas canister that was thrown at their house. Four individuals who allegedly used rocks to assault members of the PNC were also arrested.[[1040]](#footnote-1040)
35. On July 21, a group of residents protested by obstructing the highway leading to the municipality of Casillas, Department of Santa Rosa, reportedly blocking the passage of vehicles headed toward the El Escobal Mine in San Rafael Las Flores, which was guarded by the National Civil Police (PNC). According to the information available, the mine was not authorized to operate in light of a judgment by the Guatemalan Supreme Court (CSJ) admitting a petition for a constitutional remedy [*amparo*] filed by the Center for Environmental, Social and Legal Action [*Centro de Acción Legal Ambiental y Social*] (Calas) and suspending the mine’s license for extraction.[[1041]](#footnote-1041) PNC Officers reportedly fired tear gas canisters to break up the protest, and at least four people were sickened as a result.[[1042]](#footnote-1042)
36. On August 24, the Guatemalan Education Workers Union [*Sindicato de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras por la Educación*] (STEG) held a number of protests around the country to demand better working conditions and salary increases. In the town of Atescatempa, Department of Jutiapa, at least two teachers were reportedly arrested.[[1043]](#footnote-1043) The same day, in Ciudad Pedro de Alvarado, Department of Jutiapa, four other teachers were reportedly arrested for blocking the highway. Likewise, in Puerto Quetzal, Department of Escuintla, seven teachers were said to have been apprehended by the PNC while taking part in the demonstrations, although they were released after speaking with the authorities. According to the information available, la PNC used tear gas to disperse the crowd and no injuries were reported.[[1044]](#footnote-1044)
37. Guatemala also saw numerous social protests and demonstrations this year stemming from the country’s political turmoil. This resulted, among other things, in President Jimmy Morales decision to declare Iván Velásquez, head of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) *persona* *non grata*, after he and the Office of the Attorney General accused President Morales of irregularities during the campaign that carried him to power in 2016. In view of this situation, on September 12 the IACHR issued a resolution on human rights, impunity, and corruption in Guatemala, urging the State to “fulfill [its] obligation to protect human rights defenders, whistleblowers, journalists, and media outlets, which face particular risk when they investigate and disseminate information on corruption,” among other things.[[1045]](#footnote-1045)
38. On September 14, a group of individuals demonstrated in the *Plaza de la Constitución* in Guatemala City, across from the Congress of the Republic, to reject the amendments made to the Criminal Code by decrees 14-2017 and 15-2017 which, upon entering into force, would benefit politicians investigated for electoral crimes. They also demanded the resignation of the 107 members of congress who had voted for the amendments. There was a certain degree of tension between the demonstrators and the Military Police (PM) and officers from the Secretariat of Administrative and Security Affairs of the Presidency (SAAS) guarding the *Plaza de la Constitución*.[[1046]](#footnote-1046) Consequently, President Jimmy Morales issued a statement rejecting “all acts and displays of violence,” and indicated that he had instructed the country’s security authorities to investigate who had been responsible for those acts.[[1047]](#footnote-1047)
39. The following day, the protests outside the Legislative Palace continued, while members of the House of Representatives held an extraordinary session to review the amendments to the Criminal Code. The session resulted in the shelving of both decrees. The Military Police (PM) reportedly dispersed the protest with pepper spray.[[1048]](#footnote-1048) One representative from the *FCN-Nación* party reportedly called the demonstrators “terrorists.”[[1049]](#footnote-1049) A video also shows that when the representatives exited a bus at the Legislative Palace, some of them hurled insults and made vulgar gestures at the demonstrators.[[1050]](#footnote-1050)
40. On September 16, referring to the previous day’s events, Human Rights Ombudsman Jordán Rodas stated that among the demonstrators “it was known that there were infiltrators, not part of the social movement, who intended to leave a negative impression of the civic action that took place yesterday.” He added that “These individuals [congress members’ security details] were inciting violence, and we believe it was because some representatives feared for their physical safety. They were afraid that people were carrying fuel.”[[1051]](#footnote-1051)
41. The same day, the Constitutional Court (CC) admitted two petitions for constitutional remedies [*amparos*] filed by the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman [*Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos*] (PDH). In its decision, the CC held that the authorities “must allow the exercise of the rights to free movement, free expression of thought, assembly, and protest,” and that the President must adhere to the decision, instructing the Ministry of the Interior and the National Civil Police (PNC) to comply with the decision and allow demonstrators to exercise their rights peacefully.[[1052]](#footnote-1052) The same day, the Guatemalan government released a statement on Twitter indicating that it would comply with the decision.[[1053]](#footnote-1053)
42. On September 24, at a public meeting attended by ranchers and agribusiness leaders, as well as President Jimmy Morales, the governor of the Department of Izabal reportedly stated in reference to the social protests that had taken place in the past month, that “We are not going to allow small minority groups that have no representation to demand [the President’s] resignation,” later adding that, “out of respect and loyalty to the Guatemalan people, we have to say no to those people that were demonstrating—they are not a big deal.” Finally, he stated that “For five or ten thousand people to gather in the square, those people have [been paid], and that is why they can’t claim to be speaking on behalf of honest and hardworking Guatemalans.”[[1054]](#footnote-1054)
43. The IACHR indicated that "the imperative social interest of the right to participate in public demonstrations means that there is a general presumption in favor of its exercise." The IACHR affirmed that "the presumption in favor of the exercise of social protest implies that the States must act on the basis of the legality of the protests or public demonstrations and on the assumption that they do not constitute a threat to public order, even in the cases that are made without prior notice." Police action should have as its main objective the facilitation and not containment or confrontation with the demonstrators. Hence, police operations organized in the context of protests should be guided, as a general rule, to guarantee the exercise of this right and the protection of protesters and third parties present. In this sense, the Commission has considered that the mere deconcentration of a demonstration does not constitute, in itself, a legitimate end that justifies the use of force by the security forces. "When a demonstration or protest leads to situations of violence, it must be understood that the State was not able to guarantee the exercise of this right."
44. **Access to public information**
45. The right to access to public information in Guatemala is provided in the Constitution of Guatemala, as well as in the ordinary law, through the Access to Public Information Act [*Ley de Acceso a la Información Pública*] (LAIP), Decree 57-2008, passed in 2008 by the Congress of the Republic, which further designates the Human Rights Ombudsman (PDH) as its regulating entity.[[1055]](#footnote-1055)
46. According to the PDH, progress was made in the implementation of the Access to Information Act in 2016, “to the extent that the number of Access to Information Units, Electronic Portals, Reports of Entities Subject to the Law, and public requests have all risen.” Nevertheless, he indicated that certain challenges remain in view of the low levels of compliance, especially in areas outside the capital, in the municipal governments and development councils. At the central level, noncompliance is said to be notable among trusts, non-governmental entities that handle funds, and entities in the sports sector. He further asserted that there are structural challenges such as “the politicization, corruption, and social inequality of the country, which has hindered the exercise of the right in outlying areas, specifically in municipalities where citizens have considerable interest in how resources are managed, but procedures at times are not carried out correctly due to unfamiliarity with the law.”[[1056]](#footnote-1056)
47. ­According to the information available, between 2012 and 2016 the PDH documented an exponential increase in the number of requests for access to public information submitted to the mechanisms established by the LAIP. This is reflected in the 21,944 requests received in 2012, compared to 63,830 in 2016. Nevertheless, in this context, the PDH identified two related challenges: first, to compare figures on the gender of the persons requesting information, and second, to promote the use of the legally created mechanisms throughout the country to prevent the geographic concentration of requests in the Department of Guatemala.[[1057]](#footnote-1057) In July 2017, the Public Ministry (MP) and the PDH reportedly signed an inter-institutional cooperation agreement. Its objective is to strengthen the LAIP through the creation of one agency under the responsibility of the MP that will hear and decide complaints alleging noncompliance with the law, and another that will provide guidance to complainants in those proceedings, under the direction of the PDH.[[1058]](#footnote-1058) The new Human Rights Ombudsman, Jordán Rodas Andrade, reportedly confirmed that the agreement remains in effect.[[1059]](#footnote-1059)
48. Principle 4 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression which states that “[a]ccess to information held by the state is a fundamental right of every individual. States have the obligation to guarantee the full exercise of this right. This principle allows only exceptional limitations that must be previously established by law in case of a real and imminent danger that threatens national security in democratic societies.” Additionally, with regard to the principle of maximum disclosure the law must guarantee the effective and broadest possible access to public information, and any exceptions must not become the general rule in practice. Also, the exceptions regime should be interpreted restrictively and all doubts should be resolved in favor of transparency and access.
49. **Recommendations**

* Acknowledge, from the highest levels of government, the legitimacy and value of the work of journalists, and condemn attacks committed in retaliation for the exercise of freedom of expression.
* Investigate crimes committed against journalists completely, effectively, and impartially. Additionally, in cases involving the murder of journalists, establish the motive and judicially determine any possible connection to journalistic activity and freedom of expression. The authorities should not rule out the practice of journalism as a motive for the attack and/or assault before the investigation is completed.
* With respect to the program for the protection of journalists and media workers—the creation of which was announced by the President of the Republic during the visit—ensure that its content is consistent with the international parameters, in broad and effective consultation with civil society organizations, journalists, and media workers.
* Take measures to guarantee the exercise of freedom of expression, plurality, and diversity in the digital transition process. Among other things, bring the license access, renewal, and revocation processes into line with the inter-American standards.
* Promote a pluralistic approach to information and multiple points of view by fostering the full enjoyment of freedom of thought and expression, access to the media, and diversity in media ownership and sources of information through, among other things, transparent licensing systems, and, as appropriate, effective regulations that prevent the improper concentration of media ownership.
* Adopt the legislative measures and public policies to recognize and ensure community media outlets’ access to radio and television frequencies and licenses; in the meantime, abstain from criminally prosecuting community radio stations.
* Enact special, clear, and precise laws to regulate advertising at each level of government.Such provisions should clearly define government advertising and establish appropriate penalties for their violation. The Office of the Special Rapporteur reiterates that government advertising should never be allocated by the States to reward or punish media outlets for their editorial and news content.
* Ensure that its administrative laws and practices are compatible with the prohibition against the participation of the armed forces in public safety operations, in particular, the control of violence at social protests. Limit budget allocations to matters concerning national defense.

1. **GUYANA**
2. **Attacks, threats, and intimidation against journalists and the media**
3. It is reported that in January 2017, the government’s cultural policy advisor, Ruel Johnson, who is also a Director of the Guyana National Newspaper Limited called for the “torching” of the Sanata Complex, which houses most prominently the Guyana Times newspaper, Television Guyana (TVG) and Radio Guyana Inc. 89.5. Johnson’s alleged statement is “Here’s my idea for a united Guyanese protest against impunity and tenderpreneurship – go break down all the parking meters and then proceed to torch the Sanata complex.”
4. The media reported that “Johnson explicitly made the connection between the Sanata Complex, QAII, its owner and the media group consisting of the Guyana Times newspaper, Television Guyana (TVG – CH 28) and Radio Guyana Inc. (89.5) which according to him should all be ‘torched’.” A police report was filed by the head of security at the media entity with the Police Criminal Investigation Department (CID). The Government of Guyana is said to have distanced itself from the threat made on social media.[[1060]](#footnote-1060)
5. In response to the reported threat, the Private Sector Commission called out the Government for its inaction against Johnson. The Private Sector Commission asserted that Johnson may be deemed to have been inciting terrorism, as well as the threat of arson in breach of Guyana’s laws. The Private Sector Commission expressed that such a call from any other citizen would be reprehensible and that when such calls are made by a Government official to over eight thousand social media followers, then that official must surely be viewed with severity.[[1061]](#footnote-1061)
6. On June 11, *Capitol News* cameraman Rudy Morris would have been detained by members of the Guyana Defense Force (GDF) in the city of Muri Muri. Morris would have gone along with a resident of the place to film inside the Kaieteur National Park, in the framework of an investigation related to the claims of the Chenapau settlers. According to the information available, while they were returning to the boat in which they were traveling, agents of the GDF allegedly detained the cameraman for allegedly having accessed a restricted area without authorization. Afterwards, he was transferred to a dependency where he was held incommunicado for several hours and, after seizing his work equipment, he was released. According to the information collected, Morris would have identified himself as a member of the press and, in addition, he would have received authorization from the Protected Areas Commission (PAC) to access the respective National Park[[1062]](#footnote-1062).
7. On September 1, in the city of Eccles, in the eastern region of Demerara, one of the antennas of *Multi Technology Vision Inc.* (MTV) would have fallen on the installations of the audiovisual media, causing both the breaking up of work equipment and the channel building, and generating the suspension of the transmissions until further notice. The general manager of MTV, Raymond Singh, said that it would have been an act of sabotage given that, from the police investigations, a clip was found attached to one of the cables that anchored the tower. According to the information available, an investigation would be carried out to find those responsible for these acts[[1063]](#footnote-1063). At the time of preparing this report, it has not been possible to find information regarding the restart of the channel's activities or related to the progress of the investigation.
8. With respect to the violence against journalists and others because of their exercise of freedom of expression, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has underscored, based on the inter-American doctrine and case law, the importance of three positive obligations arising from the rights to life, humane treatment, and freedom of expression, to wit: the obligation to prevent, the obligation to protect, and the obligation to investigate, prosecute, and criminally punish the persons responsible for those crimes. As the Office of the Special Rapporteur has stated, these obligations are complemented reciprocally: in order for there to be free, robust, and unrestricted public debate, it is necessary to combat violence against journalists through a comprehensive policy of prevention, protection, and the pursuit of justice.[[1064]](#footnote-1064)
9. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
10. **Stigmatizing Statements**
11. In April 2017, Minister of Communities, Ronald Bulkan wrote to the editor of the Guyana Chronicle regarding a decision made by the Guyana Chronicle in its March 31, 2017 publication. Bulkan’s letter stated:
12. “Your front page is dominated by the headline: ‘More Oil’ and was followed by a full-page story on page three. I wish to suggest that your emphasis and message are totally misplaced. The subliminal message seems to be that oil will be our saviour, solve our woes, take us to the promised land and such like . . . I suggest, therefore, that your public duty would have been better served by switching the aforementioned articles. The President has already cautioned that we should not become intoxicated by the prospects of oil…”[[1065]](#footnote-1065)
13. The Guyana Press Association viewed Bulkan’s letter as “an attempt to drive fear into the editors and reporters of that newspaper with the sole aim of securing censorship and self-censorship,” and called upon President David to ensure that Prime Minister Moses Nagamootoo and the rest of his Cabinet be advised that they should not interfere in the affairs of the State media. The Association also expressed its strong disagreement with the continued role of the Director of Public Information, Imran Khan, as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Guyana National Newspapers Limited – the publishers of the Guyana Chronicle. The Association made claims about attempts by “a senior government Minister continues to dictate coverage of his office to the Editor-in-Chief and often has stories sent for his approval once it has to do with his office or the PNC, the main party in the governing coalition.” The Association also claimed to be aware that “weekly meetings of the Prime Minister with senior executives of the state media continues to be used as a tool to dictate editorial content and to silence or trivialise opposition views.”[[1066]](#footnote-1066)
14. It is reported that in response, President David Granger stated that his government Minister dictating where articles should be placed in the state newspaper is not interference, but the Minister giving his opinion as a private citizen and that the Guyana Press Association’s (GPA) condemnation of the Minister’s action is not justifiable. Granger is reported to have expressed that “I do not think he attempted to coerce or to use his ministerial influence to change what I regard as the editorial right to publish an article or to publish news stories. I don’t think there was any interference at all” and that sometimes important national events occur and some newspapers ignore such stories. [[1067]](#footnote-1067)
15. A context of marked confrontation in which journalists are constantly insulted and stigmatized creates a climate that prevents the reasonable and plural deliberation of public issues. Tension between the press and the government is a normal phenomenon that arises from the natural function of the press and occurs in many States. However, sharp polarization shuts down opportunities for calm debate and helps neither the authorities nor the press to better fulfill their respective roles in a vigorous, deliberate, and open democracy. In such cases, given its national and international responsibilities, it is the State’s job to help create a climate of greater tolerance and respect for the ideas of others, including when those ideas are offensive or disturbing.[[1068]](#footnote-1068)
16. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that public servants have the duty to ensure that their statements do not infringe upon the rights of those who contribute to public deliberation through the expression and dissemination of their thoughts, such as journalists, media outlets, and human rights defense organizations. They must be mindful of the context in which they express themselves in order to ensure that their statements do not constitute, in the words of the Court, “forms of direct or indirect interference or harmful pressure on the rights of those who seek to contribute with public deliberation through the expression and diffusion of their thoughts.”[[1069]](#footnote-1069)
17. **Legal reforms**
18. On August 4, the National Assembly adopted the Broadcasting Amendment Bill, a law that would have introduced numerous changes to the current Broadcasting Act of 2011, which would cover issues such as the introduction of three kinds of broadcasters (called commercial, non-commercial and community) and three types of emission zones (divided in primary, secondary and tertiary). Likewise, on September 15, President David A. Granger enacted the aforementioned amendment. In this regard, he would have indicated that the purpose of the new regulations would be mainly to solve the problem of illegal media that do not have a license[[1070]](#footnote-1070).
19. However, according to the information available, the law would force all media to request a license within thirty days of its enactment, operating without it could result in fines of up to US $ 1 million and convictions up to a year of prison. Likewise, the law would impose on the media the free transfer of 60 minutes a day of programming to the public service, between six in the morning and ten at night. This could cause disruptions or breaches of preexisting contractual obligations with the advertising media and alter the pre-established order in the programming. In turn, this would empower the Government by granting it an official publicity space, since the law itself defines that the "public service programming" should be used to both inform and educate the public, as well as to promote the Government’s policies and activities that favor the general public.
20. Many actors of Civil Society Organizations and the media would have criticized the law, since throughout its adoption process they would not have been consulted despite the transcendent changes that the rule would bring regarding the exercise of freedom of expression[[1071]](#footnote-1071).
21. **Indirect censorship**
22. On April 5, the Guyana Press Association (GPA) issued a statement calling attention to the attitude of the Minister of Communities, Ronald Bulkan, who had sent a letter to the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper reprimanding the performance of the editorial team On the subject, Bulkan would have suggested where to place certain news and condemned that the article informing about the inauguration of mayors and town hall representatives had not been highlighted. In this regard, the GPA noted that the letter intended to cause fear within the press employees with the aim of self-censoring their freedom of opinion, and that this kind of actions are in direct opposition to the statement of President David Granger that his administration would favor the independence of newspapers, television, and radio programs[[1072]](#footnote-1072).
23. For his part, when asked about Bulkan's attitude, President David Granger would have stated that he did not consider it an interference in the work of the media but rather the opinion of the Minister of Communities[[1073]](#footnote-1073).
24. According to Principle 5 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression “Prior censorship, direct or indirect interference in or pressure exerted upon any expression, opinion or information transmitted through any means of oral, written, artistic, visual or electronic communication must be prohibited by law. Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression.
25. **Subsequent liabilities**
26. Former Attorney General of Guyana, Anil Nandlall filed a civil defamation suit against the current Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Basil Williams. The suit is in respect of statements allegedly made by Williams in which he accused Nandlall of theft of law books. It is reported that Nandlall has repeatedly confirmed that while he was Attorney-General, law books were purchased for him by the state, using state funds, and are said to be worth over $2.5 million. These books are said to have been purchased for Nandlall as a condition of his service. After the People’s Progressive Party was unseated in 2015, Nandlall took possession of the books which were bought for him as Attorney General. The alleged offending statements by Williams include the following: “Mr Nandlall will be charged for [the] missing law books…Mr. Nandlall has stolen government property and he will be charged…” It is also reported that similar sentiments were expressed at another forum in which the Williams stated” “Nandlall stole government property…the law books…he still has the law books and he will get lock up for the law books and anyone who claim they gave him permission to steal the law books will get lock up as well, because there is no immunity for stealing and doing criminal acts in this country.” On April 27, 2017, Nandlall was charged by the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) with Larceny by Bailee. In respect of the suit, Nandlall sought damages in excess of $125M for defamation as well as an injunction restraining Williams from repeating similar statements for which he is being sued.[[1074]](#footnote-1074)
27. Williams contended that the suit should be dismissed and that his comments were based on the fact that Nandlall did not follow the Financial Expenditure Procurement process and the Stores Laws and Regulations, and as a result, could be subject to prosecution: “The comments were not orchestrated to be an attack on the claimant personally, but were made within the scope of the defendant’s office . and responsibilities as the Minister of the Ministry of Legal Affairs with responsibility to protect state assets. He was duty bound to undertake a reasonable investigation into the location of unaccounted assets.” Williams asserted that as a public official it was necessary for him to make the information known to the public and to the media in good faith.[[1075]](#footnote-1075)
28. In accordance with Principle 10 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression, “privacy laws should not inhibit or restrict investigation and dissemination of information of public interest. The protection of a person’s reputation should only be guaranteed through civil sanctions in those cases in which the person offended is a public official, a public person or a private person who has voluntarily become involved in matters of public interest. In addition, in these cases, it must be proven that in disseminating the news, the social communicator had the specific intent to inflict harm, was fully aware that false news was disseminated, or acted with gross negligence in efforts to determine the truth or falsity of such news.” [[1076]](#footnote-1076)
29. Principle 11 of the IACHR´s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states: “[p]ublic officials are subject to greater scrutiny by society. Laws that penalize offensive expressions directed at public officials, generally known as "*desacato* laws," restrict freedom of expression and the right to information.” Furthermore, the IACHR has held repeatedly that the application of criminal law to sanction expressions about public officials is disproportionate when dealing with protected speech, such as information or expression regarding matters of public interest, and infringes the right to freedom of expression.[[1077]](#footnote-1077)
30. **HAITI**
31. During 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has observed with concern the repeated excessive use of force by law enforcement, also seen in previous years, when dispersing social protest events—specifically during demonstrations surrounding the tax reform implemented by the government in September. In addition, the enactment of a law creating the criminal offense of defamation could lead to setbacks with regard to the right to freedom of expression in the country. This Office also received with concern information about threats made to journalist Jean Nazaire Jeanty by Jean Gabriel Fortuné, the mayor of Les Cayes, and the alleged subsequent assault of the journalist.
32. **Attacks, Threats and Harassment against Journalists and Media Outlets**
33. The mayor of the municipality of Les Cayes, capital of the Department of Sud, Jean Gabriel Fortuné, reportedly made a death threat against journalist Jean Nazaire Jeanty of *Radio Télévision Caraïbes* after the journalist aired a report on unhealthy conditions at Gelée Beach, where a festival was held from August 12-15 to celebrate a Haitian Roman Catholic feast day in honor of Our Lady of the Assumption. According to the information available, Gabriel Fortuné stated to the press that “If there were a state intelligence service in this country, Jean Nazaire Jeanty should be dead… The wages of sin is death. I said it, and I repeat, this man deserves death.” The statements were condemned by the National Association of Haitian Media [“*Association Nationale des Médias Haïtiens*”] (ANMH) and the Association of Haitian Journalists [“*Association des Journalistes Haïtiens*”] (AJH). Days later, on August 8, journalist Nazaire Jeanty was reportedly attacked while traveling in a car in the Dufort area of the capital, Port-au-Prince, but escaped unharmed.[[1078]](#footnote-1078)
34. With respect to the violence against journalists and others because of their exercise of freedom of expression, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has underscored, based on the inter-American doctrine and case law, the importance of three positive obligations arising from the rights to life, humane treatment, and freedom of expression, to wit: the obligation to prevent, the obligation to protect, and the obligation to investigate, prosecute, and criminally punish the persons responsible for those crimes. As the Office of the Special Rapporteur has stated, these obligations are complemented reciprocally: in order for there to be free, robust, and unrestricted public debate, it is necessary to combat violence against journalists through a comprehensive policy of prevention, protection, and the pursuit of justice.[[1079]](#footnote-1079)
35. The IACHR and the Office of the Special Rapporteur recall that public servants must unequivocally repudiate attacks perpetrated in retaliation for the exercise of freedom of expression, and must abstain from making statements that may increase the vulnerability of those who are persecuted for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Similarly, it is essential that the authorities who hold elective positions or who hold responsibilities within the State structure encourage the competent authorities to act with due diligence and speed to investigate the facts and punish those responsible.[[1080]](#footnote-1080)
36. **Social Protest**
37. Protests were held over several days in different parts of the country against the State budget for fiscal year 2017-2018, approved by the Senate on September 9, which reportedly imposed tax increases affecting diverse sectors of society.[[1081]](#footnote-1081) The Office of the Special Rapporteur has received information about different incidents related to the excessive use of force by law enforcement officers when breaking up those demonstrations. Violent incidents were also reported to have been committed by civilians against protestors and by protestors against journalists and their teams in this context.
38. On September 12, various protest events were held in different districts of the capital, Port-au-Prince. According to information gathered by the Haitian National Police [*Police Nationale D’Haiti*] (PNH) and released through police spokesperson Frantz Lerebourg, the police operation—which reportedly involved the use of tear gas canisters and firearms to disperse demonstrators who had erected barricades of flaming tires and damaged commercial buildings—resulted in two deaths. In addition, 12 people were reportedly arrested on that day.[[1082]](#footnote-1082)
39. On September 27, there was a violent police crackdown on a demonstration in Ouanaminthe, in the Nord-Est Department of Haiti. The demonstration had been convened by the National Union of Haitian Workers [*Centrale nationale des ouvriers haïtiens*], the Textiles Workers’ Union Re-exports Group [*Groupement syndical des travailleurs du textile pour la réexportation*] and the Izin Tekstil-Batay Ouvriye Platform of Textile Plant *Unions* [*Platfòm Sendikal Izin Tekstil-Batay Ouvriye*], in the vicinity of the building that houses the Internal Revenue Service [*Direction Génerale des Impôts*] (DGI). Ten people were reportedly injured during the event—two of them by gunfire—and two demonstrators were arrested. The Codevi Workers’ Union [*Syndicat d’ouvriers de Codevi*] (Socoa) reportedly filed a complaint alleging the excessive use of force by law enforcement authorities.[[1083]](#footnote-1083)
40. On September 30, the police reportedly used violence to disperse a demonstration in the capital city of Port-au-Prince, discharging firearms and launching tear gas canisters at demonstrators. In addition, vehicles belonging to the media outlets *Kiskeya* and *Metrópole* were allegedly stolen by persons taking part in the protest.[[1084]](#footnote-1084)
41. On October 3, the mayor of the municipality of Les Cayes, capital of the Department of Sud, Jean Gabriel Fortuné, reportedly stated at a press conference that the public should arm itself with sticks, rocks, and guns to fight the protestors, because children were being prevented from going to school as a result of the disturbances caused by the days of protest in connection with a general strike called for October 2-3.[[1085]](#footnote-1085)
42. On October 14, during a demonstration organized by leaders of the political opposition in the city of Les Cayes, capital of the Department of Sud, individuals identified as activists from the Haitian Tet Kale Party [*Parti haitien tèt kale*] (PHTK) allegedly attacked demonstrators with rocks. The Haitian National Police [*Police Nationale D’Haiti*] (PNH) reportedly intervened violently in the incident, causing a 3-year-old child to be sickened by tear gas. In addition, some individuals reportedly put up a barricade made out of flaming tires.[[1086]](#footnote-1086)
43. On November 7, a large number of people would have spoken publicly in the capital city, Port-au-Prince, to demand the resignation of the president, Michel Martelly. According to the available information, different groups formed mainly by young people would have clashed with supporters of the ruling party, who would have used firearms to dislodge the protest. In this context, at least two protesters were reportedly wounded after receiving two bullet shots[[1087]](#footnote-1087).
44. On 1 December, in the city of Belladères, Center department, a group of demonstrators held a protest in front of the police department, demanding the release of a man allegedly arrested for the crime of theft and injuries. According to the information available, the protesters would have thrown stones at the agency and, consequently, the police agents would have tried to evict the demonstration by throwing tear gas bombs. In this context, one of the thrown bombs would have entered the home of a woman named Yolanda Surpris, 49, who died in a hospital in the area as a result of inhaled gas[[1088]](#footnote-1088).
45. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[1089]](#footnote-1089) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[1090]](#footnote-1090)
46. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[1091]](#footnote-1091)
47. **Subsequent Liability**
48. On March 14, the Haitian Senate unanimously passed the draft Defamation Law [*Loi portant sur la Diffamation],* originally introduced in 2014 by then-Senator Edwin Zenny, which could negatively affect the right to freedom of expression in Haiti. Article 7 of the draft law establishes criminal penalties of up to one year in prison, in addition to potential fines, for anyone convicted of criminal defamation. Under Article 2, this includes “all persons who, whether in public places or meetings, in an official or public instrument, through printed material, through the press, or through audiovisual or electronic means, attribute acts to a person or entity that attack that person or entity’s honor, integrity, or image.” Although the law provides for the principle of *exceptio veritatis*, Article 8 presumes *mens rea* in cases of defamation. It also holds media editors liable for the decision to publish defamatory content and intermediaries and Internet service providers for making defamatory content available to the public, except in cases in which they can prove that they had no actual knowledge of the unlawful content. According to the information available, there was no public consultation with local press associations or media outlets in voting on and enacting this law[[1092]](#footnote-1092).
49. In accordance with Principle 10 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression, “privacy laws should not inhibit or restrict investigation and dissemination of information of public interest. The protection of a person’s reputation should only be guaranteed through civil sanctions in those cases in which the person offended is a public official, a public person or a private person who has voluntarily become involved in matters of public interest. In addition, in these cases, it must be proven that in disseminating the news, the social communicator had the specific intent to inflict harm, was fully aware that false news was disseminated, or acted with gross negligence in efforts to determine the truth or falsity of such news.”
50. **HONDURAS**
51. The political crisis generated after the presidential elections of November 28, 2017 has increased the risk for the exercise of freedom of expression and journalism in the country. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has received with alarm information about the declaration of a state of emergency, attacks and threats to the media, as well as killings and injuries of protesters as a result of the illegal and excessive use of the police force. There have also been mass arrests of demonstrators, some accused of terrorism.
52. Prior to the electoral period, the Office of the Special Rapporteur had already expressed its concern over the approval of a series of amendments to the Criminal Code in Honduras, which include provisions that are contrary to international standards and that may illegitimately restrict the right to freedom of expression in the country. In addition, the Office of the Special Rapporteur had already received complaints about illegitimate restrictions and the use of criminal law to criminalize student protests, as well as excessive use of force to disperse these protests.
53. **Murders**
54. Honduras continues to be one of the most dangerous countries in the region to practice journalism. According to the information received, during 2017 there were five murders of media workers and 15 incidents, some of them very serious, of attacks, assaults, and threats. The lack of investigation of these events and the clarification of their relationship with journalism continue to generate a climate of fear and self-censorship among journalists and their communities.
55. On January 17, journalist Igor Abisaí Padilla Chávez, who worked for the *HCH* channel, was murdered in the city of San Pedro Sula, department of Cortés while he was filming a television commercial, inside a commercial establishment. Padilla was the producer of a humorous program called `*Los Verduleros*' that was broadcasted on weekends by *HCH*. According to available information, the journalist received a phone call, which is why he went out into the street, where he was attacked by four individuals who came out from two cars and shot him multiple times, leaving him badly injured. Although he was transferred to a hospital, he didn’t make it in time to receive medical attention. On the 18th, the authorities reported the detention of 17 individuals, presumed members of the "*Mara 18*" gang, who would be responsible for the events. On the 19th, the detention of Martha Yolanda Ortez was reported, who would have made the telephone call that served to ambush the communicator[[1093]](#footnote-1093).
56. On June 15, Víctor Yobani Fúnez Solís, host of the program '*Informe Nocturno*', broadcasted on *Canal 45*, was murdered after a man shot him three times on a public road near his home located in the neighborhood La Gloria, in the city of La Ceiba. A video camera captured the attack, but because the aggressor used a motorcycle helmet, it wasn’t possible to identify him. Fúnez Solís had previously received threats due to the content of his journalistic program. In addition to his journalistic work, Fúnez was a representative candidate for the *Partido Nacional* and, according to available information, he would have been the most voted candidate in the primary elections of the department of Atlántida. On the same day of the homicide, the National Police announced the detention of Edwin Reniery Suazo Cruz, who was allegedly responsible for the murder and circulated a video in which he confessed to be the material author of the crime, although he later accused the Police of torturing him to force him to plead guilty. At the close of this report, Suazo Cruz is the only person detained in relation to the investigation and has already been linked to the process[[1094]](#footnote-1094).
57. On September 13, the media worker Carlos William Flores was murdered, he was the director of the program *'Sin Pelos en la Lengua'*, broadcasted on *Canal 22* of the community of Tegucigalpita. The channel is owned by the Association of Cable Carriers of Omoa [*Asociación de Cableros de Omoa*] (ACO) and, according to public information, Flores paid for the space of his transmission and would have criticized the extractive industry in the region of Cuyamelito, Cuyamel, and Rio Motagua. The events would have taken place in the municipality of Omoa, department of Cortés, when Flores returned from the area of Corinto, bordering Guatemala, and had been attacked by individuals in a car who shot him several times injuring him and a companion. The authorities have not reported any progress in relation to the investigation[[1095]](#footnote-1095).
58. On October 5, communicator Osmin Antonio España Chávez died in a hospital in San Pedro Sula, where he was transferred after suffering, the day before, a firearm attack in the community of Santa Rosa de Copán, department of Copán. España hosted the television program *'El Show del Príncipe*', broadcasted on *Canal 80*, and from there he would have exercised a critical journalism. According to information of public knowledge, four individuals participated in the attack and one of them would have been detained. At the close of this report, the authorities have not released any progress regarding the investigation of the case[[1096]](#footnote-1096).
59. On October 23, Carlos Oveniel Lara Domínguez was murdered, he worked as a cameraman for *Canal 12 Telemaya* in the town of La Entrada, in the municipality of Nueva Arcadia, department of Copán. According to the information gathered, Lara Domínguez left his home, located in the El Dorado neighborhood, when he would have been intercepted by unknown individuals who shot him three times after an apparent robbery attempt. At the close of this report, the authorities have not reported any progress in the investigation of the facts[[1097]](#footnote-1097). The media worker had previously reported threats against his life to the Honduran authorities, according to some journalistic versions.
60. In this regard, the State has informed the IACHR that the Office of the Public Prosecutor has registered 3 murders of social communicators during 2017, which would have been prosecuted[[1098]](#footnote-1098).
61. Faced with these events, the National System of Protection for Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Media Workers, and Justice Operators, which entered into operation in December 2016, is called to adopt all the necessary measures to generate trust among journalists and prevent attacks. The increase in the budget and international cooperation announced in 2017 are positive steps towards that direction[[1099]](#footnote-1099).
62. With respect to the violence against journalists and others because of their exercise of freedom of expression, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has underscored, based on the inter-American doctrine and case law, the importance of three positive obligations arising from the rights to life, humane treatment, and freedom of expression, to wit: the obligation to prevent, the obligation to protect, and the obligation to investigate, prosecute, and criminally punish the persons responsible for those crimes. As the Office of the Special Rapporteur has stated, these obligations are complemented reciprocally: in order for there to be free, robust, and unrestricted public debate, it is necessary to combat violence against journalists through a comprehensive policy of prevention, protection, and the pursuit of justice.[[1100]](#footnote-1100)
63. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
64. **Attacks, threats, and intimidation of journalists and the media**
65. During the reporting period at least 15 incidents were documented in which social media workers, human rights defenders, activists, and the media would have been victims of assaults, threats, acts of intimidation, direct attacks, and attempts to confiscate their work equipment.
66. Three journalists would have received death threats through the use of social networks and one more warned of possible attacks against him by a mayor. On January 4, Ernesto Alonso Rojas and Suly Cálix, from the television channel *Hable Como Habla* (HCH), would have received a threat coming from the profile of a person identified as "Jowe Agular" with the following message addressed to the owner of the channel, Eduardo Maldonado: "Don Eduardo ... I give you a month to fire Elsa Oseguera, otherwise I will kill Suliz or Ernesto". Accompanying the message would appear the photograph of an individual wearing the uniform of the Technical Agency of Criminal Investigation [*Agencia Técnica de Investigación crimina*l] (ATIC) carrying a pair of firearms[[1101]](#footnote-1101). On February 1, Edgar Joel Aguilar, who is the presenter and reporter of the red note on *Telemaya Canal 12* in Ciudad de La Entrada, municipality of Nueva Arcadia, department of Copán, would have received a death threat through Facebook through the messages sent via the WhatsApp application. Aguilar, who is also a correspondent for *Canal 6* reportedly received several messages, including a six-day ultimatum to leave the channel. In the aforementioned message, the aggressor would also have written: "You are behind a death and you know well ... so watch out for the *calaca* (death skeleton)" (sic). In April 2012, Aguilar was the victim of a criminal attack when unknown individuals shot him at least 28 times with heavy weapons[[1102]](#footnote-1102). On March 28, the journalist and human rights activist, Esteban Vasquez, who is correspondent of *Radio Progreso* and a member of the Indigenous Independent Movement "*Lenca de La Paz-MILPAH*", would have been threatened by alleged activists of the *Partido Nacional*. The events occurred in the community of Arenales, Santa María, department of La Paz, where, after intercepting him, the alleged attackers told him: "if you continue your work of informing, you will be murdered."[[1103]](#footnote-1103) On August 7, the station *Radio Progreso* reported, through its Facebook page, an attack suffered by its correspondent in the municipality of Santa Rosa de Aguán, in the department of Colón, César Obando Flores, to whom the mayor said demarcation would have warned "that he was going to give him a little warm up". The events occurred on August 6, after an open municipality meeting in the Brisas del Mar community, when the media worker, who is the beneficiary of precautionary measures ordered by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, requested an interview with the official. According to the complaint made by *Radio Progreso*, the reaction of the mayor would have its origin in the publication by Obando Flores, of journalistic reports which documented the rejection of communities and organizations to the installation of a refinery in the region[[1104]](#footnote-1104).
67. On August 24, journalist Johnny Lagos, who runs the newspaper *El Libertador*, published in the city of Tegucigalpa, was the victim, together with his wife, Lurbin Yadira Cerrato, also a journalist, of a firearm attack perpetrated by unknown individuals when he left the newsroom. According to the information disseminated by the media, the objective of the perpetrators would have been to kill the journalist, although the police authorities indicated that it was an attempted armed robbery. *El Libertador*, which has an online edition and makes a monthly printing, would be characterized by its critical line towards the government[[1105]](#footnote-1105). On September 21, a threatening message consisting of the silhouette of a corpse at the scene of the crime accompanied by the caption "RIP" would have appeared in front of the *El Libertador* offices. The media denounced the incident as an attempt at intimidation linked to the attack suffered by its director on August 21[[1106]](#footnote-1106).
68. Other journalists would have been victims of kidnappings throughout 2017. On February 20, the journalist and human rights defender of the Center for Research and Promotion of Human Rights [*Centro de Investigación y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos*] (CIPRODEH), Evelyn Molina Castañeda, was kidnapped and psychologically tortured, on a taxi in the city of Tegucigalpa, in the company of two other women. The vehicle would have been boarded by an individual who pointed a gun at them and threatened to shoot them in different parts of the body. After taking them to various places in the city, they were finally abandoned near the National Vocational Training Institute [*Instituto Nacional de Formación Profesional*] (INFOP) and stripped of their belongings and identification documents[[1107]](#footnote-1107). On February 23, the independent journalist and correspondent of several magazines, Rony Huete, denounced having been kidnapped in a taxi, when he boarded the vehicle in Colonia San Miguel, in Tegucigalpa. Two subjects had boarded the vehicle and took him to different parts of the city, later robbed him, and abandoned him after stealing his work equipment, a laptop and his cell phones. Huete also reported that on February 15 he would have been run over by a bodyguard of the rector of the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras* (UNAH), Julieta Castellanos, after he asked questions related to the alleged violation of human rights of students of said house of studies[[1108]](#footnote-1108). On August 30, journalist Víctor Manuel Pineda, who hosts a program on *Canal 6* that is broadcasted from the city of San Pedro Sula, would have been kidnapped at his home. According to information of public knowledge, Pineda, who was also a representative candidate nominated by the *Partido Liberal*, would have been kidnapped with the intention of collecting a ransom of 60,000 dollars in exchange for his release. On September 23, the police authorities reported the rescue of the media worker, as well as the arrest of two alleged perpetrators of the plagiarism who the Criminal Court in Tegucigalpa linked to the process[[1109]](#footnote-1109).
69. Regarding the case of journalist Ronnie Huete, the State has informed the IACHR that the Office of the Public Prosecutor has prepared the draft Fiscal Requirement [Requerimiento Fiscal] for the crimes of injuries, threats and unfair deprivation of liberty against security guards of the National Autonomous University of Honduras [Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras – UNAH], to the detriment of the communicator[[1110]](#footnote-1110).
70. On March 8, the community radio station *La Voz Lenca*, which is operated by the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras [*Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras*] (COPINH), would have been attacked with stones by an unidentified group of people. The events would have taken place in the community of La Cruz Concordia, in the municipality of San Francisco, department of Lempira, and COPINH would have indicated that government authorities were behind the attack[[1111]](#footnote-1111).
71. On April 6, the journalist of *Radio Globo*, Rony Espinoza, was verbally assaulted by alleged supporters of the *Partido Libertad y Refundación* (LIBRE), one of whom would have attacked him with blows. According to available information, the events occurred outside the Supreme Court of Justice [*Corte Suprema de Justicia*] (CSJ), in the City of Tegucigalpa, in the minutes prior to the arrival at the building of former President Manuel Zelaya, who had to relieve a judicial proceeding. The attackers would be sympathizers of Zelaya who would have come to the place to express their support[[1112]](#footnote-1112).
72. On May 17, the Honduran army would have assaulted several cameramen while they were covering a transfer of prisoners from different prisons to the maximum-security prison known as "*La Tolva*" or "*El Pozo II*". The military, who carried out work to protect the transfer operation, would have also tried to retain the equipment of one of the cameramen and threatened to arrest them[[1113]](#footnote-1113).
73. On May 31, cameraman René Alberto Ortega of the *Corporación Televicentro* (TVC) of the city of Tegucigalpa, would have been shot six times with firearms. The events occurred when Ortega left the facilities of his workplace located in the Buenos Aires neighborhood of the Honduran capital. The media worker was hospitalized as a result of the impacts and, after being operated on, he was admitted to the intensive care area. The National Police discarded the hypothesis of the robbery, because all the belongings of Ortega were found in the place. On June 1, the National Commissioner for Human Rights [*Comisionado Nacional de los Derechos Humanos*] (Conadeh), requested the General Director of the Protection System for Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Media Workers, and Justice Operators, to adopt protective measures in favor of Ortega[[1114]](#footnote-1114).
74. With respect to the violence against journalists and others because of their exercise of freedom of expression, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has underscored, based on the inter-American doctrine and case law, the importance of three positive obligations arising from the rights to life, humane treatment, and freedom of expression, to wit: the obligation to prevent, the obligation to protect, and the obligation to investigate, prosecute, and criminally punish the persons responsible for those crimes. As the Office of the Special Rapporteur has stated, these obligations are complemented reciprocally: in order for there to be free, robust, and unrestricted public debate, it is necessary to combat violence against journalists through a comprehensive policy of prevention, protection, and the pursuit of justice.[[1115]](#footnote-1115)
75. The authorities responsible for an investigation should conduct their activities in an expedited manner, avoiding delays or unnecessary hindrances in the proceedings which could lead to impunity and infringe on judicial protections under the law. In the Joint Declaration on Crimes against Freedom of Expression the Special Rapporteurs pointed out that “authorities should make all reasonable efforts to expedite investigations, including by acting as soon as an official complaint or reliable evidence of an attack against freedom of expression becomes available.”[[1116]](#footnote-1116)
76. The IACHR and the Office of the Special Rapporteur recall that public servants must unequivocally repudiate attacks perpetrated in retaliation for the exercise of freedom of expression, and must abstain from making statements that may increase the vulnerability of those who are persecuted for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Similarly, it is essential that the authorities who hold elective positions or who hold responsibilities within the State structure encourage the competent authorities to act with due diligence and speed to investigate the facts and punish those responsible.[[1117]](#footnote-1117)
77. **Social protest**
78. Throughout the year, there would have been at least a dozen demonstrations by students of the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras* (UNAH). The institution’s students would have taken to the streets for various reasons, and during the demonstrations they would have been repelled by the police authorities with tear gas and jets of water, in addition to the detention of around thirty protesters on various dates.
79. On February 9, university students protested the conviction against former university student Kevin Joshua Solórzano Hernández, who was found guilty of the murder of former prosecutor Edwin Eguigure, which had occurred on November 11, 2014. Solórzano was arrested on November 20, of the same year, and during the trial he was also accused of attempted murder against the widow of the former prosecutor. The protests were repelled by the police with the use of tear gas[[1118]](#footnote-1118). On March 2, new demonstrations would have taken place in demand of greater spaces to participate in university life, in addition to demanding clarification of the murder of the indigenous environmentalist Berta Cáceres, which occurred a year earlier. The police would have intervened to contain the demonstration using jets of water and tear gas[[1119]](#footnote-1119). On May 2 and 3, students would’ve blocked Suyapa Boulevard once again, which is one of the main roads surrounding the university campus, demanding greater participation within the conformation of the University Management Board [*Junta de Dirección Universitaria*], the main administrative body of the house of studies, whose seven members had to be elected on April 29. The demonstrators would have confronted the police, throwing stones at the soldiers, while the latter used tear gas and jets of water to dissolve the demonstration. During the confrontation, a policeman would have been injured[[1120]](#footnote-1120). On May 24, a group of students would have taken two UNAH’s buildings in support of three of their classmates, who were students of the Faculty of Humanistic Sciences, in trial since 2015, accused by the rectory due to the 2014 protests, when UNAH’s new academic rules were approved. According to available information, twenty students would have been arrested by the National Police, whose intervention would have been requested by the university authorities[[1121]](#footnote-1121). On June 13, university students occupied UNAH’s facilities[[1122]](#footnote-1122), but were evicted by policemen on June 16[[1123]](#footnote-1123).
80. On this matter, the State has declared to the IACHR that the National Police has acted through the use of legal means for the control and dispersion of crowds using only those means authorized by national regulations and international treaties and the Manual of the Use of Force [Manual del uso de la fuerza], using techniques that cause the least harm to individual integrity[[1124]](#footnote-1124).
81. On July 19, students united under the *Movimiento Estudiantil Universitario* (MEU) marched to the National Congress and delivered their proposal to end the crisis, consisting of the creation of a "Provisional University Government" [*Gobierno Universitario Provisional*] and the consequent suspension of all current university authorities[[1125]](#footnote-1125). On August 15, National Congress designated a Special Commission to address the university problems. The Commission summoned MEU officials to a meeting on August 16, the same date on which the anti-riot police evicted a group of students from the Faculty of Chemistry and Pharmacy, resulting in five policemen injured in the confrontation[[1126]](#footnote-1126). On August 30, Congress’ Legislative Committee presented a proposal to appoint an Acting Rector who would be elected by the University Management Board [*Junta de Dirección Universitaria*] and would head the UNAH for a period of six months. On September 25, Francisco José Herrera Alvarado would have been selected for the position, on and that same day the Rector Julieta Castellanos Ruiz ceased in her functions, the next classes would have resumed at the institution[[1127]](#footnote-1127). However, the fact that the student Marcio Noé Silva, member of the MEU, remained in prison subject to criminal proceedings, and that another 10 students are subject to precautionary measures, would have provoked new student protests and confrontations[[1128]](#footnote-1128).
82. On April 25, members of the "*Somos Muchas*" organization, which promotes the decriminalization of therapeutic abortion, held a march in front of the National Congress. They reported having been assaulted by groups allegedly aligned with the Government, who they identified as scholar students of the "*Programa Honduras 20/20*", aimed at students with limited resources. The events would have happened in the presence of army officials who would have refrained from intervening[[1129]](#footnote-1129).
83. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[1130]](#footnote-1130) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[1131]](#footnote-1131)
84. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[1132]](#footnote-1132)
85. **Stigmatizing statements**
86. Civil society organizations denounced the existence of a smear campaign directed against journalist Jairo López, director of the television program “*El Informador”*, which is transmitted through *Canal 21* in the city of Choluteca, department of the same name. The campaign would allegedly be promoted by the president of the National Congress, Mauricio Oliva Herrera, whose escort would have pointed a weapon against civilians, being captured in a video broadcasted by Lopez in his program. After the images were broadcasted, another video that aims at linking the journalist to a criminal network and with the alleged drug trafficker Orlando Pinto, would have been distributed through the social network Facebook[[1133]](#footnote-1133).
87. The State has informed the IACHR that in Honduras the crime of threat is an illegality pursued at an individual level. Journalist Jairo López has not reported the incident to the Office of the Public Prosecutor, therefore the intervention of the Office of the Public Prosecutor in said case would not be possible. Also, Lopez is, according to the State, covered by the National Protection System for Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators and Justice Operators [*Sistema Nacional de Protección para personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos, Periodistas, Comunicadores Sociales y Operadoras de Justicia*][[1134]](#footnote-1134).
88. On March 31, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Honduras issued a statement in which it warned of the existence of stigmatizing and discrediting campaigns directed against human rights defenders in Honduras. In its press release the OHCHR specifically referred to the cases of the Jesuit priest Ismael Moreno Coto, human rights defender and executive director of *Radio Progreso* and the Reflection, Research, and Communication Team [*Equipo de Reflexión, Investigación y Comunicación*] (ERIC-SJ), as well as the indigenous leader Salvador Zúniga, and the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras [*Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras*] (COPINH). Both activists and the civil society organization would be subject to accusations that aim at linking them to illicit activities. The OHCHR urged the Government of Honduras to take the necessary actions to ensure that human rights defenders can carry out their activities[[1135]](#footnote-1135).
89. Public servants, like all people, are entitled to the right to freedom of expression in its many forms. Nevertheless, in their case, the exercise of this fundamental freedom acquires certain connotations and specific characteristics that have been recognized in the Inter-American case law, particularly with respect to: the special duties they acquire by virtue of their status as state officials; (b) the duty of confidentiality that may apply to certain types of information held by the State; (c) the right and duty of public officials to denounce human rights violations; and (d) the particular situation of members of the Armed Forces.[[1136]](#footnote-1136)
90. With regard to the impact of the statements of public servants on the rights of others, the Inter-American Court has held that, under certain circumstances—even if the official speech does not expressly authorize, instigate, order, instruct, or promote acts of violence against specific citizens—its reiteration and content can increase the “relative vulnerability” of those groups and the risks they face.[[1137]](#footnote-1137)
91. **Legal reforms**
92. On February 21, the Honduran Congress approved a reform of Article 335 of the Criminal Code, by which the terrorist offense was incorporated into said ordinance; On February 22, in the same law, article 335-B was added, through which the crime of apology and incitement to acts of terrorism was established. These reforms are intended to punish anyone who "publicly, through the media, or dissemination to the public made apology, exaltation, or justification of the crime of terrorism or those who participated in its execution, or incite others to commit terrorism, or the funding of the same", and established prison sentences of four to eight years for such conduct. The incorporation of the aforementioned criminal conducts is part of the "Law for the Strengthening and Effectiveness of Security Policy" [*Ley para el Fortalecimiento y Efectividad de la Política de Seguridad*], an initiative promoted by the president, Juan Orlando Hernández, and which has been deemed by various opposition groups as an attempt to criminalize social protest[[1138]](#footnote-1138). Various civil society organizations, including the Journalists Association of Honduras [*Colegio de Periodistas de Honduras*] (CPH), have rejected the legal reforms and begun a campaign to promote their repeal. On April 4, the president of CPH, Dagoberto Rodríguez, would have held a meeting with the president of the Congress, Mauricio Oliva, to ask him to discuss his petition. Faced with the refusal of the legislator, the journalistic union would have decided to combat the law by filing a writ of Amparo before the Supreme Court of Justice[[1139]](#footnote-1139). On June 5, the CPH President informed through his Twitter account that the Public Prosecutor of Honduras had issued an opinion declaring the unconstitutionality of Article 335-B of the Criminal Code and stating that it would present a declaration to the Supreme Court on the partial inapplicability of the rule regarding journalistic work[[1140]](#footnote-1140). On August 15, the highest court would have ruled inadmissible a writ of Amparo filed by representatives José Manuel Zelaya and Luis Redondo, of the *Partido Libertad y Refundación*, against the aforementioned law, arguing that said remedy is not adequate, but rather an unconstitutionality action. At the close of this report, two unconstitutionality appeals lodged by the civil society organization Committee for Free Expression [*Comité por la Libre Expresión*] (C-Libre) and journalist Edgardo Rodríguez, member of the Board of Directors of the Freedom and Democracy Association [*Asociación Libertad y Democracia*] (ALD), were under study[[1141]](#footnote-1141).
93. The IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur, together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Honduras, expressed, through a joint press release, their concern "over the adopted reforms in the Honduran penal code, which may lead to a negative impact in the legitimate exercise and enjoyment of the guarantees and fundamental rights, the protection and promotion of freedom of expression in the country"[[1142]](#footnote-1142).
94. **Direct and indirect censorship**
95. Two media workers would have been subjected to censorship by municipal and legislative authorities. On September 28, the newspaper *El Pulso* reported that its reporter Nincy Perdomo would had been denied access to the facilities of the Jicaral Hotel Convention Center, where a special session of the National Congress was being held. The order to prevent the journalist's access would have been handed over by the person responsible for the security of congress, as a result of alleged publications made by the journalist in which she stated that "the president doesn’t do anything and only goes to sleep."[[1143]](#footnote-1143) On October 9, the civil society organization C-Libre issued an alert to denounce the alleged censorship suffered by the journalist Isaac Calix, who hosted a program on the TV channel *Más TV*. According to the organization, Calix reported that Dorn Ebanks, mayor of Roatán, of the department of Islas de la Bahía, had asked the television station to cancel the program "*Elecciones 2017, tu voz es tu voto*", hosted by Calix, by using the advertising contract that the city council has with the company[[1144]](#footnote-1144).
96. According to Principle 5 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression “Prior censorship, direct or indirect interference in or pressure exerted upon any expression, opinion or information transmitted through any means of oral, written, artistic, visual or electronic communication must be prohibited by law. Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression.
97. **Other relevant situations**
98. On May 18, César Geovany Bernardez, director of the Honduran Black Fraternal Organization [*Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña*] (OFRANEH), was arrested; he was also working as a correspondent for the Radio *Progreso* station that transmits from the municipality of El Progreso, in the department of Yoro. The arrest of Bernardez would have been registered in the locality El Porvenir, of the department of Atlántida, under an arrest warrant issued against him and three other members of the OFRANEH board in November 2016, after the Canadian businessman Patrick Forsent, owner of the company CARIVIDA, filed a complaint against them for the crime of land usurpation. The company would have the intention of building a tourist complex in traditional Garífuna lands. The judge of the case, although he ordered the release of Bernardez, would have imposed precautionary measures, among them a ban on leaving the country[[1145]](#footnote-1145).
99. **JAMAICA**
100. **Stigmatizing statements**
101. On April 25, the Prime Minister, Andrew Holness, would have pointed out that Jamaicans should not listen and believe the fake news presented by the media. Likewise, he would have indicated that he will not allow the press to spread "propaganda" or alternative facts. In this regard, the Prime Minister did not specify to which media outlet his comment was directed at. However, it would have indirectly alluded to an article published by *The Gleaner* on April 15, in which the state of deterioration of a street in the city of Kingston and Holness’s responsibility in solving it was mentioned. The video of the press conference where he allegedly referred to this matter was published in Holness’s profile on the social network Facebook[[1146]](#footnote-1146).
102. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that public servants have the duty to ensure that their statements do not infringe upon the rights of those who contribute to public deliberation through the expression and dissemination of their thoughts, such as journalists, media outlets, and human rights defense organizations. They must be mindful of the context in which they express themselves in order to ensure that their statements do not constitute, in the words of the Court, “forms of direct or indirect interference or harmful pressure on the rights of those who seek to contribute with public deliberation through the expression and diffusion of their thoughts.”[[1147]](#footnote-1147)
103. **Subsequent Liabilities**
104. On March 14, 2017, human rights defender Latoya Nugent was arrested and detained by members of the Counter-Terrorism and Organized Crime Division of the Jamaica Constabulary Force. She was charged under the Cybercrimes Act for breach of section 9 dealing with “use of computer for malicious communication” for reportedly naming alleged perpetrators of sexual violence on social media.[[1148]](#footnote-1148) On March 15, 2017 it is reported that Nugent was hospitalized and was unable to appear before the Court due to health concerns.[[1149]](#footnote-1149) Nugent was subsequently granted bail.[[1150]](#footnote-1150)
105. Section 9 of the Cybercrimes Act provides that a person commits an offence if that person uses a computer to send to another person any data (whether in the form of a message or otherwise) – that is obscene, constitutes a threat or is menacing in nature; and with the intention to harass any person or cause harm, or the apprehension of harm, to any person or property. An offence is committed regardless of whether the actual recipient of the data is or is not the person to whom the offender intended the data to be sent. The penalty for the offence of “use of computer for malicious communication” if summarily convicted before a Resident Magistrate, ranges from up to four million dollars or imprisonment for a tem not exceeding four years. If convicted on indictment before a Circuit Court, the penalty ranges up to a fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding twenty years.[[1151]](#footnote-1151)
106. Following Nugent’s arrest, stakeholders in the legal profession, the media and civil society expressed concern about the use of the Cybercrimes Act. The concern was that the law was being inappropriately used to address claims of defamatory speech and appeared to be an attempt to criminalize defamation through the backdoor.[[1152]](#footnote-1152) In 2013, Jamaica’s Defamation Act abolished criminal libel and abolished the distinction between slander and libel.[[1153]](#footnote-1153) In response to the concerns raised, a commitment was made by parliamentarians to review the Cybercrimes Act in 2017 so as to address concerns raised including the concern that the law inhibits freedom of expression.[[1154]](#footnote-1154) On May 17, 2017, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions withdrew the charges against Nugent on the basis that it had insufficient evidence to proceed and the actions complained of did not meet the elements of the offence in section 9 of the Cybercrimes Act.[[1155]](#footnote-1155)
107. The Office of the Special Rapporteur highlights that all restrictions on freedom of expression, including those that affect speech on the Internet, should be clearly and precisely established by law, proportionate to the legitimate aims pursued, and based on a judicial determination in adversarial proceedings. In this regard, the Office of the Special Rapporteur indicated that any legislation regulating the Internet should not contain vague and sweeping definitions or disproportionately affect the free flow of information and legitimate websites and services.[[1156]](#footnote-1156) To prevent the criminalization of the use of the Internet, “Cybersecurity” legislations should avoid creating new offences or increasing the penalties of criminal conducts that are not aimed at attacking the integrity, the infrastructure or the confidentiality of the Internet. For example, defamation or fraud should not be considered “computer crimes” and the punishment of those offenses should not be aggravated in exclusive consideration of the technological medium used to carry them out.
108. **Legal reforms**
109. On May 12, the Minister of Education, Youth, and Information, Ruel Reid, would have indicated in Parliament that the Government and the Broadcast Commission would be evaluating a series of reforms aimed at regulating local media. In this regard, Reid would have justified the extent to which Jamaica has a multiplicity of audiovisual media that would provoke intense struggles to increase the ratings, causing sensationalist news to attract the public’s attention. Likewise, Reid would have pointed out that the Government's action seeks to guarantee access to public information and is, in turn, in recognition of the responsibility of creating conditions for economic growth and national development[[1157]](#footnote-1157).
110. On May 16, the Press Association of Jamaica (PAJ) would have made a statement requesting the Government to clarify a series of questions related to the alleged reform being promoted. In addition, PAJ reported that between March 2009 and January 2011, it made different recommendations to amend the current law on Access to Public Information, but they were never taken to Parliament to be studied[[1158]](#footnote-1158). Finally, on May 17, Minister Ruel Ried, in dialogue with the *Cliff Hughes Online* radio program, would have rectified his statements by stating that without the approval of the PAJ and the opposition, there would be no changes in the regulations[[1159]](#footnote-1159).
111. **Access to public information**
112. According to the information available, the government allegedly restricted journalists’ access to different forums and events. In this regard, in briefings of the Prime Minister, Andrew Holness media workers would have been omitted in the respective guest lists, while selectively distributing government information, favoring certain media and journalists[[1160]](#footnote-1160).
113. This Office of the Special Rapporteur wishes to recall that in the Joint Declaration on the regulation of the media, restrictions on journalists and the investigation of corruption, the Special Rapporteurs for Freedom of Expression of the United Nations, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), noted that accreditation schemes for journalists “are appropriate only where necessary to provide them with privileged access to certain places and/or events; such schemes should be overseen by an independent body and accreditation decisions should be taken pursuant to a fair and transparent process, based on clear and non discriminatory criteria published in advance. Accreditation should never be subject to withdrawal based only on the content of an individual journalist’s work”[[1161]](#footnote-1161).
114. **MEXICO**
115. Mexico faces a profound security crisis severely affecting the human rights of its people. At the heart of the crisis is a breakdown in the rule of law and governance at local levels across the country, simultaneously leading to and exacerbated by murders, disappearances and torture. The suffering is widespread, yet the violence has often singled out those most essential to telling the story of conflict and insecurity, corruption and criminality: journalists. It is violence with a particularly political purpose, a widespread attack on the roots of democratic life in Mexico, at local, state and national levels.
116. Any fair-minded assessment must acknowledge that addressing such violence is not simple. Organized crime has deeply infiltrated the public life of the country, especially at the level of states and municipalities, as we heard from dozens of government officials, journalists, and non-government organizations. In addition to the use of violence in all its forms, criminal actors and public authorities attempt to co-opt journalists for their purposes and impose information favorable to the cartels or against their enemies. Organized crime has generated hybrid ways to interfere with journalism, generating division and distrust among journalists, and between journalists and local officials.
117. The Government, while acknowledging the problems, has nonetheless failed to devote necessary resources and demonstrate political will. We recognize progress in the protection of journalists at the federal level, but even the coordination of that protection in the states is insufficient. The mechanisms of protection have surprisingly limited resources given the context of a national crisis. The specialized mechanisms of accountability, at federal and state levels, have not delivered results, leading to increased frustration. Indeed, impunity for crimes is the general rule in cases of reported journalist killings and disappearances. This has generated a distrust of the media and journalists towards the institutions and a painful disconnection of the victims and their relatives from the institutions of justice. While the existence of these institutions is commendable, a national commitment to expanding their ambition and resources is essential to address the scourge of violence.
118. The endemic attacks on journalists, as well as human rights defenders, undoubtedly present the most immediate and challenging threat to freedom of expression in Mexico today, but that does not exclude consideration of other factors, for there is a broader environment in which deep challenges to press freedom and individual expression persist. In part this environment involves a historic transition from past authoritarian practices in government to emerging political pluralism and demands for democratic standards. That transition has not done away with the problematic and intimidating practices of the past, such as the expectations of good coverage under official advertising, described by the aphorism, "I do not pay to be beaten"; the dismissal of critical journalists at the request of authorities; the development of rosters for paid journalism by state administrations; and the lack of pluralism in the property and the editorial line of the media system. The well-documented examples of digital surveillance of journalists and human rights defenders, among others, seem to be both a relic of the approaches of the past and an example of the challenges journalists face in the digital age.[[1162]](#footnote-1162)
119. **Advancements**
120. In March, the Oral Proceedings Court in the Coast Region, State of Oaxaca, convicted Jorge Armando Santiago Martínez for the murder of journalist Marcos Hernández Bautista in 2016.[[1163]](#footnote-1163) Hernández was the correspondent for Oaxacan’s daily newspaper *Noticias Voz e Imagen de Oaxaca* and was a freelancer for other media outlets. He also served as a public official in the government of his town and was an active member of the Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional political party.[[1164]](#footnote-1164) Santiago Martínez, the former police chief of the municipality of Santiago Jamiltepec, was convicted and sentenced to a 30-year prison term and to payment of MXN$ 178 thousand (around USD $9,100) as reparation.[[1165]](#footnote-1165) Based on available information, the Court has failed to determine the motive for the murder or who was the mastermind behind it.[[1166]](#footnote-1166)
121. On April 19, the Second Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation ruled on *amparo* review case No. 1/2017, finding that in order for limitations on freedom of expression exercised through an internet site to be deemed constitutional, they must be set forth in the law, pursue a legitimate purpose and be necessary and proportional.[[1167]](#footnote-1167) In the specific case, the Court held that it was “unconstitutional for the Mexican Intellectual Property Institute (IMPI), on the grounds of being a protected musical work, to order all information, data and expressions on the webpage of the appellant to be blocked, preventing users from being able to enter said virtual site.”[[1168]](#footnote-1168)
122. In the view of the Court, the measures meet the legality requirement[[1169]](#footnote-1169) and pursue a legitimate purpose, to wit, copyright protection from third parties. Notwithstanding, the Court ruled that said measures do not meet the requirements of necessity and proportionality, nor are they the least restrictive measures. Concretely, it held that “restrictions on the human right of freedom of expression ‘should not be excessively broad,’ on the contrary, permissible restrictions ‘should refer to concrete content;’ hence generic prohibitions on certain web sites and systems in order to function are not compatible with the human right of freedom of expression, except for truly exceptional situations. Such situations of exceptionality could be triggered when all of the content of a webpage is illegal.”[[1170]](#footnote-1170) The Court noted that the blocking of the webpage, which subsequently prevents any user from gaining access to said site, constitutes the most restrictive measure possible on freedom of expression, opinion and information. Lastly, the Court found that totally blocking the webpage constituted “censorship, not only of the content generated by the administrator, right holder, owner or person responsible for said webpage himself, but also of the entire flow of information and expression that could stem from the exchange carried out by the users themselves of such a virtual site.”[[1171]](#footnote-1171)
123. In July, the former Mayor of Silao, Enrique Benjamín Solís Arzola, was convicted and sentenced to 2 years in prison after admitting to being the instigator of the crimes of serious bodily harm and threats against journalist Karla Silva of the Leon city newspaper *El Heraldo*. Solís Arzola confessed to ordering in 2014 the Municipal Police chief at the time to hire individuals to beat and threaten journalist Silva for criticism of him in her articles. The former Mayor was also disqualified from holding public office for 2 years, sentenced to pay a fine and reparation to the victims. Solís Arzola was held in pre-trial detention for one year and four months and when he was sentenced to the minimum prison term, he was granted release on bail.[[1172]](#footnote-1172) He was also required to issue a public apology through a newspaper with state-wide circulation. In the daily newspaper *El Correo* of Guanajuato, the following message was published: “I, Enrique Benjamín Solís Arzola, former Municipal President [mayor] of Silao (2012-2015), offer my apology for having hurt and threatened El Heraldo de León newspaper journalist Karla Janeth Silva Guerrero and her companion Adriana Elizabeth Palacios. By doing so, I violated freedom of expression. Crimes committed on September 4, 2014.”[[1173]](#footnote-1173)
124. On November 15, the First Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation ruled that the Congress of the Union should fulfill its legislative duties and issue a law to regulate expenditures on official publicity. The Court set April 30, 2018 as the deadline to meet said obligation emanating from the 2014 amendment to the Constitution, which mandated the Congress to legislate on the subject of government publicity[[1174]](#footnote-1174) within a period that lapses on April 30, 2014. An *amparo* suit was brought by the organization Artículo 19 for failure to honor the constitutional mandate.[[1175]](#footnote-1175) As for the right to freedom of expression, the Court ruled: “the failure to issue the aforementioned law violates freedom of expression, of the press and of information. This right requires free communications media, which convey to citizens all types of opinions, for which it is necessary to have sufficient economic income. The failure to regulate official publicity fosters an arbitrary exercise of the social communication budget, thereby restricting freedom of expression.”[[1176]](#footnote-1176)
125. On December 16, 2016, the Superior Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary (TEPJF) decided two cases of injunctive measures, issued by the Complaints and Reports Commission of the National Electoral Institute (CQD), which ordered blocking content for allegedly violating electoral law.[[1177]](#footnote-1177) In one of the cases, the TEPJF revoked injunctive measures against *Esquire* magazine for publishing advertisements for the Governor of Puebla, Rafael Moreno Valle. The measures had be issued by the CQD because electoral regulations had reportedly been violated. The judgment held that the article does not set forth positions of the Governor and does not highlight the official anywhere in it. Additionally, the TEPJF found that, with respect to the injunctive measures ordering the Governor to refrain from issuing statements on his standing in the elections, it would amount to prior censorship. Consequently, these measures were also revoked. In the other case, the TEPIF ruled on injunctive measures that had been granted on behalf of the same official. Said measures were for Televisa S.A. to suspend broadcast of an interview with said public official. The judgment referred to the importance of the role of the media in society and the possibility of taking positions on matters of public interest.
126. **Murders and Disappearances**
127. On March 2, journalist Cecilio Pineda Birto was murdered in Ciudad Altamirano, State of Guerrero. Unknown motorcyclists shot the journalist, while he was on the premises of a carwash. After the attack, the broadcaster was transferred to a clinic where he passed away. The journalist had been publically speaking out for some months that he was the target of ongoing death threats by organized crime groups and in 2015 he was the victim of an attempt on his life. Pineda Birto was the editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *La Voz de la Tierra Caliente* and a collaborating reporter for the newspapers *El Universal* of Mexico City and *La Jornada Guerrero*, and covered local organized crime news. Additionally, he would report on social media about incidents of corruption and criminal acts in the Tierra Caliente region of the State of Guerrero.[[1178]](#footnote-1178) The Office of the Special Prosecutor to Address Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE), reported that it has cooperated with the Office of the Prosecutor of the State of Guerrero. Both offices opened parallel investigations to determine which one can prosecute the case.[[1179]](#footnote-1179)
128. According to the Federal Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, Pineda Birto was at “extraordinary” risk after being the victim of an attempt on his life and having received death threats because of his work as a reporter. The Mechanism reported that it contacted the journalist to offer him protection after a news article was published in September 2015. According to a communiqué of the Secretariat of the Interior, “the Mechanism determined, through an urgent action assessment, that due to the seriousness of the case the suitable measure was for Pineda Brito to immediately leave the danger zone, and therefore temporary refuge was offered for him and his family, which he accepted.”[[1180]](#footnote-1180) The State reported that the case was examined at 4 meetings of the Governing Board of the Mechanism and after conducting the appropriate field inspections, the extraction proposal was offered to him again. However, according to the Mechanism, because the journalist decided to not accept transfer to the safe site, the case was closed and all protection measures were taken away from him.[[1181]](#footnote-1181) In June, the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic (PGR) offered a reward for locating those responsible for the homicide of Pineda Birto.[[1182]](#footnote-1182) In its observations on the draft version of this report, the State likewise reported that the Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists and the Executive Commision for Victim Service had asked the CEAV to provide comprehensive support to his family.[[1183]](#footnote-1183)
129. Journalist Ricardo Monlui Cabrera was murdered on March 19 in Ciudad Yanga, Veracruz. Unknown men riding on motorcycles shot him as he was leaving a restaurant where he was accompanied by his family members. Monlui Cabrera was the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *El Político*, columnist of the newspapers *El Sol de Córdoba*and *Diario de Xalapa*. He was also the president of the Association of Journalists and Graphic Reporters of Córdoba.[[1184]](#footnote-1184) The Office of the Attorney General of the State of Veracruz wrote in a release posted on the official Facebook account that “prosecutorial authorities are exhausting all lines of investigation, including the journalistic activity the communicator engaged in.”[[1185]](#footnote-1185) In its observations on the draft version of this report, the State pointed out that the Attorney General’s Office in Veracruz had opened an investigation file and ordered protection measures for the journalist’s home. The CEAV provided Mr. Monlui’s family with medical, psychological, and legal assistance and will also seek to offer them shelter. Likewise, the Protection Mechanism offered protection to family members of the deceased, who stated that they did not require it.[[1186]](#footnote-1186)
130. Respected journalist Miroslava Breach Velducea was murdered on March 23 in Chihuahua, Chihuahua. According to available information, an individual shot the journalist when she was leaving her residence in the presence of one of her children. The journalist passed away on the way to the hospital. Miroslava Breach had been practicing journalism since the 1980s, with a special focus on matters linked to human rights, democracy, drug trafficking and corruption. In particular, her work shed light on incidents of unlawful dispossession and struggle for the land where indigenous communities live in Chihuahua, women’s rights and, more recently, disputes between cartels and cartel relations with the political world. Breach was a correspondent for more than 15 years of the nationwide newspaper *La Jornada* and she worked for the news agency *El Norte* of Juárez. The Governor of the State of Chihuahua condemned the murder. UN Women, the IACHR Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression and UNHR expressed their dismay and condemnation for the murder and called on the appropriate authorities to reinforce actions aimed at protecting the exercise of freedom of expression and human rights defense. They additionally underscored the need for federal and state authorities to step up their joint efforts to bring down the high rate of impunity in Chihuahua. They stressed that lines of investigation must not only take into consideration the practice of journalism, but also a gender perspective, in view of the specific risks faced by women journalists for the simple fact of being women.[[1187]](#footnote-1187)
131. Based on available information, the Governor of the State of Chihuahua created a “special, multidisciplinary group to run the investigations.”[[1188]](#footnote-1188) In April, the chief state executive reported that they had “practically all of the evidence [needed] to go arrest those responsible and they are reinforcing the case and the chain of custody with the highest scientific, technical and legal rigor.”[[1189]](#footnote-1189) He also announced that there will be arrests because “it is a matter in which the actual perpetrator, co-participants and, of course, the mastermind have been detected.”[[1190]](#footnote-1190) In June, the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic (PGR) offered a reward for helping to locate those responsible for the homicide of Miroslava Breach Velducea.[[1191]](#footnote-1191) However, thus far none of these persons allegedly responsible have been located or brought to trial. In its observations on the draft version of this report, the Staate reported that the Attorney General’s Office of the state of Chihuahua had provided psychological and legal assistance to the journalist’s family, while a special procedure was used to include some of Miroslava Breach’s co-workers in the Protection Mechanism.[[1192]](#footnote-1192)
132. On April 14, journalist Maximino Rodríguez Palacios was murdered in La Paz, State of Baja California Sur. Rodríguez Palacios was gunned down in a burst of shots while he was parking his car in the company of his wife (who emerged from the attack unharmed). The journalist had been working for nearly two years for *Colectivo Pericú*, a blog to report and post news about crimes, corruption and other things, in the State of Baja California Sur and he had reportedly been the target of threats after he published in April reports of an alleged criminal cell called “Los Colores.”[[1193]](#footnote-1193)
133. According to a release issued by the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic (PGR), both the Office of the Assistant Attorney General for Regional Oversight, Criminal Proceedings and Amparo (SCRPPA), at its State Representative’s Office in Baja California Sur, and the Office of the Special Prosecutor to Address Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE), opened an investigation into the homicide of the journalist.[[1194]](#footnote-1194) In June, the PGR reported that three individuals allegedly responsible for the homicide of journalist Maximino Rodríguez Palacios had been arrested.[[1195]](#footnote-1195) He also noted that the journalist’s homicide was reportedly related to the practice of his profession.[[1196]](#footnote-1196) That same month, the PGR offered a reward for helping to locate those responsible for the homicide of Rodríguez Palacios.[[1197]](#footnote-1197)
134. Respected journalist and author Javier Valdez Cárdenas was murdered on May 15, in the city of Culiacán, State of Sinaloa. Unknown individuals shot him as he was leaving the newsroom of *Ríodoce,* the weekly magazine he founded and wrote for. Valdez Cárdenas had a long and accomplished career in journalism and was engaged in a courageous investigation into drug trafficking and organized crime in his country. On May 17, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto announced an action plan to strengthen the work of institutions investigating crimes against journalists, as well as the protection mechanism. UN and IACHR freedom of expression experts expressed their deep dismay over the murder of the journalist, welcomed the commitment of the President and urged the Mexican government, especially the competent authorities, to investigate the murder of Javier Valdez thoroughly and identify, prosecute and punish everyone responsible.[[1198]](#footnote-1198) The Office of the Special Prosecutor to Address Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE) and the Office of the Attorney General of the State of Sinaloa (FGES) have opened an investigation into the case.[[1199]](#footnote-1199) In June, the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic (PGR) offered a reward to help locate those responsible for the homicide of Javier Valdez Cárdenas.[[1200]](#footnote-1200)
135. On September 15, journalists and activists demonstrated in protested before the Office of the Attorney General of the State of Sinaloa (FGES) and demanded justice. The director of *Ríodoce* called into question the investigative efforts of the FGES and the FEADLE: “The State Prosecutor’s Office headed by Juan José Ríos Estavillo is obligated to investigate the murder, but failed to do so for a long time. And it failed to do so because the Federal Prosecutor’s Office came in and took over the evidence collection and investigation, but without taking on formal responsibility, because they do not want to respond to the demands for justice.”[[1201]](#footnote-1201) Since Javier Valdez’s death, family members and coworkers formally asked the FEADLE and the FGES to figure out which office would take the lead on the investigation. Notwithstanding, so far this request went unheeded.[[1202]](#footnote-1202)
136. On May 15, journalist Jonathan Rodríguez of the weekly magazine *El Costeño* was murdered in Autlán, Jalisco. Rodríguez was riding in his car with his mother Sonia Córdova, news director of the magazine. Córdova survived the attack, but was shot several times. According to available information, a few days prior to the attack, the magazine had reported to the Federal Police and to the mayor of Autlan that he, the victim, had been threatened and followed.[[1203]](#footnote-1203)
137. On May 18, a group of armed men abducted journalist Salvador Adame, director of TV station *Canal 6tv* in the municipality of Múgica, Michoacán.[[1204]](#footnote-1204) The Office of the Attorney General of the State of Michoacán (PGJE) reported that the competent authorities opened an investigation and notified the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic, the Federal Police and the Secretariat of National Defense.[[1205]](#footnote-1205) On June 14, the PGJE reported that it had found the journalist's body[[1206]](#footnote-1206).
138. On July 9, Honduran journalist Edwin Rivera Paz was murdered in Acayucan, State of Veracruz. Rivera Paz had been compelled to leave Honduras for fear of retaliation after the murder of his fellow journalist Igor Padilla. Edwin Rivera, cameraman for the TV program *Los Verduleros* of the Honduran television channel Hable Como Habla, reportedly requested refugee status from the Mexican authorities. The Mexican Refugee Aid Commission had granted him temporary protection.[[1207]](#footnote-1207)
139. On August 1, journalist Luciano Rivera, director of the magazine *Dictamen* and reporter for *CNR TV* was murdered in the municipality of Playas de Rosarito, State of Baja California. Five individuals reportedly came into the bar that the journalist was patronizing at the time and one of them shot him. Rivera had published reports against the local police, stories about investigations into acts of violence, which could be linked to organized crime and cases related to the public security of Playa de Rosarito. According to information provided by the State, the same day of the murder, the Office of the Special Prosecutor to Address Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE) sent an official letter to the district attorney of Playas el Rosarito in order to request official copies of the case investigation file and opened an investigation. The local authorities reported that one of the persons allegedly involved was arrested. On August 1, the Assistant Attorney General for Baja California, Patricia Ortega, announced to the local press that there is no evidence that Rivera’s murder was related to his practice of journalism.[[1208]](#footnote-1208)
140. Journalist Cándido Ríos Vázquez, correspondent of the daily newspaper *Diario de Acayucan* and founder of *La Voz de Hueyapan*, was murdered on August 22 in Covarrubias, State of Veracruz. According to the Office of the Attorney General of Veracruz, the two individuals who were accompanying Ríos Vázquez were also murdered.[[1209]](#footnote-1209) According to public information, one of the people accompanying the journalist was the former police inspector of Acayucan. Ríos Vázquez passed away on the way to the hospital.[[1210]](#footnote-1210) Authorities stated that all indications point to the attack being linked to another person, not to the journalist, that it involved an attack against another persons and against the escorts of those persons.[[1211]](#footnote-1211) Since July 2013, the broadcaster had been under the protection of the Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists. Likewise, since 2012 the journalist has been receiving legal assistance from the State Commission for the Protection of Journalists of Veracruz, because of death threat complaints filed by him against Gaspar Gómez Jiménez, former mayor of Hueyapan de Ocampo. Based on public information, on October 26, 2016, Ríos Vázquez forwarded a communication to the Office of the Special Prosecutor to Address Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE) and to the Protection Mechanism reporting several incidents of assault and threats on his life perpetrated by Gómez Jiménez. A few days before the murder of the journalist, Gómez Jiménez posted a video on the social network leveling several threats against the journalist.[[1212]](#footnote-1212)
141. Juan Carlos Hernández, of *La Bandera Noticias,* was murdered on September 5, in Yuriria, Guanajuato. Based on press reports, Hernández had recently begun work for this media outlet and his main job was to assist reporter Alejandro Chávez on a daily basis in taking photographs and videos. Hernández began to work at the news outlet as a taxi driver, but later joined the journalism team.[[1213]](#footnote-1213) According to spokespersons of the Government of Guanajuato, Hernández “was not working as a journalist, reporter or photographer or any other activity that has to do with journalism […] but was known […] for many years […] as a taxi driver and for approximately two months he was working as a taxi driver providing service in particular to the editor-in-chief of this news portal.”[[1214]](#footnote-1214)
142. On October 5, press photographer Edgar Daniel Esqueda Castro was reportedly abducted from his residence in the State of San Luis de Potosí, and had been missing until October 6, when his body was found with his hands tied and signs of torture next to the railroad tracks of the same town. According to available information, Esqueda Castro, who had collaborated with *VoxPopul*i of San Luis Potosí and *Metropoli* of San Luis, had received threats from an assistant prosecuting attorney and filed a complaint with the Ombudsman of said office about the incident. The Federal Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists claimed that it had offered Esqueda Castro protection measures, but he had rejected them.[[1215]](#footnote-1215) Additionally, there are complaints that a group of armed men dressed in police uniforms were responsible for his abduction.[[1216]](#footnote-1216) On October 5, the Prosecutorial Police of the State (PME) denied having been involved in the crime through a release published by the Office of the Attorney General of the State of San Luis Potosí (PGJSLP).[[1217]](#footnote-1217) Based on information provided by the State, the Office of the Special Prosecutor to Address Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE) opened an investigation into the homicide of journalist Esqueda, aimed at following the line of investigation linked to freedom of expression.[[1218]](#footnote-1218)
143. Later, a video circulated on social media in which journalist Daniel Esqueda Castro allegedly appeared prior to being murdered. In the video, it shows a man with his eyes covered and his hands tied who was identified as “Daniel Castro” and noted that he was collaborating with the Northeast Cartel. Additionally, it singled out several local journalists, members of the police force and public officials who were collaborators with said cartel.[[1219]](#footnote-1219) The organization Artículo 19 asserted that said video had been leaked by a former member of the judicial police and that “if it were legitimate, this video could have been obtained under torture and therefore the veracity of its content should be severely questioned.”[[1220]](#footnote-1220)
144. It is fundamental for the Inter-American Commission that the State of Mexico fully investigates the murders of the journalists in an effective and impartial manner, shedding light on the motives and making a judicial determination on whether it is related to the exercise of journalism or freedom of expression. The authorities should not discard the exercise of journalism as motive for murder and/or attacks before the investigation is completed. In that regard, the IACHR reiterates the 2010 recommendation issued by Frank la Rue, the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of expression to “[a]dopt special protocols for the investigation of crimes against journalists whereby the hypothesis that the motive for the crime was the profession be privileged and exhaustive.” [[1221]](#footnote-1221)
145. The omission of logical avenues of investigation or lack of diligence in the gathering of evidence in this respect can have a serious impact on the development of proceedings at the indictment or trial stages, especially in the identification of masterminds. [[1222]](#footnote-1222)
146. **Attacks and assaults on journalists and the media**
147. On February 17, Othón García of the media company *Rotativo* of Oaxaca*,* was reportedly threatened with disappearance and beaten by an alleged municipal police agent of Oaxaca.[[1223]](#footnote-1223) On March 7, a public official reportedly ran over Gilberto Navarro, a reporter of *AM Express*, in Guanajuato. The journalist had published a story showing the public official assaulting a driver.[[1224]](#footnote-1224) On March 13, parodist Violeta Santiago was reportedly injured with a door by the director of public works of Agua Dulce, Veracruz, when she was requesting information about his job.[[1225]](#footnote-1225)
148. On March 28, unknown individuals attempted to set the home of journalist Julio Omar Gómez on fire in Baja California Sur. Alfredo Valle, the escort assigned to protect the journalist was murdered as he attempted to stop the individuals. In December 2016, unknown individuals allegedly set the home of Gómez on fire and in February 2017, his vehicle.[[1226]](#footnote-1226) On March 29, journalist Armando Arrieta, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *La Opinión*, was reportedly the victim of an attempt on his life. He was shot as he arrived in his residence in the city of Poza Rica, State of Veracruz. Arrieta was transferred to a local hospital in serious condition. The Office of the Attorney General of the State of Veracruz opened an investigation.[[1227]](#footnote-1227) Separately, the Office of the Special Prosecutor to Address Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE) also opened a case investigation file.[[1228]](#footnote-1228)
149. On April 2, the printed version of the daily newspaper *Norte* of Ciudad Juárez announced it was closing down. Two days later, it announced its web site would be taken down.[[1229]](#footnote-1229) In its last printed editorial column, the director explained: “The tragic and sorrowful death of Miroslava Breach Velducea – our colleague – last March 23, has made me think deeply about the adverse conditions in which we do our job as journalist currently. Risk is the main ingredient.”[[1230]](#footnote-1230) Journalist Daniel Velázquez of the newspaper *El Sur* was reportedly assaulted by officials of the Town Hall of Acapulco on April 28.[[1231]](#footnote-1231)
150. On May 5, journalist Alejandro Chávez of *La Bandera* of Uriangato, was allegedly assaulted and harassed by Miguel Alfaro Vallejo, advisor to the mayor of the municipality of Yuriria, Guanajuato.[[1232]](#footnote-1232) On May 10, members of the State Police force of Campeche reportedly assaulted reporters Humberto Curmina­ and Jorge Sosa.[[1233]](#footnote-1233) On May 29, in Playa del Carmen, Quintana Roo, journalist Carlos Barrios of the news portal *Aspectos* allegedly was threatened and part of his ear was cut off with a knife. The assailant warned Barrios that *Aspectos* must stop publishing information backing the governor of Quintana Roo.[[1234]](#footnote-1234) Indigenous journalist and activist Marcela de Jesús Natalia was reportedly attacked on June 3, in Ometepec, State of Guerrero. Natalia, broadcast journalist at the Radio and Television System of Guerrero, sustained a bullet wound when she was leaving her radio program. Later in June, the alleged assailant was arrested.[[1235]](#footnote-1235)
151. According to the organization Artículo 19, on election day of June 4, 19 cases of assault were documented against journalists. It contended that the “main perpetrators were members of political parties and public officials, who were accused of being responsible for 6 of the assaults, each one.”[[1236]](#footnote-1236) On June 5, journalist Alfonsina Ávila, of the media company *Zona Franca*, was reportedly assaulted by the Citizen Counselor of the Procurement Committee of the municipality of León, Guanajuato, while she was interviewing him.[[1237]](#footnote-1237) On June 10, members of the public security force were alleged to have assaulted Alejandro Paz, director of *La Expresión*, and Julio César Trujillo, cameraman of *Televisa*. The journalists were covering the transfer of 165 persons deprived of liberty.[[1238]](#footnote-1238)
152. According to deputies who are members of the Special Congressional Committee to Follow-up on Assaults on Journalists and Media, on June 25, journalist Rubén Pat was “arbitrarily threatened and tortured by municipal police of the municipality of Solidaridad, for publishing information linking municipal officials to organized crime.”[[1239]](#footnote-1239)  Ruben Pat, of the digital media outlet *Semanario Playa News* of Quintana Roo, reported the incident to the Federal Mechanism for the Protection of Journalists.[[1240]](#footnote-1240)According to Miguel Ángel Pech Cen, Attorney General of the State of Quintana Roo, the journalist “sustained injuries that made him lose part of his face. And […] in addition to protection measures, proceedings are still underway for abuse of authority against the municipal policemen of Solidaridad, where the case investigation file is still open.” [[1241]](#footnote-1241)
153. On August 14, journalist Fredy Morales, host of the program *Enlace Serrano*, was stabbed by unknown assailants more than a dozen times at his residence in the State of Puebla.[[1242]](#footnote-1242) On August 24, unknown individuals ran over Alejandro Guerrero, journalist of the media outlet *El Sur.[[1243]](#footnote-1243)* On August 27, members of the municipal police of Celaya, Guanajuato reportedly threatened, beat and handcuffed journalist Mako Sierra of the media company *Sala de Prensa.*[[1244]](#footnote-1244)Jesús Daniel Domingo was allegedly beaten and threatened in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua allegedly by police officers of the city when he was attempting to cover an eviction.[[1245]](#footnote-1245) On October 24, two unknown men fired on the facilities of *Canal 10* in Cancún, Quintana Roo. The media outlet’s accountant was reportedly wounded.[[1246]](#footnote-1246)
154. **Threats, intimidation and arrests of journalists and media**
155. Ricardo Sánchez Pérez Del Pozo, the head the office of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes against Freedom of Expression [*Fiscalía Especializada en Delitos Cometidos contra la Libertad de Expresión*] (FEADLE), asserted at the fourth regular meeting of the Special Committee to Follow-Up on Assaults on Journalists and the Media, held on July 20, that “the highest number of complaints received by the office of the prosecutor is for threats and abuses of authority; the entities with the highest number of incidents of complaints [filed] by journalists are: Veracruz, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas and Guerrero.”[[1247]](#footnote-1247)
156. On January 10, in Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, host Abigail Soraya Arias was reportedly threatened with death via the telephone. Arias is the radio host of the program *Despierta Tlaxiaco* of radio station *La Perla de la Mixteca.*[[1248]](#footnote-1248) On January 11, journalist Alberto Escorcia Gordiano was allegedly intimidated over Twitter. Unknown individuals published his telephone number and address over this social network. The Office of the Attorney General of Mexico City was aware of his situation, because the journalist had reportedly been threatened previously. Moreover, Escorcia had been a beneficiary of the Federal Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists since November 2015.[[1249]](#footnote-1249) On January 30, journalist Raúl Rodríguez of the newspaper *Morelos Habla,* received a death threat in Cuernavaca. The incidents reportedly took place a few hours after he published news of alleged acts of corruption by municipal authorities. The journalist reported the incidents to the authorities, but in April he decided to leave the country.[[1250]](#footnote-1250)
157. On February 10, the Secretary of Public Security of Michoacán reportedly threatened journalist Alejandra Marina Martínez. The journalist was recording residents complaining about insecurity in the municipality, when the public official berated her and members of the public security force snatched away the journalist’s equipment.[[1251]](#footnote-1251) On February 17, Susana Leticia Arellano, journalist of the media outlet *El mañanero*, was allegedly threatened in Oluta, Veracruz. A man, who identified himself as the husband of the sixth town councilmember of the City Hall of Acayucan, reportedly threatened Arellano for allegedly misrepresenting information in an interview of his wife.[[1252]](#footnote-1252) On February 19, Isaí Lara Bermúdez, politics editor of the weekly magazine *ZETA*, reported that the police chief of the municipality of Tecate, State of Baja California, was allegedly planning an attack on him. Lara Bermúdez had published a column about said chief a few days prior to the threat.[[1253]](#footnote-1253)
158. On February 28, journalist Jonathan Zepeda of *Notiprensa*, and political cartoonist Carlos Orantes, were arbitrarily detained in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas. The journalists were conducting an investigation at the Municipal Palace into potential acts of corruption by local authorities.[[1254]](#footnote-1254) On March 6, armed men reportedly stole the issues of the weekly magazine *Reporte Jalisco* and threatened the media outlet’s employees. That same day, Marcelo Ramírez, journalist of the media company *Decisiones,* was allegedly threatened after publishing a news article about the former mayor of Jalisco.[[1255]](#footnote-1255) On March 7, journalist Mauricio Can Tec, of the daily newspaper Diario de Yucatán, was arbitrarily detained and assaulted while he was covering a story outside of the municipal palace.[[1256]](#footnote-1256) On March 11, unknown men reportedly burned the motorcycle of journalist Carlos Roberto Marroquín, host of the radio program *Contexto Radio* and director of *Voces Colectivas Asociación Civil* in Hermosillo, Sonora.[[1257]](#footnote-1257)
159. On March 15, Tamara De Anda, blogger of *El Universal,* reporter of *Canal Once*, radio host of *Radio Formula* and collaborator of *Maspormas*, was the target of death threats, harassment over social networks, after the broadcaster denounced that a taxi driver had harassed her on the street shouting “Gorgeous” to her. The journalist received support from the police and brought a case in Civil Court.[[1258]](#footnote-1258) One of the threatening messages that Ms. De Anda received contained a screen capture of a slip of paper with the name of the journalist on it, along with some bullets and a rosary with the following caption: “I ask for the lord’s forgiveness for what I am going to do, but you destroyed my family, tamara is dead.” [[1259]](#footnote-1259)
160. On March 21, journalist and women’s rights activist Verónica Villalvazo, known as “Frida Guerrera,” [‘Frida the lady worrier’], was threatened and harassed over her social network accounts as a consequence of her speaking out publically against femicides in Mexico.[[1260]](#footnote-1260) Villalvazo filed a complaint with the FEADLE for the death threats. The journalist and activist carries a panic button as a security measure granted by the Federal Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.[[1261]](#footnote-1261) On March 29, three journalists (a Spaniard, a Mexican and an Englishman) from *Al Jazeera* were stopped and held up by three armed individuals in the State of Sinaloa.[[1262]](#footnote-1262)
161. In March, José Luis Morales, host of the radio news program 'Infolínea' of *Radio Mexicana FM* in Aguascalientes, reported being the target of a “smear campaign,” receiving threats, pressure and police harassment. Based on available information, different media outlets reported that warrants were issued for his arrest. In addition to the foregoing, alleged police agents attempted to arrest him. According to the journalist, the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic told him that there was no case against him. Morales claimed that those responsible for said harassment were involved in Aguascalientes politics.[[1263]](#footnote-1263)
162. On April 8, the weekly magazine *Semanario Zeta* published a story relating threats by a member of the Arellano Félix cartel against the media outlet. According to the information obtained by the weekly, said cartel intended to “put an end to the Semanario ZETA by placing a bomb in the building or nearby it and exploding it.”[[1264]](#footnote-1264) On April 18, journalist Francisco Acosta, manager of the newspaper *Novedades Quintana Roo,* was reportedly harassed and intimidated by four individuals, who got out of an official vehicle of the government of Quintana Roo.[[1265]](#footnote-1265)
163. In April, journalist Gerardo Ruiz Herrera was allegedly harassed and bullied by the State Secretariat of Public Security of Puebla. The Assistant Secretary for Intelligence ordered an investigation of the journalist after learning about information that was reportedly sent to the journalist implicating him with organized crime groups. The official allegedly released personal information about Ruiz Herrera to other journalists.[[1266]](#footnote-1266) On April 22, 2017, Nehemías Jiménez and José David Morales Gómez, journalists of the media company *Chiapas sin Censura* received death threats, were detained and their work equipment was taken away from them. The journalists were documenting possible illegal practices at a public event of Senator Roberto Albores. Subsequently, supposed policemen dressed as civilians returned their property. The photos and video recordings had been deleted.[[1267]](#footnote-1267)
164. On May 13, seven journalists were held up and threatened with death by around 100 armed individuals in Acaptelahuaya, State of Guerrero. These journalists included: Sergio Ocampo and Jair Cabrera, correspondents of the national newspaper *La Jornada*; Alejandro Ortiz, of the news portal *Bajo Palabra*; Jorge Alberto Martínez, of the news agency Quadratín Guerrero; Ángel Galeana, correspondent of Grupo *Imágen*; Pablo Pérez, freelance Spanish journalist of *Hispano Post*; and Hans-Máximo Musielik, freelance German photographer and collaborator of *ViceNews México*. The assailants stole their work tools, such computers, cell phones, cameras and one of the vehicles.[[1268]](#footnote-1268) The Office of the Special Prosecutor to Address Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE) coordinated actions with state authorities to open an investigation.[[1269]](#footnote-1269) That same day, journalist Fabián García Castrejón, reporter of *Aristegui Noticia* and editor of *Ámbito Nayarit*, discovered threatening messages at the front door of his house in Tepic, State of Nayarit. The journalist received protection from the Mechanism for the Protection of Journalists and was relocated to Mexico City.[[1270]](#footnote-1270)
165. On May 16, the president of the Association of Journalists of Sinaloa, Juan Manuel Partida Valdez reported he had received death threats. Partida Valdez served as an intermediary between the authorities and a witness in the case of the murder of journalist Javier Valdez. Said witness allegedly informed Partida Valdez that Javier Valdez appeared on a list of journalists marked for murder.[[1271]](#footnote-1271)
166. On May 22, alleged members of the municipal police force of Aquiles Serán, Chihuahua, reportedly threatened, intimidated and prevented journalists from several local media outlets from doing their job. The journalists were covering possible abuses by authorities and arbitrary detentions.[[1272]](#footnote-1272) On May 14, alleged state officials beat Arturo Ávalos, journalist of the medial outlet *De Política y Algo Más,* and prevented him from performing his job.[[1273]](#footnote-1273)
167. The print media outlet *El mañana* of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas was the target of a campaign of stigmatization and acts of intimidation by the mayor of Nuevo Laredo. The newspaper had published stories about the lack of transparency in the office of the mayor and conflicts of interest between suppliers and public officials.[[1274]](#footnote-1274) According to available information, in May, the mayor called a press conference and claimed: “We have been the targets of constant attacks by the newspaper *El Mañana* […] and the message goes out to them, we are not going to give in, we are not going to give them the 2.5 million pesos that they want monthly in order to be able to print positive things.”[[1275]](#footnote-1275) Subsequently, *El Mañana* received information about a possible attack on it.[[1276]](#footnote-1276) In August, the director of *El Mañana* sued the mayor for corruption and illegal enrichment.[[1277]](#footnote-1277) In addition, in January, the daily suspended distribution of its print version for two days as a result of threats allegedly leveled against it by a criminal group.[[1278]](#footnote-1278)
168. On June 5, three policemen held a gun to journalist Leonardo Martínez Peralta, of the daily newspaper *ABC* and demanded that he delete the photos that he had just taken of the confrontation between these officers with other armed men.[[1279]](#footnote-1279) On June 9, José Angel Castro, journalist of the media outlet *Tabasco Hoy,* was assaulted, intimidated and arbitrarily arrested by members of the State public security forces of Tabasco. The journalist was covering a police news item.[[1280]](#footnote-1280) In June, journalist Sanjuana Martínez collaborator of *La Jornada* was threatened with death and rape over social media.[[1281]](#footnote-1281) On July 8, Amir Ibrahim, director of the portal *El QuintanaRoo* was reportedly threatened by unknown men and allegedly by a businessman from Quintana Roo.[[1282]](#footnote-1282) Unknown armed men watched the home of journalist Ezequiel Flores, of *Proceso,* for two days. The journalist reported the incidents to the Mechanism for Protection, of which he is a beneficiary due to previous threats. According to the journalist, the federal authorities took two hours to arrive.[[1283]](#footnote-1283)
169. On July 13, journalist Lydia Cacho Ribeiro was threatened by an unknown individual in Quintana Roo.[[1284]](#footnote-1284) On July 15, Jesús Olivares, of the newspaper *El Dictámen,* was threatened over Facebook allegedly by a former public official of Veracruz.[[1285]](#footnote-1285) On July 18, journalists Cynthia Caballero and Miguel Angel Salguero, of *Iztacalco Noticias* news agency, received threats after publishing a video of members of political parties engaged in physical fighting.[[1286]](#footnote-1286) On July 19, two narco-blanket messages allegedly appeared in Quintana Roo signed by the Zetas threatening with death journalists Pedro Canché, editor of the portal *Pedro Canché Noticias,* and Amir Ibrahim, director of the portal *El QuintanaRoo.*[[1287]](#footnote-1287)That same day, journalist Luis Rubén López Domínguez, of the newspaper *Tabasco Hoy,* was allegedly threatened in the municipality of Paraíso, State of Tabasco. An individual reportedly shot at the journalist’s car and left a threatening message on the windshield. López published news stories about several municipal officials. The spokesperson of the mayor’s office called the incident a “self-staged attempt.”[[1288]](#footnote-1288)
170. July 20, Alejandro Otero Reséndiz, journalist of the digital magazine *Revista Original*, was reportedly assaulted, threatened and blocked and his work tools damaged while he was covering a news story in Chinconcuac, State of México. Alleged members of the State Security Commission and of the Municipal Police Department incited individuals to beat the journalist. One of the alleged members of the Municipal Police pressured journalist Rodrigo Hernández, from the digital newsfeed *Contrapapel Texcoco,* to reveal his sources after disseminating information connected to Otero Reséndiz’s original coverage.[[1289]](#footnote-1289)
171. On July 21, journalist José Maldonado, founder and editorial chief of *Agencia Mexicana de Noticias Noventa Grados,* reportedly was threatened by email. The email warned Maldonado to stop publishing information relating to the activities of public officials of Morelia, State of Michoacán.[[1290]](#footnote-1290) On July 25, journalist Gil Cruz, of the newspaper *Periódico MX,* was threatened though a message to his family members in Álamo Temapache, Veracruz. According to available information, unknown individuals entered the parents’ family business and threatened to kill Gil Cruz if they didn’t pay 100,000 pesos by the weekend.[[1291]](#footnote-1291)
172. On August 3, Armando Ramírez, journalist of the news service *Noticiudadana* was threatened over the social media allegedly for publishing articles about organized crime in Tláhuac.[[1292]](#footnote-1292)Journalist Héctor de Mauleón, columnist of *El Universal* received death threats though the social networks and an email on July 27 and August 30. One of the threats circulating via Twitter shows a video with a photograph of the journalist and how someone is shooting him.[[1293]](#footnote-1293) The journalist reportedly conducted interviews which discuss organized crime in Mexico City. The National Commission on Security, Forensic Science Division of the Federal Police, the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic and the Office of the Special Prosecutor to Address Crimes against Freedom of Expression (Feadle) are all supposedly investigating the threats.[[1294]](#footnote-1294)
173. On August 20, persons alleged to be policemen in Sabinas, Coahuila beat, arbitrarily detained and held in isolation journalist Sigifredo de la Cerda, of the newspaper *Zócalo*, and prevented him from doing his job*.* The journalist was covering a breaking news story when alleged policemen reportedly beat, choked and then transferred him to the Office of the Public Prosecutor. The officials are alleged to have said that because he was not wearing a vest with the word “Press” on it, he could not be identified as such. After 10 hours of being held in custody, the journalist was notified that he had been charged with causing bodily injury for allegedly beating a police officer.[[1295]](#footnote-1295) On August 29, journalist Virjilio Osorio Nava and camerawoman Montserrat Ángel Rogelio, of the magazine *El Gritón* and the TV channel *El Mundo de Tlaxcala*, were reportedly threatened with death by an alleged State police officer of Tlaxcala.[[1296]](#footnote-1296)
174. On September 5 and 6, several members of the daily newspaper staff of *Quintana Roo Hoy*, including its assistant director Irma Ribbon López, received several death threats via text messages and phone calls. They also received a bomb threat by phone and, consequently, firemen, Civil Protection and the state and federal police were mobilized to the facilities of the newspaper. The threats specifically involved articles published by the news outlet. Recently, the newspaper had published articles about the Cancun Cartel and about the unlawful dispossession of land in the hotel zone. The Office of the Attorney General of the Republic opened an investigation into the incidents.[[1297]](#footnote-1297)
175. Several journalists and media outlets were victims of unknown individuals who broke into their homes or facilities. In January, the offices of the outlet *El Otro Enfoque*, in Silao, Guanajuato, were broken into. The unknown burglars reportedly stole a computer with journalistic information, a telephone and a motorcycle.[[1298]](#footnote-1298) In April and May, respectively, unknown individuals broke into the residence of Genaro Lozano, columnist of *Reforma* and television host of *Televisa* in Mexico City[[1299]](#footnote-1299) and the residence of Alejandro Saucedo Alvarado, a journalist of the media outlet *Red es Poder* in Torreon, Coahuila.[[1300]](#footnote-1300) In both instances, no valuables were stolen, but objects such as cameras and documents were moved around. Similarly, in May, unknown persons reportedly broke into the facilities of the publisher of the magazine *Proceso*, in Mexico City.[[1301]](#footnote-1301) According to the organization Artículo 19, the day after the incident, a cloned cover and text of the magazine was circulated on social media.[[1302]](#footnote-1302) In June, the office of journalist Joaquín López Dóriga of *Radio Fórmula* in Mexico City also was broken into. The unknown individuals reportedly stole a cellphone, four computers and searched through files and drawers.[[1303]](#footnote-1303)
176. The IACHR recalls the obligation of the States to adopt a public discourse that contributes to preventing violence against journalists, including the recognition of journalistic work and public condemnation of murders and all physical violence against journalists, omitting any statement that can raise the risk for journalists; and to adopt training programs, as well as to formulate and implement guidelines of conduct for public officials and especially police or security forces on respect for the media, including those specifically related to gender issues.
177. In addition, the State must ensure that effective and concrete protection measures are adopted, urgently, to guarantee the safety of those who are subject to a special risk for the exercise of their right to freedom of expression, whether that the threats come from agents of the State or of individuals. The measures must guarantee journalists the possibility of continuing their professional activity and their right to freedom of expression. In the same way, the State must adopt the necessary measures so that those who work in the media and have had to move or go into exile because they are at risk, can return to their homes in safety conditions. When it is not possible for these people to return, the States must adopt measures so that they can remain in the place they choose in decent conditions, with security measures and with the financial support necessary to preserve their work and family life.
178. In accordance with international human rights standards, the Mexican State is not only obligated to guarantee that its agents do not commit acts of violence against journalists, but also to reasonably prevent aggressions from individuals when they know or should know about the risk. The ninth principle of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression of the IACHR establishes that: "The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation".
179. **Prevention, protection and impunity of crimes against journalists**
180. In its report *The Situation of Human Rights in Mexico* and its first follow-up report on its recommendations, the IACHR recognized the efforts of the Mexican State for adapting its legal framework and institutions to address the challenge posed by impunity. However, it noted that reforms are ineffective when in practice and in response to victims’ and, in general, society’s clamoring for justice, there is no response. On the contrary, rates of impunity are still on the rise in a context of constant serious crime and assaults on the press. This all conveys the wrong message as those who attack the press go unpunished leaving journalists and broadcasters defenseless.
181. The Commission has recognized the efforts of the Mexican State to confront the situation of impunity, such as instituting legislative reforms and creating investigative units like the Office of the Special Prosecutor to Address Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE). In May 2013, the National Congress approved a legal reform to regulate the legal authority of the Office of the Federal Prosecutor to take over cases[[1304]](#footnote-1304) and the jurisdiction of the federal justice system to prosecute and try crimes committed against journalists, persons or facilities, that “affect, limit or undermine the right to information or freedoms of expression or press.”[[1305]](#footnote-1305) The purpose of this reform was to overcome the legal obstacle that FEADLE faced to be able to take over jurisdiction and become more effective in getting to the bottom of cases that may be linked to the practice of journalism. Notwithstanding, in its recommendations, the IACHR pointed to the need to eliminate obstacles in practice that stand in the way of FEADLE from taking over cases of crimes committed against journalists and freedom of expression and be able to conduct a thorough, timely and independent investigation in contexts where there are no assurances of such an investigation.
182. According to information provided by the State, “as of July 31, 2017, the FEADLE had exerted the power to take over 48 preliminary investigations in several federal entities.” Additionally, it reported that in order strengthen its activities, FEADLE is implementing Immediate Response Cells (CRI, the Spanish initials for Células de Reacción Inmediata), made up of federal prosecutors, federal enforcement agents and police personnel.[[1306]](#footnote-1306)
183. Notwithstanding, Sara Irene Herrerías Guerra, Assistant Attorney General for Human Rights, Crime Prevention and Community Service of the PGR, acknowledged that of the 48 cases taken over by the FEADLE, only three have led to convictions, according to information presented at a hearing before the Special Committee to follow up on assaults on journalists and media of the Chamber of Deputies of the Federation. For her part, Brenda Velázquez Valdez, chair of the Special Committee, noted that “with four murders linked to the exercise of freedom of expression, in March alone, it is clear that the Government of the Republic’s prevention and prosecution policies are ineffective and inefficient.” Deputy Exaltación González Ceceña asserted: “impunity to find the actual perpetrators and masterminds behind assaults on journalists, that is to say, murders, attacks on their physical integrity or materials, because their facilities are also assaulted and they are cases that remain unsolved.”[[1307]](#footnote-1307)
184. Additionally, on May 17, “the President of the Republic invited the Governors of the federal entities to a special meeting of the National Governors Conference CONAGO to agree, through emergency actions in the area of protection and justice, on a plan to strengthen the National Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.” At said meeting, the following strategies were agreed upon: i) Creation of State Protection Units for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists made up of public servants of state governments; ii) Mapping out areas of risk and locations of assaults against human rights defenders and journalists in each federal entity; iii) Drafting of a National Protocol for the Coordination of Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.[[1308]](#footnote-1308)
185. On June 2, the Secretary of the Interior entered into agreements with 32 entities to reinforce collaboration between the federal government and the state governments. Additionally, on August 11, CONAGO approved the Coordination Protocol for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists. Likewise, the Protocol for Accompaniment of Journalists was drafted, which defines “the procedure to investigate, assist and protect victims and offended parties from crimes committed against journalists, or which infringe, limit or undermine the right to information, freedom of expression or of the press.”[[1309]](#footnote-1309)
186. For its part, the Consultative Council of the Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists issued a press release stating: “for all actors with whom we have spoken […] impunity is the fundamental factor that rewards and covers up crimes committed against human rights defenders and journalists in the country. Over 90% of cases remain in impunity, according to the authorities themselves. Civil society organizations claim that the figure is even higher. The main thing is that both the FEADLE and the prosecutor’s offices of all the entities [States] have shown an inability to address these crimes. Cover up, incompetence and complicity may be some of the factors for having these results,” noted the organizations making up the Consultative Council of the protection mechanism.[[1310]](#footnote-1310)
187. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that one of the factors contributing to the steady rates of impunity in crimes against journalists is the failure to exhaust lines of investigation linked to the practice of journalism by the victim, inasmuch as it hinders criminal prosecution and fosters impunity of the masterminds.[[1311]](#footnote-1311) The State’s efforts to focus on convicting perpetrators sends a message to the victims of an apparent striving to bring justice.
188. Based on the foregoing, the IACHR and its Special Rapporteurship reiterate the recommendation to the State to maintain FEADLE’s status as a specialized prosecutor and endow it with sufficient economic resources to do its job. In turn, the FEADLE must make sure it removes the obstacles standing in the way of the practice of taking over the investigations of cases of crimes committed against journalists and against freedom of expression; accordingly, the necessary measures must be adopted to avoid conflicts of jurisdiction between the federal and state jurisdictions that hamper or delay investigations. Additionally, special investigation protocols must be adopted under which the hypothesis of a link between the homicide or the assault, to the craft of journalism must be thoroughly and sufficiently exhausted. The victims and their families and, when applicable, their assistants, must be ensured the ability to take part in the criminal proceedings with full fair trial rights, both in seeking the truth and getting to the bottom of the crimes as well as when the time comes to demand reparation. As to the participation of the victims, the State reiterated that, “under the new National Code of Criminal Procedure, the incorporation of the rights of victims as one of its core principles, the FEADLE is obligated to respect and ensure the participation of the direct and indirect victims and the representatives thereof.”[[1312]](#footnote-1312)
189. **Social Protest**
190. On January 5 and 7, at least 20 journalists were assaulted by members of the public security force in the states of Coahuila and Baja California. The incidents reportedly took place during protests against the rise in the price of fuel.[[1313]](#footnote-1313) On January 5, Erika del Carmen Llaguno and Ismael Meza, of *Libera Radio* were threatened and beaten while they were covering citizen rallies in Hermosillo, Sonora.[[1314]](#footnote-1314) On June 10, members of the public security forces assaulted journalists Rubén Santos Hernández, cameraman of *Meganoticias* and Ricardo Jonás Soto Contreras, reporter of *TV Azteca* Veracruz. The journalists were covering the abuses and use of excessive force by the public security bodies against demonstrators in Veracruz.[[1315]](#footnote-1315)
191. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[1316]](#footnote-1316) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[1317]](#footnote-1317)
192. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[1318]](#footnote-1318)
193. **Mechanism for the Protection of Defenders and Journalists**
194. In its country report, specifically, the chapter on the Protection Mechanism, the IACHR notes the efforts made by the State to protect at-risk persons in the context of the serious violence taking place as a result of the defense or promotion of human rights, and the exercise of freedom of expression and journalism in Mexico over past years. Particularly, the Commission deemed especially important the creation of the “Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists” (hereinafter “the Mechanism” or “the Protection Mechanism”) in 2012, the issuance of the specific regulatory framework, the allocation of funds for the protection program to function, implementation of procedures to assist persons who resort to the Mechanism to request protection measures and the considerable number of persons receiving protection, among other actions it implemented for the purpose of creating ties of trust in the effectiveness of the Mechanism.[[1319]](#footnote-1319) In this regard, based on the information received through the different monitoring mechanisms of the IACHR, including precautionary measures, the Commission made several recommendations to the State in this specific area.
195. In following up on said recommendations, the Inter-American Commission recognizes the efforts and the commitment undertaken by the State to protect a growing number of beneficiaries of the Protection Mechanism, some of whom are beneficiaries of IACHR granted precautionary measures and provisional measures of the Inter-American Court. As of July 2017, the Mechanism received 5.5% more requests for protection and 17.7% more people have been granted protection than in 2016 as of September. In fact, as of July 2017, 95 requests for protection (56 journalists and 39 defenders) have been received and 93 persons (55 journalists and 39 defenders) have been granted protection.[[1320]](#footnote-1320) It must be noted that, since its creation in 2012, the Mechanism has provided protection measures to a total of 10 groups of journalists and that 7 of these groups filed their request in 2017. Additionally, since its creation, it has provided protection measures to a total of 774 individual beneficiaries and currently, measures are in force for 599 beneficiaries, of which 374 are human rights defenders and 225 are journalists.[[1321]](#footnote-1321)
196. For its part, the Consultative Council of the Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists issued a press release identifying, among other things, the major shortcomings of the Mechanism. In fact, it highlighted the importance of increasing personnel and establishing a fixed amount in the Federal Budget of Expenditures so proper funding is not subject to “vagaries of politics.”[[1322]](#footnote-1322) It also recalled that the Trust of the Federal Mechanism “did not receive one peso from the budget. In fact, the annual contribution to the trust has been decreasing: in 2013, it was endowed with $127,500,000 pesos; in 2014, with $118,000,000 pesos; in 2015, with $102,000,000 pesos; in 2016, with $88,900,000 pesos; and in 2017, $0 pesos. If you compare the contribution of 2013 to that of 2016, there has been a 31.28% decrease, even though there is an increasing trend in the number of beneficiaries and protection measures adopted.”[[1323]](#footnote-1323)
197. The Consultative Council also raised the need to provide comprehensive assistance to journalists and broadcasters who are forcibly displaced or are extracted by the Mechanism. As to the case of the murder of journalist Cecilio Pineda Birto on March 2 in the State of Guerrero, no protection measures were being provided by the Mechanism when he was killed because all measures had been lifted in October 2016. According to the State, all measures were removed, even though he was at serious risk, because on several occasions the journalist did not accept the safe house being offered to him by the Mechanism.[[1324]](#footnote-1324) In this regard, it is important to reiterate that, pursuant to Inter-American standards on the subject matter, “States have an obligation not only to protect at-risk journalists, but also to guarantee that the protective measures adopted are effective and adequate. In this sense, when measures are adopted to protect journalists from the credible threat of damage to their physical integrity, the measures must take into account the needs specific to the profession of the beneficiary, the beneficiary’s gender, and other individual circumstances.” [[1325]](#footnote-1325)
198. According to the organization Artículo 19, as of June 18 draft laws on protection of journalists were either reintroduced or introduced in the following states; Baja California Sur, Chihuahua, Durango, State of Mexico, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Michoacán, Nuevo Leon, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, Quintana Roo, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Zacatecas. In the view of said organization, these draft laws are “quick fixes [palliatives] in relation to the serious crisis that is being experienced in Mexico, because without the capacities and the political will, only more laws will be generated lacking effectiveness and more bureaucracy.”[[1326]](#footnote-1326) On this score, the Consultative Council of the Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists noted: “the creation of state mechanisms does not solve the problem in the local sphere” and warned about “the difficulties in methodologies and training involved in setting the Protection Mechanism into motion. That experience must be taken into account before adopting similar bodies at the local level. […] Discussions as to whether legislation should go beyond the creation of a mechanism and focus on forms of cooperation and adequate coordination; on the role of the institutions of administration of justice; and on the prevention measures that must be adopted, among other things.”[[1327]](#footnote-1327)
199. On another front, members of civil society have continued expressing their concern over the lack of a strategy of prevention and punishment of those responsible for the attacks who continue to confront human rights defenders and journalists. On July 26, the group of organizations Espacio de Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil Para la Protección de Personas Defensoras y Periodistas (Espacio OSC) published a report examining the obstacles and challenges of Mexican protection policies. In this regard, it identified: i) that there is a “lack of capacity to react to the diversity of forms of violence that defenders and journalists face (physical and digital assaults, acts of stigmatization or criminalization);” ii) the Protection Mechanism had not incorporated a gender approach into risk assessments and measures; iii) there is a lack of coordination between federal entities and the Protection Mechanism in implementation of measures; iv) measures still have to be adopted to foster a suitable environment for the exercise of freedom of expression and defense of human rights; v) “impunity and lack of adequate investigation into assaults and murders of human rights defenders and journalists continues to fuel, and even exacerbates, the commission of these crimes. The total absence of actions by the Protection Mechanism to ensure criminal investigation of assaults is proof that there is no true policy in Mexico, designed to prevent risks and protect human rights defenders and journalists.”[[1328]](#footnote-1328)
200. **Subsequent liability**
201. In May, Humberto Moreira, former governor of Coahuila, reportedly filed a complaint for defamation, slander and libel against the daily newspapers *Reforma* and *Vanguardia.* The official brought legal action before the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic and the Office of the Specialized Prosecutor to Address Electoral Crimes. According to available information, the complaints were related to an investigative news story published in the *Reforma* newspaper, reprinted by *Vanguardia,* claiming that Moreira’s family members allegedly had foreign bank accounts.[[1329]](#footnote-1329)
202. On June 9, Mario Galeana, journalist *24 Horas* Puebla, was served notice of a suit filed against her for damages by Ignacio Molina Huerta, secretary general of the city hall of San Pedro Cholula, State of Puebla. The journalist published information about allegedly illegal acts committed by the public official.[[1330]](#footnote-1330) Silvano Bautista, journalist of *El Diario de Chiapas,* also was served notice in June of a lawsuit filed by María de Jesús Olvera Mejía, deputy of the local Congress of the State of Chiapas. According to available information, the suit is related to a story published in October 2016 in which Bautista provides an account of 8 preliminary investigations allegedly opened against the deputy.[[1331]](#footnote-1331) The deputy is reportedly asking for MXN$ 5 million in damages (around US$ $260 thousand 100).[[1332]](#footnote-1332) Subsequently, Bautista received protection through the Police as a preventive measure.[[1333]](#footnote-1333)
203. On June 26, the daily newspaper *El mañana* was served notice of a lawsuit for MXN$ 15 million (around US$ 792 thousand), brought by Hilario Martín Landa Herrera for alleged damages. Landa Herrara is a supplier of the City Hall of Nuevo Laredo, and his suit is related to investigations and requests for access to information that the media outlet filed. According to the newspaper’s investigations, some of the companies linked to Landa Herrera are the main drug suppliers in the municipality. In this regard, *El Mañana* reportedly gained access to documents linking the official to the commission of crimes.[[1334]](#footnote-1334) According to the organization Artículo 19, Landa Herrera filed a second lawsuit against *El Mañana* for publishing a news story reporting on the first claim filed against the media outlet.[[1335]](#footnote-1335) Subsequently, on October 2, *El Mañana* was served notice of a third lawsuit brought against it. The municipal treasurer of Nuevo Laredo, Daniel Tijerina Valdez, reputedly sued the newspaper for publishing a story about the official’s alleged illegal enrichment.[[1336]](#footnote-1336)
204. **Direct censorship**
205. The Office of the Special Rapporteur notes with satisfaction the decision adopted by the 14th District Court on Civil Matters in Mexico City [*Juzgado 14 de Distrito en Materia Civil en la Ciudad de México*] on July 15, in which it would have rejected the lawsuit filed against the journalist Carmen Aristegui by the radio *MVS*[[1337]](#footnote-1337). In 2015, Aristegui, who uncovered a case of alleged corruption involving high authorities in the purchase of a luxurious house used by the President of the Republic[[1338]](#footnote-1338), was displaced untimely from her radio space in the concessionaire of *MVS* radio, who argued image reasons to unilaterally break the contract with one of the journalist teams with the largest audience in the journal. After that, and other investigations, the journalist and her team were dismissed by the concessionaire of the station with which they had a contract. The company *MVS* alleged that Aristegui and her team had used the image and brand of the press for unauthorized purposes, in order to join the Mexico Leaks platform, aimed at obtaining information from confidential sources[[1339]](#footnote-1339). The company said that the termination of the contract was not due to government pressure, but to the defense of the brand of the firm used without consultation. For her part, Aristegui indicated that the excuse was unsustainable and that a clarification on air was enough to resolve the dispute; she added that her and her team had adhered to this mechanism to protect their sources and access confidential information on an individual basis, which ultimately benefited the journalistic quality of the program[[1340]](#footnote-1340).
206. According to a statement issued by the lawyers of Carmen Aristegui, the judge "concluded that the pretext used by the radio station to prematurely terminate the contract with Carmen Aristegui was actually the announcement of the launch of the Mexicoleaks platform, without it being an illegal behavior, neither on behalf of the journalist nor of her collaborators, and reiterated that the journalist never breached her contractual or legal obligations." Likewise, according to the statement, the judge indicated that it is false that Aristegui had illegally exploited the *MVS* trademarks or infringed its copyright. As a result, "Carmen Aristegui was acquitted of paying any amount to *MVS* and it was declared that she had not incurred any responsibility"[[1341]](#footnote-1341).
207. For its part, radio *MVS* indicated that the judge ruled in their favor by "declaring the contract with the journalist to be legally terminated for the hosting of the radio program" and not imposing any compensation payment in favor of the journalist[[1342]](#footnote-1342).. In this regard, Aristegui's lawyers pointed out that the judge refers to the termination of the contract due to the expiration of the term and that "if *MVS* did not obtain anything that he requested in court, it means that they lost the case"[[1343]](#footnote-1343).
208. **Access to Information**
209. In its report *Situation of Human Rights in Mexico* and in its first follow-up report on the recommendations made, the IACHR welcomed the approval of the General Law of Transparency and Access to Public Information, which stands as proof of the Mexican State’s commitment to transparency and the right of access to information. However, it voiced it concern over information received regarding obstacles to ensuring access to information related to human rights violations. In particular, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur expressed their concern about the power vested in the Office of the Counsel of the President of the Republic to appeal any decision to declassify information, made by the National Institute of Access to Information, which put national security interests in jeopardy.[[1344]](#footnote-1344) During its country visit, the IACHR also took note of a progressive regression in the active transparency and public information policy about civilian and military deaths in security operations, in particular, when the armed forces are involved.[[1345]](#footnote-1345)
210. On March 17, during the 161 period of session of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the hearing " Right to Truth in Cases involving Gross Human Rights Violations in Mexico" was held, requested by several civil society organizations. According to the organizations, the right to truth must be guaranteed through judicial and extrajudicial mechanisms that allow society and the victims to know the facts. Likewise, the right to truth requires effective investigations, professional, and independent forensic systems, reparation mechanisms that address the effects on victims due to the lack of truth and a document management system that allows memory to be reconstructed and guarantees the non repetition of human rights violations. They also stated that in Mexico there are a number of restrictions to access documents and information held by public entities related to gross human rights violations. They reported the difficulties of the victims to access the files of the investigations, the lack of delivery of copies, as well as the delivery of the fully endowed information .They also indicated that there is a fragmentation of information in complex cases due to the multiplicity of files that are distributed at the state and federal levels. Likewise, the fragmentation is evidenced when the reports of missing persons are collected and these are not necessarily linked to the preliminary investigation of the case under investigation. In addition to the above, fragmentation occurs with the partial contribution of information made by the different areas of expert services even within their own institution. According to the organizations, in the genetic area it is particularly serious, because both the PGR and the Federal Police have national genetic bases of unidentified remains and relatives of missing persons, that for the moment do not connect with each other. Likewise, the database of the PGR would only receive partial genetic information from a third of the States of the Republic.
211. The petitioners stated that there are regulations and administrative practices that hinder access to the information stored in the historical archives related to human rights violations, since the documents containing said information are endowed claiming the protection of personal data. For its part, the State reported on the General Archive of the Nation [*Archivo General de la Nación*] (AGN), a decentralized body that acts according to INAI guidelines on data protection. Based on these guidelines, documents containing information on human rights violations have been endowed. He reiterated his commitment to transparency and accountability and, as an example, referred to the implementation of the so-called open folder to which the parties can access via the Internet, in accordance with the criminal legislation victims should have access to the file and can get free copies of it[[1346]](#footnote-1346).
212. In its follow-up report on the recommendations made in its report *Situation of Human Rights in Mexico,* the IACHR welcomed the INAI joint initiative with civil society organizations to develop the project *Memory and Truth.* According to information provided by the State, this project consists of a virtual platform devoted to the dissemination of information on cases of alleged human rights violations and probable crimes against humanity. The purpose of this initiative is “to promote the guarantees of non-repetition, the right to the truth, facilitate access to information for victims, investigative bodies, adjudicatory bodies and/or guarantors of human rights, courts and any other interested party.” The information available for reference is related to the cases of Acteal, Aguas Blancas, Apatzingan, Atenco, Ayotzinapa 2011, Ayotzinapa 2014, Cadereyta, Cotton Field, El Halconazo, San Fernando 2010, San Fernando 2011, Dirty War, Tlatelolco and Tlatlaya. In order to generate useful public information, information is located then sorted and analyzed into categories of alleged violation and theme.[[1347]](#footnote-1347)
213. On July 12, the National Institute of Transparency, Access to Information and Protection of Personal Data (INAI) approved the declaration of public interest for the 15 cases of gross human rights violations included in project *Memory and Truth.*[[1348]](#footnote-1348) Commission member Areli Cano Guadiana said that INAI’s decision is a “fair response to the expectation of a society that demands to know the truth about the what happened in our history” and that the 15 cases that were recounted all have common elements “which makes it necessary for a wide opening of information related to them. Abuse of power, confrontation and the use of violence; partial and limited versions and manipulation of events are aspects that seriously undermine social coexistence and democratic rule of law and are significantly checked by public scrutiny.”[[1349]](#footnote-1349)
214. The IACHR reiterates its recommendation to the Mexican State as to regulating the power vested by the Law of Access to Information to the Office of Legal Counsel of the Office of the President to appeal any decision to declassify information made by the National Institute of Access to Information (INAI), that places national security interests in jeopardy. It also reiterates its recommendation to strengthen laws, policies and practices to ensure that judicial authorities have full access to relevant information when they investigate and prosecute cases of human rights violations attributed to members of the security forces. Also, to adopt the appropriate measures for the security agencies to gather, systematize and publish periodically information pertaining to affections of life and integrity, as a consequence of the fight against organized crime. In this regard, INAI, as the guarantor, must make sure, through compliance with its constitutional and statutory mandate, that authorities comply with their obligations of transparency and access to information. [[1350]](#footnote-1350)
215. **Surveillance of communications**
216. Over the course of 2017, complaints of violations of privacy were brought. In January, *el Diario* charged that an operations facility of the Office of the Prosecutor of Chihuahua allegedly monitored the communications of local politicians, policemen, government officials, former public servants, journalists and businessmen. This surveillance was reportedly conducted using Israeli equipment.[[1351]](#footnote-1351) Subsequently, the Attorney General of the State, César Augusto Peniche Espejel, claimed that that entity does not have an area dedicated to spying nor does it have the tools to carry out that type of activities. He asserted that, since 2014, there has been an obligation in force to have an oversight and intelligence area, but that this area dedicated to the investigation of crime and not spying.[[1352]](#footnote-1352) On January 21, *el Diario* cited the study: The State of Surveillance: Out of Control,” read the title of the story published by the Red en Defensa de los Derechos Digitales (R3D) [‘Digital Rights Defense Network’], revealing that Chihuahua is one of the Mexican entities that has relations with the private espionage company *Hacking Team.*[[1353]](#footnote-1353)
217. In February, civil society organizations decried that the Draft Law of Homeland Security[[1354]](#footnote-1354) would excessively increase the powers of the army, the navy and the air force to conduct spying on Mexican citizens. Article 28 of this draft law establishes that authorities may use “any method of information collection” to carry out intelligence activities; Article 48 of this same bill provides that “concessionaires, permit holders, operators and traders of telecommunications services and, as applicable, those authorized and service providers of applications and content” must “have the essential technical capacity to meet the demands made by the judicial authority to operate the cited measures.”[[1355]](#footnote-1355) In light of this, it should be noted that, based on the National Survey on Transparency, Access and Protection of Personal Data (ENAID), published in December 2016, 84% of the population interviewed expressed its 81.4% have the same concern with regard to their personal email address. Additionally, 61.3% of those surveyed were concerned about improper use of information on their religious beliefs and 59.5% about data related to their political opinions.[[1356]](#footnote-1356)
218. [On February 11, Citizen Lab published a study, which sprung from a petition of the organization](https://citizenlab.org/2017/02/bittersweet-nso-mexico-spyware/)  R3D,[[1357]](#footnote-1357) showing that a scientist of the National Institute of Public Health and two Mexican NGO directors had been targets of espionage through spying malware known as “Pegasus” marketed by the Israeli company NSO.[[1358]](#footnote-1358) In total, from July 18 to August 17, 2016, these three individuals received 12 sms messages with links tied to that malware. Both the scientist and the activists had actively participated in the promotion of a soft drink tax.[[1359]](#footnote-1359)
219. According to information disseminated by a group of civil society organizations,[[1360]](#footnote-1360) from January 2015 to August 2016, there were reported 97 attempts at infecting cellphones of journalists, human rights defenders, attorneys and politicians with the malware “Pegasus.”[[1361]](#footnote-1361) According to the information revealed, the malware would affect a smartphone by allowing “access to files kept on the equipment, as well as contacts, messages, emails. The malware also obtained permissions to use, without the target being aware, the microphone and camera device.”[[1362]](#footnote-1362) The incidents were also reported and investigated by the daily newspaper *The New York Times* and independent computer science experts.[[1363]](#footnote-1363)
220. Based on the statements of Dmitry Bestuzhev, director of the Research and Analysis Team for Latin America of Kaspersky Lab, Mexico’s vulnerabilities in cyber security can be viewed as heightened, inasmuch as, according to Bestuzhev, Mexico is the third most affected country in Latin America and fifth in the world by the cyber attack through the computer virus Wannacry, perpetrated on May 12.[[1364]](#footnote-1364)
221. During the hearing on Justice and Impunity in Mexico, held on Thursday July 6, 2017 at the 163rd regular session of the IACHR, the participating human rights organizations expressed their alarm over charges of spying on persons who criticized the Mexican government. They also felt that the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic (PGR) “cannot guarantee a partial and autonomous investigation,” because its criminal investigation agency is one of the entities that has acquired the aforementioned malware. As such, they claimed: “the only possible route toward justice is through the creation of an international panel of experts.”[[1365]](#footnote-1365) Additionally, during the hearing on the Special Ayotzinapa Follow-Up Mechanism, also held at the IACHR’s 163rd session, PRODH denounced attempts at spying on members of this organization.[[1366]](#footnote-1366)
222. At these hearings, the State contended that the FEADLE of the PGR opened an investigation into these incidents and that the complainants are invited to provide testimony or other evidence needed to move the investigation forward. Additionally, it reported that this special prosecutor’s office has proposed establishing partnership agreements with national and international agencies in order to “strengthen any investigation and determine, if applicable, appropriate liability.”
223. On June 21, 2017, the National Human Rights Commission of Mexico reported that it requested different federal government offices[[1367]](#footnote-1367) to “implement actions so that when they possess programs to intercept communications of telephone and computer devices, to refrain from using it against journalists, civil society organizations and human rights defenders, as well as against any other person in violation of the legal constitutional order.” In turn, it asked that, “in the event that information has been obtained through this type of program, refrain from using the information or disseminating it and have its legality assessed by the competent bodies” and that “an investigation be conducted of the incidents with professionalism, comprehensiveness, objectivity and diligence.”[[1368]](#footnote-1368) Additionally, through a joint communiqué of July 10, 2017, the Mexican State, expressed its “repudiation of any act that undermines freedom of expression and the right to privacy of persons.”[[1369]](#footnote-1369)
224. October 31, journalist Félix Bigman’s Facebook account was reportedly hacked. Bigman works at the outlets *Tu Espacio del Sureste* and *La noticia ciudadana,* where he engages in investigative journalism criticizing the government of the municipality Kanasín, Yucatán. In January, unknown individuals also appropriated his account and published news in support of the municipal government. Additionally, since the account was hacked, individuals have been threatening the journalist’s sister. On prior occasions, the journalist also had been threatened with death. Recently, on March 15 he was threatened on the street by an individual who made specific reference to his work as a journalist.[[1370]](#footnote-1370)
225. This Rapporteurship has stressed that the exercise of freedom of expression on the Internet is closely tied to the guarantee of privacy of individuals on the network. Breach of privacy in communications causes a chilling effect, reducing the full realization of freedom of expression.[[1371]](#footnote-1371)
226. **Diversity and pluralism**
227. On February 17, Jairo Cerriteño Ojeda’s radio program, which was broadcast on three radio stations, was cancelled for good. According to available information, the cancellation took place one day after the portal *Monitor Expresso*, of which Cerriteño is the director, refused to take down a story about Silvano Aureoles, the governor of Michoacán. The story involves an interview by another journalist of the governor during a meeting with migrants in Chicago, United States.[[1372]](#footnote-1372)
228. On July 20, the Title of Social Community Concession was approved and awarded to the community radio station *En Neza Radio* of Nezahualcóyotl, in the State of México. The community radio station had been in existence for more than 20 years and had been applying for the concession permits for around 14 years, but it had been denied on three occasions.[[1373]](#footnote-1373)
229. On August 15, the Plenary of the Federal Institute of Telecommunications [*Instituto Federal de Telecomunicacione*s] (IFT) authorized the merger between the AT&T Group and Time Warner (TW)[[1374]](#footnote-1374). However, the IFT identified that such a merger "could generate risks of effects that are contrary to economic competition and free competition, because the participation of AT & T in Sky Mexico and its association with Grupo Televisa, would create incentives for AT&T/TW to: (i) unilaterally, prevent access to the provision and licensing of channels and packages of Pay TV channels to third parties, other than Sky Mexico [provides pay TV services and AT&T is an indirect shareholder] and Grupo Televisa [is a shareholder of Sky Mexico], and establish barriers to entry and displace those third parties in the related Pay TV market, and (ii) coordinate or exchange information with Grupo Televisa in the provision of Pay TV channels." AT&T and TW presented a proposal of conditions to avoid those risks identified by the IFT. In this regard, the IFT conditioned its authorization to comply with the following provisions: "1. Separation of Sky Mexico with respect to the provision of channels for STAR providers by TW and AT&T at the level of Directors and Relevant Personnel. 2. Separation of HBO LAG [HBO Latin America Group] from the operations of TW in the provision of Pay TV channels; 3. Obligations to meet all requests for access to channels that TW receives from Pay TV providers and to negotiate under competitive conditions; 4. Reporting and Verification Mechanisms"[[1375]](#footnote-1375).
230. In October, the Senate Plenary approved reforms to the Federal Telecommunications and Broadcasting Law [*Ley Federal de Telecomunicaciones y Radiodifusión* ](LFTR) [[1376]](#footnote-1376). Among others, paragraph III of article 256 was eliminated, which established as a right of the audiences: "that it be clearly differentiated the news information from the opinion of the person presenting it". Although the reform obligates the concessionaires to refrain from "transmitting publicity or propaganda presented as journalistic or news information" (Article 256.IV), they will be the ones who in their own Ethics Codes "will indicate the elements and practices that they will observe to prevent and avoid carrying out the ban". The amendment to article 259 establishes that the concessionaires that provide the broadcasting service will freely designate the defender of the audience. The actions of the audience advocate shall be subject "exclusively to the Concessionaire's Code of Ethics". Previously, the defenders of the audience were subject to the general guidelines that the Federal Institute of Telecommunications [*Instituto Federal de Telecomunicaciones*] (IFT) issued on the minimum obligations of the defenders of audiences[[1377]](#footnote-1377). The IFT or other authority will not have the power to intervene or make a prior or subsequent opinion regarding the designation of the defender of the audience or the Code of Ethics issued by the concessionaire (Article 256. X). The reform also eliminated the powers of the IFT to establish "precautionary suspensions" in the matter of defense of the audiences[[1378]](#footnote-1378).
231. For its part, the Radio and Television Commission of the Chamber of Representatives approved reforms to the Federal Telecommunications and Broadcasting Law [*Ley Federal de Telecomunicaciones y Radiodifusió*n] (LFTR) and the Federal Criminal Code. Said reform, if approved by Congress, would modify article 304 of the LFTR in such a way that the ineligibility for five years to obtain new concessions would be applicable not only to those who have revoked the concession or authorization, but also to those who have been sanctioned for providing telecommunications or broadcasting services without having a concession. For its part, the amendment to Article 172 TER of the Federal Criminal Code would establish a penalty of "imprisonment of two to six years and a hundred to three hundred days fine and confiscation of instruments, objects, or product" to "use, take advantage of, or exploit" bands of frequency of the radioelectric spectrum or orbital resources without having authorization or concession"[[1379]](#footnote-1379).
232. On various occasions, the IACHR and the Office of the Special Rapporteur have recognized that community media in our region fulfill a fundamental function for the exercise by diverse sectors of society of freedom of expression and access to information.[[1380]](#footnote-1380) In that sense, it is necessary for the states to legally recognize community media and to consider fair spectrum reserves for this type of media, along with adequate conditions of access to licenses that would take into account the circumstances. Similarly, community media must benefit from fair and simple procedures for obtaining licenses, must not have to comply with technological or other types of requirements that involve disproportionate barriers for access to licenses, and in their operation must not be the target of differentiated treatments that are not adequately justified.[[1381]](#footnote-1381)
233. Principle 12 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression establishes that “monopolies or oligopolies in the ownership and control of the communication media must be subject to anti-trust laws, as they conspire against democracy by limiting the plurality and diversity which ensure the full exercise of people’s right to information. In no case should such laws apply exclusively to the media. The concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies should take into account democratic criteria that provide equal opportunity of access for all individuals.”
234. **NICARAGUA**
235. During 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression continued receiving concerning information regarding the situation of freedom of expression in Nicaragua. According to information reported by the press and civil society organizations, the practice of preventing or limiting a free access to journalists and independent communicators to a wide range of government activities allegedly continues in the country. President Daniel Ortega has not held press conferences open to all media in the ten years he has been leading the executive branch and his government's high executives are forbidden of granting interviews to unofficial media.
236. Likewise, during 2017 cases of harassment, stigmatization, and threats against journalists and human rights defenders were reported. The limitations to the work of the independent press occur in a context in which most of the television and radio media would be controlled by a duopoly composed by the presidential family and the Mexican businessman Ángel González, a situation that severely affects the plurality of voices and the access of the Nicaraguan people to independent and varied information. It was even reported that a private radio station would have yielded to pressure from the government to remove an independent news program from the air, which reportedly had a large audience. Additionally, the placement of government advertising lacks a transparent system to regulate the process, and, according to the independent media and civil society organizations, government advertising is mainly allocated to state media or media allied to the official discourse. In turn, the right to access to public information has severe restrictions, despite the existence of a law approved a decade ago, there are no implementation policies, and the existing appeals against refusal to provide information are ineffective in enforcing state agencies to guarantee the right to access to information.
237. **Attacks, threats, and intimidation to journalists and media**
238. In Nicaragua there is a hostile environment against independent journalism, the most illustrative acts of this environment are the physical attacks, the official blockade, intimidation, harassment, and espionage, as reported by the civil society organizations that participated in the hearing held within the framework of the 161st Regular Period of Sessions of the IACHR. According to the monitoring carried out by the organizations, throughout Ortega’s governments, journalists from *La Prensa*, *Canal 12*, *Canal 23*, *Canal 14*, *Canal 10*, *Esta Semana*, *Radio Corporación*, *Onda Local*, *Radio Darío*, *Confidencial*, *Associated Press,* and other national and foreign media, have been subjected to physical attacks, including damage to their audiovisual equipment, while covering events of public interest. The organizations report that in most cases the aggressors are associated to official paramilitary groups and the National Police, and have never been investigated or detained[[1382]](#footnote-1382).
239. On March 27, the newspaper *La Prensa* reported in its editorial that "immediately after" they attended the hearings of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to denounce the problems related to freedom of expression in the country, a "strong campaign to smear" the newspaper started. The attacks focused on two of its main journalists: the editor-in-chief, Eduardo Enríquez and the cartoonist Manuel Guillén, the newspaper said. The editorial stated that the Government of Nicaragua uses the strategy of attacking the credibility of independent media to discredit them in the public eye.
240. On February 28, the human right defender of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples Lottie Cunnigham, president of the Center for Justice and Human Rights of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua [*Centro por la Justicia y Derechos Humanos de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua*] (Cejudhcan), was the victim of death threats. The human rights defender would have received an anonymous message that, among other things, warned her that: "We will no longer allow you to speak against the *Frente (Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional*). One more publication in press, radio, or television, and you know what’s going to happen (...) We will annihilate you, if you want war, you will have war. War means blood." Cunnigham had already been the victim of threats in the past, and since August 8, 2016 had been granted a precautionary measure by the IACHR[[1383]](#footnote-1383).
241. On August 22, during the coverage of the trial against a person accused of setting fire to part of the *Mercado Oriental* in Managua, the *Hoy* newspaper reporter, Juan Carlos Tijerino, would have been assaulted by relatives and friends of the person convicted[[1384]](#footnote-1384).
242. On September 5, while covering the presentation of the electoral formula of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* in a Managua market, the *100% Noticias* journalist, Jefferson Cruz Díaz, would have been assaulted by the president of the Merchants' Market Association of Nicaragua [*Asociación de Comerciantes de Mercados de Nicaragua*], Jorge Gonzales, when he attempted to interview him, and also by alleged members of municipal security[[1385]](#footnote-1385).
243. With respect to the violence against journalists and others because of their exercise of freedom of expression, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has underscored, based on the inter-American doctrine and case law, the importance of three positive obligations arising from the rights to life, humane treatment, and freedom of expression, to wit: the obligation to prevent, the obligation to protect, and the obligation to investigate, prosecute, and criminally punish the persons responsible for those crimes. As the Office of the Special Rapporteur has stated, these obligations are complemented reciprocally: in order for there to be free, robust, and unrestricted public debate, it is necessary to combat violence against journalists through a comprehensive policy of prevention, protection, and the pursuit of justice.[[1386]](#footnote-1386)
244. The authorities responsible for an investigation should conduct their activities in an expedited manner, avoiding delays or unnecessary hindrances in the proceedings which could lead to impunity and infringe on judicial protections under the law. In the Joint Declaration on Crimes against Freedom of Expression the Special Rapporteurs pointed out that “authorities should make all reasonable efforts to expedite investigations, including by acting as soon as an official complaint or reliable evidence of an attack against freedom of expression becomes available.”[[1387]](#footnote-1387)
245. **Stigmatizing statements**
246. On March 8, nine Nicaraguan ministers and deputy ministers sent a letter to the US ambassador, Laura Dogu, questioning the tribute to human rights defender Vilma Nuñez, founder and president of the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights [*Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos*] (Cenidh), in the framework of International Women's Day. In the letter, the high executives questioned the decision of the ambassador to nominate Nuñez to the International Prize for Courageous Women [*Premio Internacional a las Mujeres de Coraje*], which they considered "an act of hostility" against the Nicaraguan people. They also described Núñez as "a person whose diatribes, insults, and practices have repeatedly offended the People and Government of Nicaragua."[[1388]](#footnote-1388)
247. On May 16, the Supreme Court of Justice published a press release in which it stigmatized the work of journalist Martha Vásquez and the newspaper *La Prensa*, assuring that the newspaper "deceives its readers."[[1389]](#footnote-1389) The press release refers to the "frequent defamatory practices against the Judiciary" and to the "gross manipulation" that the media carries out "as part of its campaign of permanent attacks."[[1390]](#footnote-1390) The statements were made following an article published by the journalist in which she reported that the Supreme Court had purchased high-end vehicles for its judges, at a time when the Judiciary was in an austerity plan[[1391]](#footnote-1391).
248. The following day, on May 17, security guards of the Judiciary would have prevented the journalist from entering the Central Judicial Complex [*Complejo Judicial Central*] of Managua to carry out her usual news coverage in the courts. When asked by the press about the issue, the spokesperson of the Judiciary, Roberto Larios, responded that the newspaper "has a smear and misogynistic campaign" against the president of the Judiciary, Alba Luz Ramos, and said that they didn’t have knowledge about the alleged order to ban the entrance of the journalist to the Judicial Complex[[1392]](#footnote-1392). On May 19, the newspaper *La Prensa* reported that for three consecutive days the Supreme Court of Justice denied access to the facilities of the Judicial Complex to the journalistic team of the newspaper which intended to cover the trial involving a known criminal. Reportedly, a team from the newspaper *Hoy* had also been prevented from entering.[[1393]](#footnote-1393).
249. A context of marked confrontation in which journalists are constantly insulted and stigmatized creates a climate that prevents the reasonable and plural deliberation of public issues. Tension between the press and the government is a normal phenomenon that arises from the natural function of the press and occurs in many States. However, sharp polarization shuts down opportunities for calm debate and helps neither the authorities nor the press to better fulfill their respective roles in a vigorous, deliberate, and open democracy. In such cases, given its national and international responsibilities, it is the State’s job to help create a climate of greater tolerance and respect for the ideas of others, including when those ideas are offensive or disturbing.[[1394]](#footnote-1394)
250. Public servants, like all people, are entitled to the right to freedom of expression in its many forms. Nevertheless, in their case, the exercise of this fundamental freedom acquires certain connotations and specific characteristics that have been recognized in the Inter-American case law, particularly with respect to: the special duties they acquire by virtue of their status as state officials; (b) the duty of confidentiality that may apply to certain types of information held by the State; (c) the right and duty of public officials to denounce human rights violations; and (d) the particular situation of members of the Armed Forces.[[1395]](#footnote-1395)
251. **Indirect restrictions to freedom of expression**
252. The State of Nicaragua would have continued with the practice of unduly obstructing the right of journalists and academics to seek, receive, and disseminate information of public interest. In that regard, the Government would have been continuing their policy to not authorize access to media, who were considered independent, to all kinds of official activities or information. According to the director of the organization on freedom of expression Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation [*Fundación Violeta Barrios de Chamorro*], Cristiana Chamorro, "all government actions are aimed at hindering the right of journalists and academics to seek, receive, and disseminate information of public interest.”[[1396]](#footnote-1396)
253. According to the petitioning organizations of the hearing on the situation of freedom of expression in the country held during the 161st Regular Period of Sessions of the IACHR on February 21, the authorities, e.g., prevented access to independent media and foreign correspondents to the state of the union address[[1397]](#footnote-1397). "The prohibition against independent media covers any type of government activity. From the presentation of a regular felon in a press conference by the National Police, to reports on natural disasters, presentations of the Ministry of Health about vaccines or epidemics, and even judicial hearings," the organizations said[[1398]](#footnote-1398).
254. On the other hand, according to the Inter American Press Association (IAPA) in its report on the situation of freedom of expression in Nicaragua, President Ortega would not have held press conferences open to all media since he took office in 2007[[1399]](#footnote-1399). The same situation was reported by the participating organizations of the hearing mentioned, who also added that the President would have rejected interviews with media with independent or critical editorial lines to his party, and that he also prevents his ministers from doing so[[1400]](#footnote-1400).
255. During the hearing on the "Situation of the Right to Freedom of Expression in Nicaragua", held within the framework of the 161st Regular Period of Sessions of the IACHR, on March 18 in Washington DC, the petitioners expressed their concern regarding the situation of the right to freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and access to public information in Nicaragua[[1401]](#footnote-1401). The organizations affirmed that during the 10 years of President Daniel Ortega’s government there has been "an authoritarian process of concentration of power around the Executive branch, invalidating the constitutional principle of independence and separation of powers, which as consequence affects the right to freedom of expression." They assured that the legislative, judicial, and electoral branches have no guarantees of independence, "which undermines the rule of law and the principles, which according to the Constitution, should protect freedom of expression." The petitioners pointed out that this situation has been accompanied by the adoption of laws that are harmful to freedom of expression, such as the Sovereign Security Law [*ley de Seguridad Soberana*], "which criminalizes social protest."
256. This Office of the Special Rapporteur wishes to recall that in the Joint Declaration on the regulation of the media, restrictions on journalists and the investigation of corruption, the Special Rapporteurs for Freedom of Expression of the United Nations, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), noted that accreditation schemes for journalists “are appropriate only where necessary to provide them with privileged access to certain places and/or events; such schemes should be overseen by an independent body and accreditation decisions should be taken pursuant to a fair and transparent process, based on clear and non discriminatory criteria published in advance. Accreditation should never be subject to withdrawal based only on the content of an individual journalist’s work”[[1402]](#footnote-1402).
257. **Access to public Information**
258. According to the petitioning organizations of the IACHR hearing on the situation of freedom of expression in Nicaragua held within the framework of the 161st Regular Period of Sessions of the IACHR, despite the approval of a Law on Access to Public Information [*Ley de Acceso a la Información Pública*] in Nicaragua in May 2007, citizens have seen unable to exercise such right due to the repeated refusal by multiple State agencies to respond to requests for information, as well as the refusal to fulfill obligations of active transparency. Ten years after the approval of the law, its application "has been null and void, without the sanctions provided for in the law being applied, or the request submitted being successful."[[1403]](#footnote-1403)
259. During the hearing "Extractive Industries: Access to Information", held on March 18 during the 161st Regular Period of Sessions of the IACHR, the petitioners argued that in Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Guatemala, "there are no effective and timely mechanisms on access to information and transparency" in the planning and decision making of environmental and social management of extractive projects. They also stated that during the development of extractive projects, access to information mechanisms although established in the legal framework "are not effective."
260. They indicated that "the information is insufficient, the evaluation, and environmental inspection is extremely poor, and the information on social and environmental expenses of the companies is not disclosed." They also pointed out the "ineffectiveness of administrative and judicial procedures to demand the delivery of information on concessions, tax exemptions, and payment of royalties." Nor is information on environmental impact studies or monitoring of environmental obligations by the State accessible. The petitioners identified three types of formal limitations to access information: procedural or bureaucratic; the lack of implementation of the interculturality principle (the information does not adapt to the language of the population possibly affected); and, the classification of information as confidential, secret, or reserved for reasons of security or national interest[[1404]](#footnote-1404).
261. Principle 4 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression which states that “[a]ccess to information held by the state is a fundamental right of every individual. States have the obligation to guarantee the full exercise of this right. This principle allows only exceptional limitations that must be previously established by law in case of a real and imminent danger that threatens national security in democratic societies.” Additionally, with regard to the principle of maximum disclosure the law must guarantee the effective and broadest possible access to public information, and any exceptions must not become the general rule in practice. Also, the exceptions regime should be interpreted restrictively and all doubts should be resolved in favor of transparency and access.
262. **Concentration of the media**
263. In Nicaragua, the media system has high levels of concentration and little pluralism. There is a television duopoly controlled by the family of President Ortega and Mexican businessman Ángel González[[1405]](#footnote-1405). According to the petitioning organizations, during the hearing on the situation of freedom of expression in Nicaragua held during the 161st Regular Period of Sessions of the IACHR on March 18, the Government has not complied with the constitutional mandate that orders the State to guarantee the media "is not subjected to foreign interests or the economic monopoly of any group." "This provision has been violated in two ways by the government, by encouraging open television and a large part of the radio to be in the hands of two economic groups, and by being one of the partners of this duopoly of foreign capital," they denounced.
264. As explained by the petitioners, private companies owned by the presidential family own channels 4, 8, and 13 (in VHF), which operate as "official media." Likewise, channel 6 is state owned and controlled by the Government. The Mexican businessman controls channels 2, 7, 9, 10, and 11. In total, the duopoly controls 10 television channels. Only channel 12, owned by the Valle-Flores family, would operate on open television "outside the custody of the television duopoly." This family also operates three cable channels (14, 63, and 99). In the UHF frequency, channel 41 is owned by the presidential family, while González owns channels 17, 19, and 23. According to the organizations, "all their properties are at the hands of figureheads who appear to be requesting the allocation of licenses or acquiring them, with the complicity of the State." The petitioners reported that "the existence of the television duopoly restricts the possibilities for Nicaraguans to express themselves and receive information." They maintained that the main characteristic of the channels of the Ortega-Murillo family and the businessman González, "is that they are dedicated exclusively to disseminating official propaganda (...) invalidating the principle of plurality of information sources and the possibility of public debate.”[[1406]](#footnote-1406)
265. In broadcasting, the scenario is similar, the organizations argued at the hearing. The Ortega-Murillo family owns *La Nueva Radio Ya*, *La Sandino*, and at least 10 stations, while González controls 17 radio stations. "But it is difficult to establish the total number of radio stations they control, because the Nicaraguan Institute of Telecommunications and Postal Services [*Instituto Nicaragüense de Telecomunicaciones y Correos*] (Telcor) refuses to provide information on the ownership of the licenses and there are no means of access to public information," they said[[1407]](#footnote-1407).
266. Principle 12 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression establishes that “monopolies or oligopolies in the ownership and control of the communication media must be subject to anti-trust laws, as they conspire against democracy by limiting the plurality and diversity which ensure the full exercise of people’s right to information. In no case should such laws apply exclusively to the media. The concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies should take into account democratic criteria that provide equal opportunity of access for all individuals.”
267. **Government advertising**
268. The IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur have received information on the alleged use of indirect mechanisms to hinder the development of journalism by inducing them to self-censorship. It’s of particular concern the use of the discretional power of the State for the allocation of government advertising as an instrument to reward and punish the editorial line of the media, a situation that has been denounced by various media and civil organizations. According to the report on the situation of freedom of expression in Nicaragua of the Inter American Press Association (IAPA), "Government advertising is used to reward or punish the media according to their tendencies, and is being used in a large proportion to favor the media owned by the presidential family."[[1408]](#footnote-1408)
269. According to the organizations that participated in the hearing on the situation of freedom of expression in Nicaragua during the 161st Regular Period of Sessions of the IACHR, the Government allocates advertising "without regulation or transparency, discriminating against independent media, and conferring privileges to those who are owned by the presidential family." According to a monitoring carried out by advertising agencies at the beginning of 2017, and cited by the organizations, in 2016 government institutions invested US $ 16 million 200 thousand dollars in media advertising, which represents 10% of the total advertising. 98% of government advertising goes to television, and particularly to channels 4, 8, and 13, which operate as private companies of the presidential family[[1409]](#footnote-1409).
270. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that article 13.3 of the American Convention establishes that “[t]he right of expression may not be restricted by indirect methods or means, such as the abuse of government or private controls over newsprint, radio broadcasting frequencies, or equipment used in the dissemination of information, or by any other means tending to impede the communication and circulation of ideas and opinions.” Similarly, Principle 13 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights states that “The exercise of power and the use of public funds by the state, the granting of customs duty privileges, the arbitrary and discriminatory placement of official advertising and government loans; the concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies, among others, with the intent to put pressure on and punish or reward and provide privileges to social communicators and communications media because of the opinions they express threaten freedom of expression, and must be explicitly prohibited by law.”
271. **Other relevant situations**
272. On April 3, the Board of Directors of the Nicaraguan Association of Broadcasting Professionals [*Asociación de Profesionales de la Radiodifusión Nicaragüense*] (Apranic), which owns the radio station *La Primerísima*, informed the director of the radio program "Onda local", Patricia Orozco, that they would cancel the transmission of the program. The Association did not explain the decision[[1410]](#footnote-1410). The program was one of the most popular in the country and had been on the air for 17 years. The members of the program and various social organizations expressed their concern over the decision, which they attributed to a purpose of silencing critical, independent, and inconvenient journalism to the Government. The program carried out investigative journalism, with a focus on human rights issues, and in partnership with local media and civil society organizations[[1411]](#footnote-1411).
273. On this particular, in a letter addressed to the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR, the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders [*Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Humanos*] warned about the suppression of criticism or independent journalism in the media. Likewise, the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights [*Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos*], in a letter sent to the Special Rapporteur, expressed concern over what they considered a decision "influenced by the Government."[[1412]](#footnote-1412). For his part, the director of the Media Observatory of the Center for Communication Research [*Observatorio de Medios de Comunicación del Centro de Investigación de la Comunicación*] (CINCO) of Nicaragua, Guillermo Rothschuh, condemned the closing of the radio station: "the Nicaraguan society and the different municipalities of the country lose an unconditional ally in their demands towards local and central governments." In a statement, the "Onda Local" team reported that they would continue broadcasting the program through the Internet and regretted that in the country "spaces continue to be lost in broadcasting, especially of those programs who opt for the plurality of voices, and which are not of the liking of the official, informal, state, and private media.”[[1413]](#footnote-1413)
274. **PANAMA**
275. Investigations on the EPASA publishing group continued through 2017, linked to former President Martinelli. While the prosecutor would have formalized the existence of an investigation in relation to the acquisitions of Grupo EPASA that would involve 15 companies, 2 individuals, and a law firm upon which the crime of money laundering would be imputed, meanwhile the managers of the media that are owned by EPASA, denounced that the investigations would be promoted by the government in retaliation to their coverage and claims of corruption acts of the current government. The government, meanwhile, argues that it is an investigation that depends on the prosecutor and is linked to the alleged existence of corruption of the previous government in the operation of buying some media from that group.
276. **Attacks, threats, and intimidation against journalists and the media**
277. On February 1, the newspaper *Panamá América*, part of the Panama América Publishing Group [*Grupo Editora Panamá América*] ​​(EPASA), would have reported being threatened by the Government of Panama due to its critical publications, especially the revelations that it would have made regarding the alleged involvement of relatives of the representative in congress of the ruling party, José Luis Varela, who is the brother of the President of the Republic, in the investigation of the Odebrecht case, which in Panama would involve the payment of US$ 59 million in bribes to public officials. EPASA’s claim was presented after the representative in congress of the ruling party *Partido Panameñista*, Jorge Iván Arrocha, requested, from the tribune of the Congress, that the General Prosecutor, Kenia Porcell, investigate the acquisition process of the newspapers *Panamá América*, *Crítica*, and *Día a Día*, by the EPASA group, noting that the money with which the operation was carried out would be the product of "many bribes and payoffs". On February 8, the Inter-American Press Association expressed its concern for what it considered to be "a subtle form of intimidation and censorship" by the Panamanian government[[1414]](#footnote-1414).
278. On 8 February, the Inter-American Press Association expressed its concern over what it considered "a subtle form of intimidation" on the part of the Panamanian government[[1415]](#footnote-1415). In the case of Epasa, the Attorney General, Kenia Porcell, informed the IAPA, that the Prosecutor's Office is investigating whether in the publisher's purchase in 2010, made through persons linked to former President Ricardo Martinelli (2009-2014), state funds were diverted. Roberto Rock, president of the IAPA's Committee on Freedom of the Press and Information, led a visit to Panama along with a delegation made up of Edward Seaton, former president of the IAPA and president of Seaton Newspapers, Manhattan, Kansas, United States; Raúl Kraiselburd, former president of the IAPA; Danilo Arbilla, former president of the IAPA; Jorge Canahuati, president of the Executive Committee of the IAPA and president of the OPSA Group, San Pedro Sula, Honduras and Ricardo Trotti, executive director. President Varela told the delegation that the case of EPASA depends on the investigations of the Prosecutor's Office and the judges who must assess whether corruption was committed in the event that public funds were used for the purchase. According to a public statement, the IAPA expressed its concern to President Varela "because of the political connotations that the case of EPASA could have, considering his estrangement from former President Martinelli, who was his vice president. Claims were made about alleged tax harassment against EPASA, as well as signs of discrimination with goverment advertising."
279. On June 26, Attorney General Porcell would have formalized the existence of an investigation in relation to the acquisitions by Group EPASA that would involve 15 companies, 2 individuals company, and a law firm, for which they would be charged with the crime of money laundering. The case, known as "New Business", would involve the diversion of public funds, a fact on which the Attorney General claimed to have found evidence upon detection of an offshore account that would have been used for: first, the collection of money from the public reserves and, later, for the acquisition of the *Crítica*, *Día a Día*, and *Panamá América* media outlets. EPASA Group has described the investigation as an attempt to discredit the company. Employees of the Group have publicly declared themselves against the investigation, calling it an attack against freedom of expression[[1416]](#footnote-1416). At the close of this report, the Panamanian Prosecutor's Office has reported that, as a result of the case, 20 people have been prosecuted, 3 red warnings have been issued, and one person had been arrested, while another person would be a fugitive[[1417]](#footnote-1417).
280. On July 6, journalist Alexander Arosemena, who works for the newspaper *La Prensa*, woud have been arrested by the police while operating a drone with which he took photographs of the building under construction of the new headquarters of the Apostolic Nunciature in Ciudad de Panama. The arrest would have been made at the request of the surveillance staff of the Nunciature, the latter would subsequently issue a statement in which it would allege that an "offense of violation of extraterritoriality (provided for in the Vienna Convention), as well as violations of the right of privacy and airspace rules" would have been carried out. The newspaper and journalists' organizations condemned the incident and described it as an attack on freedom of expression because neither the journalist nor the drone invaded the property. The journalist would have remained under arrest for just over four hours and then would have been released without charges being brought against him[[1418]](#footnote-1418).
281. With respect to the violence against journalists and others because of their exercise of freedom of expression, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has underscored, based on the inter-American doctrine and case law, the importance of three positive obligations arising from the rights to life, humane treatment, and freedom of expression, to wit: the obligation to prevent, the obligation to protect, and the obligation to investigate, prosecute, and criminally punish the persons responsible for those crimes. As the Office of the Special Rapporteur has stated, these obligations are complemented reciprocally: in order for there to be free, robust, and unrestricted public debate, it is necessary to combat violence against journalists through a comprehensive policy of prevention, protection, and the pursuit of justice.[[1419]](#footnote-1419)
282. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
283. **Social protest**
284. On June 12, 13, and 22 there would have been clashes between students of the *Universidad de Panamá* and members of the National Police during the protest demonstrations due to the promulgation, on June 6, of Executive Decree 130 [*Decreto Ejecutivo 130*], through which the Government of the Republic would be proposing the creation of a unique cadastral system in the country. The confrontations would have left nine civilians and six police officers injured, as well as four detained students. President Juan Carlos Varela would have issued a decree suspending the measure on June 12, but the protests would have continued in demand that Executive Decree 130 be repealed[[1420]](#footnote-1420).
285. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[1421]](#footnote-1421) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[1422]](#footnote-1422)
286. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[1423]](#footnote-1423)
287. **Other relevant situations**
288. On February 15, the Communications and Transportation Commission of the Legislative Assembly [*Comisión de Comunicación y Transporte de la Asamblea Legislativa*] discussed and approved Bill No. 465 "That establishes the inclusion of educational, cultural, or electoral education messages in regular media programming", sending it to the plenary for discussion. The initiative had been presented on September 20, 2016 by Assemblyman Noriel Salerno Estevez, of the *Partido Cambio Democrático*, and it proposes establishing as an obligation of digital media "inserting in their regular programming educational messages and cultural, as well as educating on electoral matters, which contribute to strengthening participatory democracy, values ​​such as love of the homeland, peace, respect, family harmony, and tolerance" and an obligation of print media to insert in their editions similar messages "in spaces located in sections that are fixed for advertisements to guarantee that messages are perceived by a large number of readers." The same initiative suggested that such messages would be produced by the media themselves, but in the definition of the content and extension of the same would participate the Ministries of Education and Social Development [*Ministerios de Educación y Desarrollo Social*], the National Authority of Public Services [*Autoridad Nacional de los Servicios Públicos*], the State Radio and Television Service [*Servicio Estatal de Radio y Televisión*], the Panamanian Broadcasting Association [*Asociación Panameña de Radiodifusión*], the Council of Rectors of Panama [*Consejo de Rectores de Panamá*], and the civic clubs[[1424]](#footnote-1424).
289. The initiative of representative Salerno was rejected by different organizations and media associations such as the Panamanian Broadcasting Association [*Asociación Panameña de Radiodifusión*], the National Journalism Council [*Consejo Nacional de Periodismo*], and the Inter-American Press Association, whose members described the project as a violation of the right to freedom of expression, as well as an "interference with contents and a violation of the right to property of newspaper companies." The project was withdrawn by its author on March 22[[1425]](#footnote-1425).
290. On October 23 it was announced at a press conference, that the United States Department of the Treasury would have agreed to remove the editorial group *El Siglo* from the so-called "Clinton List", a company that publishes the newspapers *La Estrella de Panamá* and *El Siglo*, after accepting the proposal of its main shareholder, Abdul Waked, to transfer, free of charge, 51 per cent of the shares of the Editorial Group to the *Fundación Publicando Historia*. The Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) would have included Waked in the "Clinton List" on May 5, 2016, after being identified as allegedly responsible for the crime of money laundering, a circumstance that involved the prohibition of individuals and companies of American origin to carry out commercial operations with the aforementioned newspapers, which put them on the verge of disappearance. The decision of the US government ended a 17 months period during which various civil society organizations and personalities of Panamanian public life pleaded to the United States government to lift restrictions imposed on the dean of Panamanian newspapers [[1426]](#footnote-1426).
291. Between September 4 and October 2, the National Public Services Authority [*Autoridad Nacional de los Servicios Públicos*] (ASEP) of Panama conducted a public consultation in order to establish the date to carry out the first phase of the "analog blackout" in the country. The ASEP informed, at the end of the consultation, that it had received only three observations, two of which were made by concession companies of television frequencies. Following the consultation, October 14, 2018 was presented as the date to carry out the first phase of the analog blackout[[1427]](#footnote-1427).
292. **PARAGUAY**
293. In 2017, demonstrations were held to protest the attempt by a group of Senators to pass a constitutional amendment that would allow for the president’s reelection. During the protests held on March 31, a group of demonstrators committed acts of violence, and police repressed protestors and—indiscriminately—journalists who were covering the events, which was of deep concern to the Office of the Special Rapporteur. Subsequent to these incidents, the State reported that a number of actions and investigations had been undertaken. In the following months, the Inter-American Commission and its Office of the Special Rapporteur called on the State numerous times to guarantee the diligent and impartial investigation of these events and determine the respective liabilities.[[1428]](#footnote-1428) The Office of the Special Rapporteur continued to document other incidents during this period involving assaults, threats, and stigmatizing statements against journalists and media workers.
294. The Office of the Special Rapporteur views with particular concern the recent introduction to Congress of a bill seeking to establish a framework to eliminate anonymity on the Internet and remove content from social media—without a court order—when it is considered offensive or alleged to be false by candidates to public office or public servants. This type of restriction can seriously affect freedom of expression and the circulation of information on matters of public interest.
295. With respect to access to public information, the Office of the Special Rapporteur recognizes the ongoing efforts of the Paraguayan State to move forward with the implementation of the law on access to public information, and encourages it to continue to take measures that help guarantee transparency and access to information of public interest. Nevertheless, the office learned of some decisions made by different bodies of the Judicial Branch in 2017 that could be “red flags” regarding the role of the Judiciary as a guarantor of the effective enjoyment of this right.
296. In addition, the Office of the Special Rapporteur underscores the establishment of the Inter-Institutional Working Group for the Safety of Journalists and the positive actions that have resulted from this space for the promotion of freedom of expression and the protection of journalists. Moreover, it encourages the State to continue working on the implementation of the security protocol for at-risk journalists that was approved in 2017, and on the adoption of a comprehensive protection mechanism. The office also joins civil society in acknowledging the decision of President Horacio Cartes to veto a provision that would have adversely affected access to, and privacy in the use of, mobile phones.
297. The Office of the Special Rapporteur also heard the public complaints of the Paraguayan Journalists’ Forum [*Foro de Periodistas Paraguayos*] and Journalists’ Union [*Sindicato de Periodistas*] regarding increased job insecurity and layoffs, which according to the journalists’ union is tied to the high concentration of media ownership in Paraguay. Additionally, the Office of the Special Rapporteur takes note of reports of political pressure on media outlets and the complaints that have arisen with regard to government advertising policy.
298. **Progress**
299. In February, the Inter-Institutional Working Group for the Safety of Journalists and the Fight against Impunity was established, consisting of members of the following organizations: the Supreme Court of Justice, the Legislative Branch, the Public Ministry, the Secretariat of Information and Communication (SICOM), the Ministry of Culture and Paraguay National Commission for UNESCO, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, the Paraguayan Journalists’ Forum, the Paraguayan Journalists’ Union, and the Paraguayan Press Photographers’ Association [*Asociación de Reporteros Gráficos del Paraguay*]. This coordinating body between the public sector and civil society was created pursuant to the Letter of Intent signed by the State and UNESCO in November 2016.[[1429]](#footnote-1429) According to the information available, the Group has been operating as a forum to engage in dialogue about the safety of journalists in Paraguay and coordinate the promotion of joint actions to help shape public policies on the issue. In the context of the State’s obligation to put an end to impunity for crimes against journalists, the trial of Vilmar “Neneco” Acosta Marques began on October 23. Acosta Marques, the former mayor of Ypejhú, was charged by the Office of the Public Prosecutor as the alleged instigator of the 2014 murders of *ABC Color* journalist Pablo Medina and his assistant, Antonia Almada.[[1430]](#footnote-1430)
300. On July 18, the Juvenile Court of Appeals [*Tribunal de Apelaciones de la Niñez y la Adolescencia*] of the Capital overturned a lower court judgment ordering the digital rights organization TEDIC to remove content from a page on its website where it condemned gender-based Internet violence against journalist Karen Ovando.[[1431]](#footnote-1431) The organization’s publication contained a screenshot of a Facebook Messenger group message to which the journalist had access and made public in order to denounce, among other things, that the message talked about raping her to “correct” her sexual orientation. One of the participants in the group chat filed a petition for a constitutional remedy [writ of *amparo*] seeking to have the content removed. The appeals court found in its judgment that the previously granted writ of *amparo* was not the appropriate judicial proceeding with which to address the issues at stake in the case.
301. **Attacks, Threats, and Harassment against Journalists and Media Outlets**
302. On March 12, journalist Eduardo González died. In March 2016, he had been found unconscious with signs of head trauma on Ruta Granero del Sur, in the Department of Itapúa.[[1432]](#footnote-1432) Addressing the incident in its 2016 report, the Paraguayan Journalists’ Union (SPP) indicated that the police had said that González died in a traffic accident, but that this version raised doubts because the motorcycle he had been riding showed no damage or signs of collision.[[1433]](#footnote-1433) According to that report, “The suspicions began to point toward local police officers that González had denounced on his radio program *El Trigal FM* for their alleged complicity in cattle theft.” The Office of the Special Rapporteur regrets that the journalist died without the circumstances of his death having been clarified, and it urges the authorities to continue investigating the facts diligently and impartially, exhausting the lines of investigation related to the victim’s professional practice of journalism.
303. On September 2, in the border city of Capitán Bado, Judge Leongino Benítez ordered the release of Felipe Escurra Rodríguez, who—according to reports—has ties to drug trafficking and has been accused of plotting to murder journalist Cándido Figueredo (a local correspondent for *ABC Color*) in retaliation for his investigative journalism.[[1434]](#footnote-1434) The Paraguayan Journalists’ Union (SPP) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) warned of the risk Figueredo faces as a result of that decision. The SPP and various media outlets indicated that “there are suspicions” regarding the judge’s action. In a press release, the Union demanded that the Judiciary investigate the judge’s action. According to the information available, on September 11 the Supreme Court ordered a review of the judge’s decision. On September 15, a delegation of the SPP and the Inter-Institutional Working Group for the Safety of Journalists and the Fight against Impunity met with authorities from the Ministry of the Interior to express their concern over the risk faced by the journalist and request that the State guarantee his safety.[[1435]](#footnote-1435)
304. The Office of the Special Rapporteur also continued to document threats and attacks on journalists and press workers reported in different areas of the country.
305. According to the information available, on December 24, 2016, journalist Blanca López of the *Sistema Nacional de Televisión* (SNT) reported having received a death threat that included members of her family. In reporting on the incident, different media outlets indicated that the threat may have been related to her coverage of drug trafficking cases.[[1436]](#footnote-1436) On December 26, 2016, journalist Raúl Cortese, a correspondent for *Telefuturo* and the newspaper *Última Hora*, reported having been intimidated with threats and gunshots by the occupant of a property and his guards while he was conducting a journalistic investigation in the district of Mayor Otaño, in the Department of Itapúa.[[1437]](#footnote-1437)
306. On the night of January 17, 2017, journalist Nino Silguero Rodas, a broadcaster on *Radio Panambi Vera* of Villarica in the Department of Guairá and correspondent for *970 AM*, had his car set on fire by unknown persons outside his house. The same day, the Paraguayan Journalists’ Union publicly condemned the incident and demanded security for the journalist and his family.[[1438]](#footnote-1438) In February, TV journalist Fernando Sotelo of the town of Hohenau in the Department of Itapúa reported that he had been threatened by Adolar Schlender, the mayor of Jesús de Tavarangüe, and pressured not to report on an investigation that the Office of the Comptroller General of the Republic was conducting into alleged irregularities in the municipal government.[[1439]](#footnote-1439) According to the journalist, the mayor told him that if he published the information, things would “go very badly” for him.
307. On March 21, photographer Juan Agüero of *Última Hora* and columnist Alejandro López and cameraman Gustavo Avalos of *Telefuturo* were assaulted by a group of law students from the National University of Asunción (UNA) who were taking part in a final campaign event for the election of Student Center leaders.[[1440]](#footnote-1440),[[1441]](#footnote-1441) According to publicly available information, the supervisory criminal court ordered the house arrest of two students charged with assaulting the press workers.[[1442]](#footnote-1442)
308. According to the information available, on April 6, Grupo Multimedia S.A. filed a complaint with the Public Ministry against unnamed individuals responsible for messages circulating on social media advocating for the building that houses the digital newspaper *Hoy* to be set on fire, “with its journalists inside.”[[1443]](#footnote-1443)
309. Also in April, a team of journalists from *Telefé Noticias* of Argentina that was investigating the marijuana trafficking route in Pedro Juan Caballero had to abruptly suspend its work and leave the country due to alleged death threats.[[1444]](#footnote-1444) On August 26, journalist Clara Martínez of *Red Paraguaya de Comunicaciones* (RPC) was harassed by fans of the Cerro Porteño soccer club while covering the aftermath of a soccer match. The SPP found that the journalist was subjected to sexual coercion and condemned all forms of violence and discrimination against women journalists. For its part, the directors of the soccer club also denounced the act of violence and expressed their solidarity with the reporter.[[1445]](#footnote-1445)
310. On October 12, the newspaper *ABC Color* reported that its journalist Gladys Benítez was threatened by the head of the National Land and Rural Development Institute [*Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Rural y de la Tierra*] (Indert), Justo Pastor Cárdenas, based on the publication of information about the origin of his assets and his alleged enrichment.[[1446]](#footnote-1446) According to the newspaper, the official reportedly warned the journalist: “Gladys, do not mess with or bother my children. I am the only one who is going to get into your dirty and miserable war. If you mess with my kids, I will mess with yours. Don’t fuck with that. For my family, I am capable of doing things that wouldn’t even occur to you. Let that be very clear.” SPP condemned the act before the Senate’s Human Rights Committee and held a march repudiating the threat.[[1447]](#footnote-1447)
311. With respect to the violence against journalists and others because of their exercise of freedom of expression, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has underscored, based on the inter-American doctrine and case law, the importance of three positive obligations arising from the rights to life, humane treatment, and freedom of expression, to wit: the obligation to prevent, the obligation to protect, and the obligation to investigate, prosecute, and criminally punish the persons responsible for those crimes. As the Office of the Special Rapporteur has stated, these obligations are complemented reciprocally: in order for there to be free, robust, and unrestricted public debate, it is necessary to combat violence against journalists through a comprehensive policy of prevention, protection, and the pursuit of justice.[[1448]](#footnote-1448)
312. The Office of the Special Rapporteur notes that “violence committed against female journalist as a result of their work has a particular characteristics streaming from the social constructs of gender and discrimination.”[[1449]](#footnote-1449) The United Nations Special Rapporteur in the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Opinion and Expression stated in his report on the protection of journalist and media that a “gender-sensitive approach is therefore needed when considering measures to address the issue of violence against journalists.”[[1450]](#footnote-1450) The Office of the Special Rapporteur reiterates that States have a reinforced obligation to act with due diligence to prevent violence against female journalists.[[1451]](#footnote-1451)
313. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
314. **Social Protest**
315. During the demonstrations that were held on March 31 to protest the decision of a group of senators to amend the rules of the upper house of Congress to pass a constitutional amendment allowing for presidential reelection, a significant number of demonstrators and journalists were reportedly injured as a result of the indiscriminate use of tear gas and rubber bullets by police. Additionally, according to publicly available information, police raided the headquarters of the opposition party *Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico* in the early morning hours of April 1, beating and shooting at demonstrators inside the premises. A young party leader named Rodrigo Quintana died from multiple gunshot wounds. On April 1, Interior Minister Miguel Tadeo Rojas, as well as the Commander of the National Police, were removed from office as a consequence of the police actions during the protests.
316. On April 3, the IACHR issued a statement urging the State to comply with its international obligations to respect and guarantee human rights in this context, particularly the full enjoyment of the rights to life, humane treatment, and personal freedom of protestors, as well as the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and political participation.[[1452]](#footnote-1452) According to the information received by the Office of the Special Rapporteur, while they were covering the public demonstration outside Congress, 23 journalists and media workers were assaulted by law enforcement officers during the repression of the protests. On April 7, in a joint action facilitated by the Inter-Institutional Working Group for the Safety of Journalists and the Fight against Impunity, the Paraguayan Journalists’ Union, the Paraguayan Journalists’ Forum (FOPEP), and the Press Photographers’ Association filed a formal complaint regarding the attacks on the press workers before the Public Ministry’s Office of the Assistant Human Rights Prosecutor [*Fiscalía Adjunta de Derechos Humanos*].[[1453]](#footnote-1453)
317. On May 26, during a public hearing convened by the IACHR *ex officio* during its 162nd Session held in Buenos Aires, the FOPEP and the Paraguayan Photojournalists’ Association presented videos and evidence of the repression unleashed against press workers during the aforementioned protests. Civil society affirmed that journalists and media workers were “deliberately and indiscriminately attacked by the National Police under superior orders to the effect that there not be any record of the repression perpetrated by the National Police against the protestors.”[[1454]](#footnote-1454) According to reports, the most serious case was that of press photographer José Bogado of the newspaper *Última Hora*, who was hit by 18 rubber bullets.[[1455]](#footnote-1455) According to reports, other journalists, camerapersons, and photographers were injured by rubber bullets and beatings. In some cases, their work equipment was also damaged. For its part, the State provided an account of the actions taken thus far to identify and punish those responsible for the repression. It admitted that the repression of journalists is unacceptable, but asserted that at this stage of the investigations it was not possible to establish that there was a deliberate attempt to impede the work of journalists, as reported. During the hearing, the State announced the imminent approval of a security protocol for journalists in high-risk situations.
318. The IACHR expressed concern over the reports and videos presented by civil society at the hearing, which showed an excessive use of force by the police against demonstrators and members of the press who were covering the protests. It asked the State about the status of the investigations to identify and punish the members of the security forces involved in the assault on the press and the killing of a *Partido Liberal* leader that night. It also reminded the State of the inter-American standards on the need to train police in procedures and use of force during demonstrations. On August 9, various media outlets reported that the Public Ministry had charged two police officers with assaulting two members of the press who had been covering the incidents of March 31 outside Congress.[[1456]](#footnote-1456) Additionally, according to the information available, in April the Bar Association of Alto Paraná and the Paraguayan Bar Association reportedly filed a complaint with the police authorities of Alto Paraná concerning the violent repression of young demonstrators on the *Puente de la Amistad* [Friendship Bridge] during the public protests held in that town in the early morning hours of April 1.[[1457]](#footnote-1457)
319. Regarding these same incidents, on August 8, the United Nations Committee against Torture adopted its Concluding Observations on the seventh periodic report of the State of Paraguay. The Committee expressed its concern “over reports alleging the disproportionate use of force by the national police, including acts of torture and ill-treatment inflicted upon arrested persons, during the riots that occurred in connection with the protests in Asunción on 31 March and 1 April 2017.” It additionally expressed concern about the “the alleged extrajudicial killing” of political leader Rodrigo Quintana during the police operation carried out on April 1, and urged the State to investigate and punish these acts.[[1458]](#footnote-1458)
320. In July and August, peasant leaders and the Human Rights Coordinating Committee of Paraguay (Codehupy) reported that police had placed restrictions on the peasant demonstrations held in Asunción to demand the enactment of a law to resolve debt problems in the sector.[[1459]](#footnote-1459) On August 6, the Ministry of the Interior and the National Police issued a statement announcing that during the peasant demonstrations the Police would continue to implement “preventive controls throughout the country in order to prevent acts that infringe upon or violate public order and the rights of others."[[1460]](#footnote-1460) The statement specified that the officers would not carry firearms during the demonstration.
321. On September 8, a student was forcibly removed from an official ceremony at the Encarnación National Technical School in which the President of the Republic and other national authorities were taking part, for carrying a sign that said, “free school lunch for all.”[[1461]](#footnote-1461) On September 12, Codehupy released a statement condemning the existence of a policy restricting public demonstrations and freedom of expression during different social protests that took place in 2017.[[1462]](#footnote-1462)
322. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[1463]](#footnote-1463) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[1464]](#footnote-1464)
323. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[1465]](#footnote-1465)
324. **Stigmatizing Statements:**
325. According to publicly available information, during a public ceremony held on June 23 in Ciudad del Este, Paraguayan President Horacio Cartes reportedly accused two journalists of inciting violence and insinuated that they should be jailed for their coverage of the political crisis of March 31.[[1466]](#footnote-1466) *ABC Color* reported that, although the president had not named the journalists directly, his statements were directed at Menchi Barriocanal and Óscar Acosta, journalists from *Telefuturo* and *radio Monumental*. The president reportedly said: “There is a married couple that, if there is justice, should be there (in prison) with Stiben Patron as well, because they incited violence (on March 31).” The Paraguayan Journalists’ Union, the Paraguayan Journalists’ Forum, and Amnesty International issued different statements rejecting the president’s assertions.
326. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that public servants have the duty to ensure that their statements do not infringe upon the rights of those who contribute to public deliberation through the expression and dissemination of their thoughts, such as journalists, media outlets, and human rights defense organizations. They must be mindful of the context in which they express themselves in order to ensure that their statements do not constitute, in the words of the Court, “forms of direct or indirect interference or harmful pressure on the rights of those who seek to contribute with public deliberation through the expression and diffusion of their thoughts.”[[1467]](#footnote-1467)
327. **Mechanisms of Protection**
328. The Inter-Institutional Working Group for the Safety of Journalists and the Fight against Impunity, comprised by representatives of different public agencies and civil society, was established in February 2017. The Working Group has facilitated the coordination of actions to promote and protect freedom of expression and journalists’ safety.[[1468]](#footnote-1468) In view of this development, on May 4, IACHR Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza met with the Group to receive information about the initiative and mark the beginning of a forum for technical advice and exchange in furtherance of risk prevention and the protection of journalists in Paraguay. From May 3 to 5, the Special Rapporteur traveled to Asunción to participate in the regional celebration events in the framework of World Press Freedom Day. Events of celebration were organized by the Inter-institutional Table. Special Rapporteur Edison Lanza met with the Table in order to receive information about the initiative and to start a space for exchange and technical advice on the progress of the prevention and protection of journalists in Paraguay. During his stay in the country, the Office of the Special Rapporteur also held meetings with government authorities, including a meeting with the Attorney General, Dr. Javier Díaz Verón, who reaffirmed his commitment to the protection of journalists and the fight against impunity.
329. On June 22, through Resolution 538 of 2017, the National Police adopted the Protocol for the Safety of Journalists in High-Risk Situations. The resolution states that the Protocol was drafted by the Permanent Committee for the Study of Laws and Regulations [*Comisión Permanente de Estudio de Leyes y Reglamentos*], in conjunction with members of the Paraguayan Journalists’ Union (SPP) and the Paraguayan Journalists’ Forum (FOPEP).[[1469]](#footnote-1469) It establishes the procedure to be followed by the National Police in the case of “complaints of threats lodged by journalists in high-risk situations.” The procedure stipulates that when such a complaint is received, it must be reported to the Departmental Police Headquarters and the background information must be forwarded to the Public Ministry. The Bureau of Prevention and Security [*Dirección General de Prevención y Seguridad*] will supervise all measures taken pursuant to the Protocol, and to that end a database will be compiled in coordination with the SPP and the FOPEP. It further specifies that, when a complaint is received, “it is recommended to establish an analysis group made up of representatives of the Police institution and the journalistic trade associations.”
330. In addition, during 2017 several committees of the House of Representatives issued opinions on the draft law on “freedom of expression and the protection of journalists, press workers, and human rights defenders,” introduced on November 17, 2016. As of this writing, the bill had not been considered by the full House. Its debate was postponed during various plenary sessions.[[1470]](#footnote-1470)
331. The IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur have identified some of the requirements for the protection mechanisms to be effective. They stress, for example: 1) the importance of guaranteeing the necessary personnel and financial resources for the adequate implementation of the mechanism; 2) the need to ensure effective coordination among the entities responsible for the implementation of measures of prevention, protection and administration of justice; 3) the need to adequately define protective measures called for in the mechanism and the procedure for their adoption; 4) the need to guarantee the full participation of journalists, civil society and beneficiaries in the implementation and operation of the mechanism; and 5) the benefits of seeking support from the international community for the mechanism’s operation.[[1471]](#footnote-1471)
332. **Access to Public Information**
333. September marked the two year anniversary of the entry into force of Law 5282/2014 on “free citizen access to public information and governmental transparency.” According to the information available, 156 institutions had joined the unified portal www.informacionpublica.gov.py by early October.
334. As publicly reported by the Ministry of Justice, during 2017 its Office of Access to Public Information continued with the process of publicizing the law and training public servants.[[1472]](#footnote-1472) Civil society organizations have also promoted and disseminated the law during this period, including by signing agreements with public institutions to enhance the training of their employees.[[1473]](#footnote-1473) Nevertheless, the Office of the Special Rapporteur received information pointing to ongoing difficulties in the implementation of the provision at the municipal level, given that most municipal governments had still not joined the Access to Public Information Portal.[[1474]](#footnote-1474)
335. Members of the print media and civil society have also continued to demand that the State guarantee the right to access to public information and transparency in different spheres.[[1475]](#footnote-1475) On September 28, various aspiring presidential candidates signed an agreement in favor of transparency and free access to information on the occasion of the International Day for Universal Access to Information. The initiative was promoted by the Access to Information Group [*Grupo Impulsor de Acceso a la Información*] (GIAI).[[1476]](#footnote-1476)
336. On July 7, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court dismissed *in limine* a constitutional challenge filed by a citizen seeking to overturn an appellate court judgment handed down in October 2016. That judgment had held that information on the amounts of taxes and fees owed by the top 100 delinquent taxpayers of the Municipality of Encarnación had to be disclosed with the names of third parties expressly excluded.[[1477]](#footnote-1477)
337. On September 21, the Sixth Civil and Commercial Court of Appeals [*Sexta Sala del Tribunal de Apelaciones en lo Civil y Comercial*] ordered the Tribunal for the Prosecution of Judges [*Jurado de Enjuiciamiento de Magistrados*] (JEM) to turn over to two lawyers from the Paraguayan Lawyers’ Coordinating Committee [*Coordinadora de Abogados del Paraguay*] a copy of the minutes of their regular and extraordinary sessions and other information about the hiring of public employees.[[1478]](#footnote-1478) In stating the reasoning for its ruling on the writ of *amparo* through which the lawyers sought access to this and other information from the JEM, the Court found that the requested instruments were different from the decisions of the Tribunal, and because they were not secret or confidential under any provision of law, they had to be considered public documents.
338. On September 29, the 17th Civil and Commercial Trial Court [*Juzgado de Primera Instancia Civil y Comercial de 17º Turno*] dismissed a request for the Judicial Council [*Consejo de la Magistratura*] to disclose the results of the psycho-technical tests administered to applicants. The Court held that such information “could” contain “sensitive data” that would violate the constitutionally protected right to the protection of privacy. The judgment rejected the possibility of partially publishing such information (Art. 37 of Decree 4064/2015) “given the highly technical nature of the way in which the test results are displayed.” The GIAI asserted that the information placed by the Judicial Council in the court file and the information published on its website was not enough to weigh each candidate, which it considered key to understanding the reasoning for each decision.[[1479]](#footnote-1479) In administrative proceedings, the Judicial Council had denied access to the decision of the honor committee, which was later turned over pursuant to the *amparo* proceedings.[[1480]](#footnote-1480) On October 5, the GIAI appealed the trial court’s decision. [[1481]](#footnote-1481) On November 6, the Court of Appeals in Civil and Commercial Matters [*Tribunal de Apelaciones en lo Civil y Comercial*], First Chamber, confirmed the first instance judgment[[1482]](#footnote-1482).
339. Principle 4 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression which states that “[a]ccess to information held by the state is a fundamental right of every individual. States have the obligation to guarantee the full exercise of this right. This principle allows only exceptional limitations that must be previously established by law in case of a real and imminent danger that threatens national security in democratic societies.” Additionally, with regard to the principle of maximum disclosure the law must guarantee the effective and broadest possible access to public information, and any exceptions must not become the general rule in practice. Also, the exceptions regime should be interpreted restrictively and all doubts should be resolved in favor of transparency and access.
340. **Internet and freedom of expression**
341. On October 10, Representative Edgar Ortiz introduced a bill that would require the providers of online applications and social networks to immediately suspend and remove—at the request of the affected parties—any offensive or defamatory remark written anonymously on their websites against political parties, movements, or electoral candidates until the author is identified by his or her full name, identification, and social security number.[[1483]](#footnote-1483) The initiative provides that once the author of the online commentary is fully identified, the providers of the online applications and social networks can allow it to remain online. Civil society organizations warned that the initiative “violates the freedom of expression of citizens and is a direct attack on the right to political participation without fear of retaliation,” and asked Congress to reject the bill.
342. The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression has underscored that, because freedom of expression and privacy are closely related, the States should avoid the implementation of any measure that arbitrarily or abusively restricts the privacy of individuals. This is broadly understood to mean all private and anonymous space, free of intimidation and retaliation, necessary for an individual to be able to freely form an opinion and express his or her ideas, as well as to seek and receive information. In that regard, it has underscored that the protection of the right to privacy entails at least two specific policies connected to the exercise of the right to freedom of thought and expression: the protection of anonymous speech and the protection of personal data.[[1484]](#footnote-1484)
343. **Surveillance of Communications**
344. On April 20, the organization TEDIC presented a report evaluating the country’s six most important telecommunications companies.[[1485]](#footnote-1485) Upon releasing the report, **the organization emphasized the need for these companies to strengthen their standards for the protection of personal communications data and guarantees for complying with the rights of their users.** TEDIC stated that, “State-owned companies, such as COPACO and VOX, provide traffic data (metadata) to the Public Ministry, without a judicial warrant.” [[1486]](#footnote-1486) With respect to the content of communications, according to the results of the investigation, the companies examined agreed to turn over data on the content of a user’s communications to justice authorities provided that there is a prior court order.
345. On September 25, the President of the Republic Horacio Cartes vetoed parts of the draft “Law regulating the activity of mobile telephone service,” which governs the activation of this type of telephone service.[[1487]](#footnote-1487) The bill provides that sales agents must demand that the person requesting service meet a number of requirements prior to the activation of that service, including filling out a form on which “the right thumbprint” of both the requester and the sales agent must be placed. The president’s objection indicated that the prerequisites for activating service “would be a barrier to citizens’ access to telecommunications,” and that “the collection of biometric data could be dangerous because [a fingerprint] it is a unique piece of data that should be treated with extreme care.” Accordingly, he concluded that the bill “fails to provide the minimum standards” that should govern the collection of personal data. The organization TEDIC noted that the objection to this bill is “a favorable precedent for the right to privacy of persons who access the Internet through their mobile devices.”[[1488]](#footnote-1488)
346. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has observed that decisions to conduct surveillance that invades individual privacy should be authorized by independent judicial authorities, who should state the reasons why the measure is suitable for accomplishing the aims pursued in the specific case; whether it is sufficiently limited so as not to affect the right in question more than necessary, and whether it is proportional to the interest being promoted. Moreover, investigative processes that entail an invasion of privacy that is legally authorized and ordered by a judge of competent jurisdiction must respect other rights related to due process. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has also indicated that the reasons for the decisions adopted by the courts in such cases should be made public.
347. **Diversity and Pluralism**
348. According to the Paraguayan Journalists’ Union, the documented concentration of media ownership in the country is one “of the main causes of violations of the right to communication and information, and makes arbitrariness and abuses of power a daily reality.”
349. The report further stated that, “The limited number of media outlets reduces the flow and quality of information and jeopardizes the independence of journalists, who—in an increasingly restricted labor market—have less freedom to fulfill their duty to inform, and are more susceptible to pressure and self-censorship.”[[1489]](#footnote-1489) According to an alert issued by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), between July and August of 2017, 18 journalists were fired “from the large media groups in Paraguay,” having been “let go because they dissented from the editorial line of their employer media outlet (…) or because they organized to obtain better salaries and working conditions.”[[1490]](#footnote-1490)
350. At the public hearing held during the 162nd Session of the IACHR, the Paraguayan Journalists’ Forum and the Paraguayan Photojournalists’ Association expressed concern over the fact that “sixty-five percent of the media outlets are in the hands of the family” of the President of the Republic. The representatives of the State were unaware of the source of this figure.[[1491]](#footnote-1491)
351. On January 12, Unicanal S.A. and Teledifusora Paraguaya S.A. publicly disclosed an “agreement of intent,” “subject to the prior approval of Conatel,” for the purchase of *Red Paraguaya de Comunicación Canal 13*. With this sale, the channel would become part of Grupo JBB, which is owned by businessman Javier Bernardes and also owns the cable TV channel *Unicanal SA*.[[1492]](#footnote-1492) In addition, in June, the National Telecommunications Commission (Conatel) awarded licenses for two new digital commercial television channels. The awardees were Mercuria SA and DTH Magnética SA, companies reportedly owned by Argentine and Paraguayan interests. The new free-to-air television channels have 18 months to begin operations.[[1493]](#footnote-1493)
352. Principle 12 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression establishes that “monopolies or oligopolies in the ownership and control of the communication media must be subject to anti-trust laws, as they conspire against democracy by limiting the plurality and diversity which ensure the full exercise of people’s right to information. In no case should such laws apply exclusively to the media. The concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies should take into account democratic criteria that provide equal opportunity of access for all individuals.”
353. **Community Broadcasting**
354. In numerous reports, members of the community broadcasting sector continued to complain that community radio stations critical of the government were subject to persecution, bureaucratic restrictions, and financial subsistence problems to the extent that they are unable to obtain advertisers.[[1494]](#footnote-1494) In addition, during the public hearing **on the right to freedom of expression and community radio in the Southern Cone** held during the IACHR’s 162nd Session, the petitioner organizations asserted that the country’s laws continue to be discriminatory and fail to consider the respective inter-American standards.[[1495]](#footnote-1495) Furthermore, “journalists and community radio broadcasters are frequently subject to threats and attacks from criminal organizations as well as from government authorities, in a climate of serious impunity,” according to a report by Reporters Without Borders.[[1496]](#footnote-1496)
355. Similarly, according to information from the Observatory of the Paraguayan Journalists’ Union, the National Telecommunications Commission (Conatel) issued a decision on February 15 notifying the community radio station *Record FM* of Arroyito, in the Department of Concepción, that its authorization to provide service was being terminated. According to SPP, the stated reason was the expiration of the station’s license, and it reportedly received notice of the decision two days before the first municipal elections were held in Arroyito.*[[1497]](#footnote-1497)* Those affected asserted that the measure was politically motivated.
356. On various occasions, the IACHR and the Office of the Special Rapporteur have recognized that community media in our region fulfill a fundamental function for the exercise by diverse sectors of society of freedom of expression and access to information.[[1498]](#footnote-1498) In that sense, it is necessary for the states to legally recognize community media and to consider fair spectrum reserves for this type of media, along with adequate conditions of access to licenses that would take into account the circumstances. Similarly, community media must benefit from fair and simple procedures for obtaining licenses, must not have to comply with technological or other types of requirements that involve disproportionate barriers for access to licenses, and in their operation must not be the target of differentiated treatments that are not adequately justified.[[1499]](#footnote-1499)
357. **Government Advertising**
358. According to publicly available information, on February 8, Paraguay’s Vice President Juan Afara met with members of the Paraguayan Broadcasters’ Union [*Unión de Radiodifusores del Paraguay*] to propose a political and business relationship to facilitate informing the public about government works and “good news” about public administration.[[1500]](#footnote-1500) During his speech, the Vice President expressed his intent to strengthen ties with “legal” broadcasters and stressed the need for “the truth to reach” citizens in a context in which there are “ill-intentioned” people who “undermine” the government’s work, and promised to maintain “business ties” with the broadcasters through Sicom and Conatel.[[1501]](#footnote-1501) On February 9, the Association of Community Radio Stations and Alternative Media Voices Paraguay [*Asociación de Radios Comunitarias y Medios Alternativos Voces Paraguay*] issued a statement questioning the government’s action.[[1502]](#footnote-1502) The Inter American Press Association (IAPA) was also aware of this situation: according to the report on Paraguay from the mid-year meeting of the Inter American Press Association, held from March 31 to April 3, 2017 in Guatemala, “The existence of denunciations by social organizations of pressures from those in power against news media has given rise to questions about governmental interference in press freedom.” It further noted that, “[Added to this is] the government initiative to pay owners of radio stations for them to broadcast news favorable to the government. This explicit offer was made by Paraguayan Vice President Juan Afara in February.”[[1503]](#footnote-1503)
359. According to the information available, in September, Senator Víctor Bogado (ANR) filed a complaint alleging defamation [*difamación, calumnia e injuria*] against the director of the newspaper *ABC Color*, Aldo Zuccolillo, and seeking compensation of $PYG 5 million 400 thousand (approximately US$ 956 thousand). The congressman reportedly filed a similar complaint in 2016. The newspaper has investigated and raised questions about the growth of the congressman’s assets.[[1504]](#footnote-1504)
360. In October, the Ministry of Education and Culture passed a resolution prohibiting the dissemination and use of printed and digital materials referring to “gender theory and/or ideology” in schools within the Ministry’s purview.[[1505]](#footnote-1505)
361. Principle 13 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights states that “The exercise of power and the use of public funds by the state, the granting of customs duty privileges, the arbitrary and discriminatory placement of official advertising and government loans; the concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies, among others, with the intent to put pressure on and punish or reward and provide privileges to social communicators and communications media because of the opinions they express threaten freedom of expression, and must be explicitly prohibited by law.”
362. **PERU**
363. The Executive has made efforts to recognize the work of the press and to create an environment free of threats for the exercise of journalism and freedom of expression in Peru. However, threats to freedom of expression have emerged from the majority of the legislative branch, some of whose members have submitted bills that seek to establish state controls over information, in the name of "veracity", among other ways to condition the press. A project that proposes impeding the exercise of journalism by media executives when they are involved in alleged acts of corruption was also presented; the latter was a matter of concern for the Office of the Special Rapporteur.
364. Violence against journalists and the media continues to be an unresolved issue in different areas of the country, where attacks, threats have occurred, and even an aberrant murder that took place in the town of Sayán that still remains unpunished.
365. The permanence in the legal system of crimes such as defamation and insults continues to give rise to criminal complaints against Peruvian journalists and columnists for reporting or commenting on matters of public interest. Due to this, several media workers have had to face criminal convictions at the district level for this type of proceedings. The role of the courts of appeal and the Supreme Court has been important in ensuring a balance that takes into account the public interest for information, the importance of investigative journalism, and a robust opinion, in a democratic society.
366. **Murders**
367. On February 27, the lifeless body of journalist José Feliciano Yactayo Rodríguez, who worked as an independent journalist and audiovisual producer, was found. His dismembered body was found in Andahuasi, a village in the district of Sayán, in the province of Huaura, department of Lima. According to the information released, Yactayo would have disappeared two days before, after meeting with some friends near his home in the city of Lima.
368. On April 9, the authorities informed of the arrest of Wilfredo Zamora Carrión, who was allegedly responsible for the crime. In these events, businessman Aldo Cáceda Benvenuto has also been involved for, presumably, helping Zamora. The authorities have not reported whether the murder was linked to the journalistic activities of the victim[[1506]](#footnote-1506).
369. With respect to the violence against journalists and others because of their exercise of freedom of expression, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has underscored, based on the inter-American doctrine and case law, the importance of three positive obligations arising from the rights to life, humane treatment, and freedom of expression, to wit: the obligation to prevent, the obligation to protect, and the obligation to investigate, prosecute, and criminally punish the persons responsible for those crimes. As the Office of the Special Rapporteur has stated, these obligations are complemented reciprocally: in order for there to be free, robust, and unrestricted public debate, it is necessary to combat violence against journalists through a comprehensive policy of prevention, protection, and the pursuit of justice.[[1507]](#footnote-1507)
370. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
371. **Attacks, threats, and intimidation to journalists and the media**
372. During 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur learned of several events in which a dozen journalists and a media outlet were subjected to acts of restriction or harassment to their journalistic work. Several of these events were carried out by state agents, and others are related to conflicts between communities and extractive industry actors in Peru, which led to the arrest of nine journalists and the expulsion of two of them from the country.
373. On February 3, journalist Marco Bonifacio Sánchez, host of the program *'El Canillita'*, which is broadcasted on *Turbo MIx Radio y Televisión*, would have been ambushed by unknown individuals, who put him in a vehicle, beat him and tortured him, and even tried to cut off his tongue. The attack would have occurred in the city of Cajamarca, capital of the province of the same name, at night when the journalist was walking back to his home. According to his colleague, Ronald Tiper, the attack would be linked to the broadcasting of a video, made by Bonifacio, in which acts of corruption by the mayor of Cajamarca, Manuel Becerra Vílchez, would have been presented[[1508]](#footnote-1508).
374. On April 21, agents of the National Police, accompanied by immigration agents, would have detained in Cuzco the American documentary filmmaker John Dougherty and the Canadian activist Jennifer Moore, under accusations of carrying out prohibited activities under the tourist status in which they entered Peru on April 15. According to information of public knowledge, Dougherty and Moore participated in the showcase of the documentary "*Fraude de Flin Flon*" which denounced the negative consequences that the activity of the mining company HudBay Minerals, of Canadian origin, would have had for the populations of diverse countries in the continent. After being detained a few hours, both were released and, according to press reports, they had traveled to Bolivia on the recommendation of their lawyers before the hearing to which they were summoned by Peruvian immigration authorities on April 25. The Government of Peru would have prohibited them from entering the country as a result of these events[[1509]](#footnote-1509).
375. On July 12, the director of the digital media *Chimbotenlinea* reported an alleged act of intimidation against the aforementioned media, carried out by the Office of the General Attorney of District of the Santa Province's [*Ministerio Público del Distrito Fiscal de la provincia de Santa*], by distributing a press release in which it would scold the publication of information related to a criminal investigation carried out by the Specialized Corporate Provincial Prosecutor's Office against Organized Crime [*Fiscalía Provincial Corporativa Especializada contra la Criminalidad Organizada*], which would involve a criminal gang operating in the area. According to the authorities' press release, this information would be classified as confidential and they considered that its disclosure would affect the investigations and "represents a risk to the physical and psychological integrity of the Prosecutor in charge of the case", which is why they would have warned about the possibility of it resulting in criminal, civil and administrative sanctions against the media. The warnings were condemned by various journalistic organizations that considered them a threat to journalists for publishing information of public interest [[1510]](#footnote-1510).
376. On October 20, the police would have detained journalists Martín Ramos Mamani, of *Stereo Uno*:; Walter Porras Laguna, from the weekly *Vista Previa*; Carlos Zuñiga Zeballos, of *TV Austral*; Jesús Fernández Rivera, of *TV Unsa*; Giancarlo Aragón Villanueva, from *Quatro T*V; Jorge Gámez Zuñiga, of the newspaper *Sin Fronteras,* and Julio Revilla Riega while they were covering a community protest against the mining company Buenaventura, in the province of Castilla. According to the information released, the community members were accused of illegally entering the land where the Paula mine is located, an act that provoked the police to be present, registering the detention of some fifty community members and the seven media workers covering the events. Various union groups reported that the media workers would had been subject to physical attacks and threats[[1511]](#footnote-1511).
377. With respect to the violence against journalists and others because of their exercise of freedom of expression, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has underscored, based on the inter-American doctrine and case law, the importance of three positive obligations arising from the rights to life, humane treatment, and freedom of expression, to wit: the obligation to prevent, the obligation to protect, and the obligation to investigate, prosecute, and criminally punish the persons responsible for those crimes. As the Office of the Special Rapporteur has stated, these obligations are complemented reciprocally: in order for there to be free, robust, and unrestricted public debate, it is necessary to combat violence against journalists through a comprehensive policy of prevention, protection, and the pursuit of justice.[[1512]](#footnote-1512)
378. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
379. **Social protest**
380. During the month of January, at least two clashes between protesters and the police would have taken place, resulting in 11 wounded individuals-including a child and six police officers- and about 70 detainees. The events would have taken place on January 5 and 12, when residents of the Puente Piedra district, in the Province of Lima, protested against the establishment of a toll fee on the Panamericana Norte Highway, following a contract signed between the municipality of Lima and the company Rutas de Lima. According to the information released, the police would have used tear gas on both occasions to disperse the demonstrators and would have shot in the air. On January 17, the mayor of Lima, Luis Castañeda, announced the suspension of the toll. However, in June there would have been new protests, this time demanding the withdrawal of all toll points in the Peruvian capital[[1513]](#footnote-1513).
381. Between June 15 and September 4, a national strike of education workers would have taken place, called by the Unified Workers Union in Education of Peru [*Sindicato Unitario de Trabajadores en la Educación del Perú*] (SUTEP) to demand a salary increase, the suspension of the evaluation process announced by the Government, the increase in the number of hiring, and the repeal of the Law of the Teacher Education Reform [*Ley de la Reforma Magisterial*] (Law 29944), among others. The strike, which would have begun in the department of Cuzco, gradually spread to different regions of the country where at least 13 clashes would have been recorded between rival factions of the teachers' union and between the police, on various dates. On July 19, the Council of Ministers published in the Official Gazette a decree declaring a state of emergency in five districts of the Department of Cuzco and one of the Department of Puno, a measure that implied the suspension, for 30 days, of the constitutional rights relating to personal liberty and security, the inviolability of domicile, and freedom of assembly and transit. The measure, which was lifted the next day for the districts of Machu Picchu and Ollantaytambo, would have been motivated by various acts of protest by teachers, including the blockage of the train tracks leading to Machu Picchu, tearing down a section of the perimeter wall of the airport of Cuzco, and blocking the international bridge Ilave that unites Peru and Bolivia. The confrontations between rival factions of the SUTEP and the police would have left an undetermined number of people injured and 14 detained. In two of the protests, two reporters covering the events were reportedly attacked[[1514]](#footnote-1514).
382. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[1515]](#footnote-1515) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[1516]](#footnote-1516)
383. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[1517]](#footnote-1517)
384. **Subsequent liability**
385. On March 31, the 35th Criminal Judge of the City of Lima sentenced lawyer Ronald Alex Gamarra Herrera for finding him guilty of the crime against honor in its aggravated modality of defamation. Gamarra Herrera was reportedly accused by Luz Marina Guzmán Díaz, a member of the National Council of Magistrates [*Consejo Nacional de la Magistratura*] (CNM) after he published an opinion piece titled "*Favor con favor se paga*". The text had been published on March 20, 2015 by the weekly *Hildebrandt* in its *Trece*, where Gamarra would have referred to the alleged existence of an exchange of favors between the Councilor Guzmán Díaz and the Prosecutor Mirtha Chenguayén Guevara. The judge considered an aggravating circumstance of the conduct the fact that the author of the text was a lawyer by profession, as well as the fact that "the opinion expressed by the defendant of Ms. Luz Marina Guzmán Díaz, is not based directly on making public information known –to inform-, but on making a verdict or appearing to be making one, as if he considered her to be convicted, that is, he carries out a stigmatization of that person, and that is where the honor of this person must be respected, as we must differentiate that one legal thing is 'the public cause' or 'public knowledge', and another one is to pour denigrating phrases against the honor of the person, imputing or denigrating them for such or so action, under the right of freedom to inform."[[1518]](#footnote-1518)
386. Gamarra Herrera was sentenced to one year of suspended prison on the condition that, during said period, he does not change his address without prior authorization from the Court; present himself every 30 days to the Biometric Control Center [*Centro de Control Biométrico*] of the Court to report on its activities; pay $10,000.00 Sol Peruano (PEN) (approximately US$3,000.00) for civil damages, within a period not exceeding five months; not commit another crime of aggravated defamation; and pay a fine of more than PEN $3,000.00 (approximately US $900.00). The Office of the Special Rapporteur expressed concern over this criminal conviction and recalled that this was the third time that a Peruvian district court issued a similar judgment in less than a year. The Office also recalled that "the case law of the Inter-American System has repeatedly recognized that freedom of expression grants—to both the directors of media outlets and the journalists that work for them—the right to disseminate information and ideas of all kinds, especially on public interest issues", which is why he reiterated the call to the Peruvian State to adopt " the international standards on freedom of expression regarding the subsequent liability for the dissemination of opinions and information, and as a consequence, to promote the reform of domestic criminal legislation that punishes speech that relates to public interest or directed at public officials."[[1519]](#footnote-1519)
387. On February 7, the 34th Provincial Criminal Prosecutor's Office of Lima decided to open an investigation and summon journalist Jaime Chincha Ravines of the Willax TV channel to testify after the Venezuelan Embassy in Peru denounced him for having broadcasted, on January 10, through the program *'Primer Plano'*, a journalistic note that would entail for the Venezuelan diplomats, an accusation for the commission of an offense "against public trust ". The journalistic piece would consist of a collection of reactions of Venezuelan citizens, interviewed on the outskirts of the building of the aforementioned Embassy, ​​regarding the declaration, issued by the Venezuelan National Assembly, of "abandonment of office" by President Nicolás Maduro. The same Prosecutor's Office reversed its decision on March 30 when its title holder, Antonio Gosicha, resumed the post from which he had been absent. In explaining the reason for the overturn, Gosicha explained that the Deputy Prosecutor "has sinned of being diligent by accepting a complaint that under Peruvian law does not contain any crime." [[1520]](#footnote-1520)
388. On February 22, the Press and Society Institute [*Instituto Prensa y Sociedad*] (IPYS) warned of the existence of a complaint filed by a Peruvian judge against journalists Antonio Bazán Chero, of the newspaper *La Industria*, Juan Mendoza, correspondent of *Peru 21*, and Fátima Constantino and Juan Vejarano, of the newspaper *La República*. The alleged facts occurred on February 20, when Judge Cecilia Margarita Grandez Rojas filed a lawsuit against the journalists after they disseminated information regarding a trial in which the judge would be involved and that would involve a case of domestic violence against his own son. IPYS requested the respect of journalists' right to freedom of expression[[1521]](#footnote-1521).
389. Principle 11 of the IACHR´s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states: “[p]ublic officials are subject to greater scrutiny by society. Laws that penalize offensive expressions directed at public officials, generally known as "*desacato* laws," restrict freedom of expression and the right to information.” Furthermore, the IACHR has held repeatedly that the application of criminal law to sanction expressions about public officials is disproportionate when dealing with protected speech, such as information or expression regarding matters of public interest, and infringes the right to freedom of expression.[[1522]](#footnote-1522)
390. The Inter-American Commission and the Inter-American Court have established that in a democratic society those in public office should have a higher threshold of tolerance for criticism, [[1523]](#footnote-1523) because “they have voluntarily exposed themselves to a stricter scrutiny and because they have an enormous capacity to call information into question through its convening power.”[[1524]](#footnote-1524) In this regard, the Inter-American Commission stated that “[t]his kind of political debate encouraged by the right to freedom of expression will inevitably generate some critical speeches or even offensive to those who hold public office or are intimately involved in the formation of public policy.”[[1525]](#footnote-1525) Therefore, as stated in Principle 10 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression adopted by the Inter-American Commission in 2000, “[t]he protection to reputation should only be guaranteed through civil sanctions in those cases which the person offended is a public official.” That is, the use of criminal mechanisms to punish speech on matters of public interest, and especially public officials or politicians does not respond to a pressing social need that justifies it, is unnecessary and disproportionate and it can be a means of indirect censorship given its chilling effect of the debate on matters of public interest.
391. **Direct and indirect censorship**
392. On March 7, the *Partido Fuerza Popular* bloc, a majority in the Congress of the Republic, presented an initiative titled "Law that protects the freedoms and information rights of the people" [*Ley que protege las libertades y derechos informativos de la población*]. The project, which contains only three articles, would have as its object, according to its promoters, "to adopt measures designed to guarantee society’s right to objective, accurate, plural, and timely information, and to strengthen the exercise of freedom of expression of the media ", as well as "to avoid influence on content and editorial line, among other analogous concepts, as a result of the interference of acts of corruption by owners or third parties linked to the media, protecting the freedom of expression and the right of information of citizens."
393. The project, which was described as unconstitutional by various civil organizations and by the Ombudsman's Office, proposes to prohibit those who have been convicted of corruption offenses, "to the detriment of the State", to participate as directors, shareholders or media editors, and even proposes to extend this prohibition to those who are under investigation after having been reported for said crimes. Additionally, the project proposes the creation of a "citizen oversight", whose function would be to participate "in the management of the media". On March 31, the authors of the project announced an amendment to the original project, which would have removed the ban originally proposed to those who are under investigation for corruption, as well as the proposal to create a citizen oversight. President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski would have warned on April 7 that he will not sign "any press law" if it’s sent by Congress[[1526]](#footnote-1526).
394. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that article 13.3 of the American Convention establishes that “[t]he right of expression may not be restricted by indirect methods or means, such as the abuse of government or private controls over newsprint, radio broadcasting frequencies, or equipment used in the dissemination of information, or by any other means tending to impede the communication and circulation of ideas and opinions.” Similarly, Principle 13 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights states that “The exercise of power and the use of public funds by the state, the granting of customs duty privileges, the arbitrary and discriminatory placement of official advertising and government loans; the concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies, among others, with the intent to put pressure on and punish or reward and provide privileges to social communicators and communications media because of the opinions they express threaten freedom of expression, and must be explicitly prohibited by law.”
395. **Government Advertising**
396. On November 15, Congressman Mauricio Mulder, representative of the American Revolutionary Popular Alliance [*Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana*] (APRA), presented before Congress a bill that aims to regulate the advertising expenditure of the Peruvian State (Law No. 2331 ). In this regard, in its article 3, the bill provides for the prohibition of any kind of government advertising in private media, while establishing that the violation of this mandate will be considered a crime of embezzlement. In addition, the project foresees that the governmental management tasks should be publicized in the state media "at a cost rate". In addition, he adds that all public entities must subscribe an account in the most widely used social networks and with the largest number of users, where they will have to communicate their activities and social interest issues[[1527]](#footnote-1527).
397. The bill has been criticized by different public officials and members of civil society. In this regard, it had been indicated that the regulations could affect the right to information that citizens have to know what is happening in public management, what are the important problems in health, education. For its part, the project would have been labeled "wrong" because "[t]he thing is to handle advertising with balance to avoid concentrating on one media outlet and another is to cut it radically." Likewise, the Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) reported that "the law affects the freedom of competition", constituting the State as "a monopoly", and that although the media are companies "they ensure the validity of a right of people to be informed"[[1528]](#footnote-1528).
398. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that article 13.3 of the American Convention establishes that “[t]he right of expression may not be restricted by indirect methods or means, such as the abuse of government or private controls over newsprint, radio broadcasting frequencies, or equipment used in the dissemination of information, or by any other means tending to impede the communication and circulation of ideas and opinions.” Similarly, Principle 13 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights states that “The exercise of power and the use of public funds by the state, the granting of customs duty privileges, the arbitrary and discriminatory placement of official advertising and government loans; the concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies, among others, with the intent to put pressure on and punish or reward and provide privileges to social communicators and communications media because of the opinions they express threaten freedom of expression, and must be explicitly prohibited by law.”
399. **Other relevant situations**
400. On July 17, Congressman José Marvin Palma Mendoza, of the parliamentary group *Fuerza Popular* presented a bill to add Article 154-B to the Criminal Code of Peru with the purpose of sanctioning the nonconsensual dissemination of images or audios with sexual content, a behavior known as "nonconsensual pornography" or " revenge pornography". The initiative, which at the close of this report is being studied in the Justice and Human Rights Commission [*Comisión de Justicia y Derechos Humanos*], establishes that the crime of "diffusion of nonconsensual intimate material" would be committed by "he/she who, without consent and deliberately disseminates, threatens, or makes available images, audio-visual material, or audio, with sexual content of an individual with whom he or she has maintained or maintains an intimate or trusting relationship". The preamble includes, among other elements to support its relevance, the provisions of Articles 2, 5 and 11 of the American Convention on Human Rights, as well as Advisory Opinion No. 18 of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, in which the obligations contracted by the states parties are specified, in relation to the generic duty established in article 2 of the Convention, regarding the need to adopt measures that guarantee "on one hand the suppression of norms and practices of any nature that entails violation of the guarantees provided for in the Convention. On the other hand, the issuance of norms and the development of practices conducive to the effective observance of said guarantees."[[1529]](#footnote-1529)
401. **DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**
402. The situation of risk for the exercise of journalism and for those who report acts of alleged corruption worsened in the Dominican Republic in 2017. The murder of two journalists and a lawyer linked to anti-corruption social organizations and a popular leader were recorded, all of which could be linked to the exercise of the right to freedom of expression. Various civil society organizations also reported restrictions on the exercise of protest, particularly when they go to public buildings or during government events.
403. **Progress**
404. On October 4, the national government put into operation the Unified Portal for Requesting Access to Public Information [*Portal Único de Solicitud de Acceso a la Información Pública*] (SAIP), through which Dominican citizens will be able to request access to information electronically. The project is part of the Dominican Republic’s agreements with the Open Government Partnership (OGP), an initiative it joined in 2012. The portal, run by the Office of Government Ethics and Integrity [*Dirección General de Ética e Integridad Gubernamental*] (DIGEIG), reportedly received over 1,200 requests for access to information during its first four weeks in operation.[[1530]](#footnote-1530)
405. **Murders**
406. The situation of risk for journalists and activists worsened in the Dominican Republic during 2017. The murders of two journalists, a lawyer with ties to anti-corruption social groups, and a popular leader were reported; all of those cases may be connected to the exercise of the right to freedom of expression. The number of murders committed during the year was unprecedented, according to the reports of the Office of the Special Rapporteur from 2010 to 2016.
407. On February 14, journalists Luis Manuel Medina and Leónidas Martínez were murdered during the airing of their program *Milenio Caliente*, on the radio station *FM 103.5* which broadcasts from the city of San Pedro de Macorís, capital of the Province of San Pedro de Macorís. The attack, perpetrated by a single individual, also reportedly resulted in the injury of the station’s secretary, Dayana García. According to various media outlets, the assailant entered the radio station, shot the journalists, and fled the scene. However, because the program was also broadcast live on social media, his image was captured on video, reportedly leading to his identification.
408. The National Police reported the next day that the alleged murderer, identified as José Rodríguez, had been located at a residence in the Villa Azucarera neighborhood, in the district known as “Los Multis,” and, once cornered, shot himself to death. Media reports stated that there had been a standoff between the police and the alleged murderer, who reportedly committed suicide after a chase in the area surrounding to the residence.[[1531]](#footnote-1531)
409. Different civil society organizations condemned the journalists’ murder and demanded that the necessary investigations be carried out to identify the masterminds of the attack, if any. The Office of the Special Rapporteur issued a press release condemning the crime and demanding that the Dominican authorities “judicially determine the relationship that they may have with journalistic activity and freedom of expression,” as “The authorities must not discard the practice of journalism as a motive for the killings and/or aggression before the investigation is completed.”[[1532]](#footnote-1532)
410. On October 12, attorney Yuniol Ramírez Ferreras was found dead. He was a professor at the Law School of the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD) and served as the president of the National Lawyers’ Association [*Convergencia Nacional de Abogados*] (CONA). Ramírez’s body was found in a creek in the Manoguayabo neighborhood, in the municipality of Santo Domingo Oeste, Province of Santo Domingo. He had been shot in the face, and was found chained to a pair of cement blocks. According to the information disseminated, the professor had been seen for the last time on October 11, when he went to teach classes at UASD. He reportedly received a phone call that forced him to interrupt the class and leave the building. On October 15, authorities reported the arrest of José Antonio Mercado Blanco, one of the alleged direct perpetrators of the murder, as well as three accomplices, after they executed a search and arrest warrant against Argenis Contreras González, the person alleged to have fired the shot that killed Yuniol Ramírez.
411. The detainees are said to be employees of the Office of the Metropolitan Bus Service [*Oficina Metropolitana de Servicios de Autobuses*] (OMSA), a government agency that prepares, repairs, maintains, and dispatches the Santo Domingo city bus fleet. According to initial investigations disclosed by Santo Domingo prosecutor Olga Diná Llaverías, the victim allegedly tried to extort the detainees. Journalistic accounts, however, assert that Ramírez Ferreras’s murder was motivated by the journalist’s exposé of corruption at the government agency.[[1533]](#footnote-1533)
412. On August 1, social and student leader Mario Vladimir Lantigua Baldera was shot and killed, allegedly by security officers in the Pueblo Nuevo sector of the community of San Francisco de Macorís, in the Province of Duarte. According to the information available, the events occurred during the confrontation between local residents and members of the National Police on the first day of a strike called by numerous social organizations demanding the construction of public works and the investigation of alleged corrupt acts. Members of different social organizations indicated that images captured on security cameras show that the shots were fired from a police weapon. Three police officers were also injured in the incident.[[1534]](#footnote-1534)
413. With respect to the violence against journalists and others because of their exercise of freedom of expression, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has underscored, based on the inter-American doctrine and case law, the importance of three positive obligations arising from the rights to life, humane treatment, and freedom of expression, to wit: the obligation to prevent, the obligation to protect, and the obligation to investigate, prosecute, and criminally punish the persons responsible for those crimes. As the Office of the Special Rapporteur has stated, these obligations are complemented reciprocally: in order for there to be free, robust, and unrestricted public debate, it is necessary to combat violence against journalists through a comprehensive policy of prevention, protection, and the pursuit of justice.[[1535]](#footnote-1535)
414. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
415. **Attacks, Threats and Harassment against Journalists and Media Outlets**
416. There were at least two reported cases of journalists being assaulted while working, allegedly at the hands of State agents. Journalists Tomás Ventura[[1536]](#footnote-1536) and Ramón Cruz Benzán[[1537]](#footnote-1537) were reportedly assaulted on May 11 and 17, respectively, during events held by the Public Ministry and at a demonstration of citizens demanding transparency in the investigation of alleged cases of corruption involving public servants and the Brazilian company Odebrecht.
417. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
418. **Social Protest**
419. Between January and June, a number of social organizations reportedly called for protest demonstrations and sit-ins outside government institutions to demand transparency in the investigation of alleged corrupt acts involving the payment of some US$ 92 million in bribes to different government officials.
420. On January 23, the so-called “end of impunity” march proceeded down several avenues in the city of Santo Domingo. The protestors attempted to end the march outside the National Palace, but a group of police officers reportedly blocked access to the area where the building is located, so they had to make a detour toward Independence Park.[[1538]](#footnote-1538) On May 16, a group of members of the *Frente Amplio de Lucha Popular* [Broad Front for Popular Struggle] reportedly attempted to set up a camp outside the Office of the Attorney General of the Repubilc [*Procuraduría General de la República*] to pressure Attorney General Jean Alain Rodríguez to publicly disclose the names of those implicated in the Odebrecht bribery case. Members of the National Police reportedly prevented the protestors from doing so, dispersing them with tear gas and using force. Several individuals were reportedly arrested during the police operation, and others sustained slight injuries.[[1539]](#footnote-1539)
421. On March 30, during the celebration of the 173rd anniversary of the battle for the independence of the Dominican Republic, the national government reportedly implemented a strategy to bar people wearing green clothing from access to the commemoration. The instruction, which reportedly came from the officers responsible for the event’s security, was apparently meant to prevent the participation of members of the movement called “green march,” which is calling for transparency in the investigation of the alleged acts of corruption between public servants and the Brazilian company Odebrecht. At least two journalists, Ruth Camil Santos, of *Telenoticias, Canal 11*, and Wellington Díaz, of the newspaper *Hoy*, reported that when they arrived to cover the event wearing green, they were prevented from going into the area where the authorities, including President Danilo Medina, were located. The journalists were ultimately authorized to enter the area where the event was being held, but—according to the information disseminated—a significant number of citizens were forced to leave.[[1540]](#footnote-1540)
422. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[1541]](#footnote-1541) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[1542]](#footnote-1542)
423. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[1543]](#footnote-1543)
424. **Direct and Indirect Censorship**
425. The National Commission on Public Performances and Broadcasting [*Comisión Nacional de Espectáculos Públicos y Radiofonía*], a public agency within the Postal and Telecommunications Administration [*Dirección General de Correos y Telecomunicaciones*], reportedly suspended journalists Álvaro Arturo Arvelo Aybar and Claudia Pérez Ramírez, for 20 and 30 days, respectively. Arvelo is the host of the radio program *El Gobierno de la Mañana*, which is broadcast on radio station *Z101*, while Pérez hosts the television program *Eficiencia Social* on *Canal 45,* which is owned by the company Teleradioamerica.
426. In the first case, the government agency reportedly decided to suspender the journalist from his activities as of October 9, because Arvelo had made “a number of accusations, insults, and speech contrary to morality and decency, as well as assertions that profane the name, the work, and the image of Founding Father Juan Pablo Duarte,” during the broadcast of his September 28 program.
427. In the second case, the agency reportedly sanctioned Pérez Ramírez for “using crude and vulgar language, including coarse, vulgar, obscene, and discriminatory words and speech inappropriate for use in public.” The measure has been characterized as a violation of the constitutional right to freedom of expression and as an act of censorship. On October 27, the company Teleradioamerica reportedly announced the permanent suspension of the program hosted by Pérez Ramírez.[[1544]](#footnote-1544)
428. According to Principle 5 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression “Prior censorship, direct or indirect interference in or pressure exerted upon any expression, opinion or information transmitted through any means of oral, written, artistic, visual or electronic communication must be prohibited by law. Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression.
429. **SAINT KITTS & NEVIS**
430. **Progress**
431. In line with the above regarding other member countries of the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority (ECTEL), this Office of the Special Rapporteur welcomes the approval of the Electronic Communications Bill (ECB)[[1545]](#footnote-1545), which would include a series of objectives to ensure the dissemination of licenses to retail customers, fair and equal access to the public network of electronic communications, to favor open access to the internet, and to specify the guidelines that should guide the consumer's defense of electronic communications. According to the information available, each member state of ECTEL must adopt the electronic communications law in its internal legislation[[1546]](#footnote-1546).
432. **SAINT VINCENT & THE GRANADINES**
433. **Progress**
434. The Office of the Special Rapporteur welcomes, as it has done with the other States of the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority (ECTEL), the approval of the Electronic Communications Bill (ECB)[[1547]](#footnote-1547), which would include a series of objectives to ensure the dissemination of licenses to retail customers, fair and equal access to the public network of electronic communications, to favor open access to the Internet, and to specify the guidelines that should guide the consumer's defense of electronic communications. According to the information available, each member state of ECTEL must adopt the electronic communications law in its internal legislation[[1548]](#footnote-1548).
435. **SAINT LUCIA**
436. **Progress**
437. In the same way that reference has been made to the other States that are part of the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority (ECTEL), the Office of the Special Rapporteur welcomes the approval of the Electronic Communications Bill (ECB)[[1549]](#footnote-1549), which would have a series of objectives to ensure the dissemination of licenses to retail customers, fair and equal access to the public network of electronic communications, to favor open access to the Internet, and to specify the guidelines that should guide the consumer's defense of electronic communications. According to the information available, each member state of ECTEL must adopt the electronic communications law in its internal legislation[[1550]](#footnote-1550).
438. **Social Protest**
439. According to available information, on March 17, 2017 officers attached to the Special Service Unit (SSU) of the Royal St. Lucia Police Force (RSLPF) were deployed to the site of the Hong-Kong based Desert Star Holding (DSH) Project at Beausejour, Vieux-Fort. This deployment was in response to social media posts indicating that on March 17, 2017 persons will gather at the site in order to stop the project by halting further construction and removing all equipment in an effort to protect what is left of Saint Lucia’s beaches and land.
440. In response to the deployment of officers at the site, the Saint Lucia Labour Party is reported to have issued a press release expressing “outrage over the decision of the Allen Chastanet Government to send armed SSU officers to patrol the DSH site to deter any public protest.” It expressed that the “action of the Chastanet government was out of proportion and hasty” and that the “Government did not send regular Police, to determine whether there was an illegal protest or sabotage, but instead sent a battalion of HEAVILY ARMED SSU officers. This is clearly an attempt to frighten Saint Lucians who are in opposition to the project.”The Saint Lucia Labour Party emphasized that “[c] itizens have a democratic right to protest and the Police must not be used to suppress that right.”[[1551]](#footnote-1551) In December 2016 citizens had staged protests outside the parliament building against the multi-billion dollar DSH project that includes the construction of a race course, a free trade zone, a shopping mall complex, marina, and other facilities on 700 acres of land in Vieux Fort will destroy the environment in that area, and would result in the taking away of homes and recreational areas from people in the community.[[1552]](#footnote-1552)
441. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[1553]](#footnote-1553) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[1554]](#footnote-1554)
442. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[1555]](#footnote-1555)
443. **Stigmatizing statements**
444. On August 21, in the context of a press conference given by the Minister of Tourism, Dominic Fedee, the journalist of *HTS News4orce*, Miguel Favrier, would have consulted him about the concessions with which the Government allegedly favored the company Sandals Saint Lucia and, specifically, on the veracity of the documents that would demonstrate such operation, that had been presented days before in two talk shows.
445. The Minister of Tourism would initially have asked Favrier to show him these documents, but when the journalist indicated that he did not have them, Dominic Fedee allegedly indicated that he would not answer questions based on rumors, that this could not be a credible question and, finally, that this kind of questions would degrade the journalist as such. Likewise, the Minister of Tourism would have pointed out to Favrier that he would only answer questions that could be backed up, and he would have asked him to be fair to the people of Saint Lucia, who do not want that information presented in their homes[[1556]](#footnote-1556).
446. **Diversity and pluralism**
447. On May 11, Prime Minister Allen Chastanet announced the closure of *Radio Saint Lucia*, given that the annual subsidy of EC$400 thousand (approximately US$148 thousand) could not manage to absorb a debt of approximately EC$3 million (approximately US$1 million 100 thousand).
448. In addition, the Prime Minister would have indicated the different debts that the radio has with different state and private entities, while explaining that the internet, television, and cell phones have taken over the media outlets. He would have also stated that "[t]he airwaves are saturated with radio stations and there are multiple channels for the government to get its message across to the public. Therefore, we should review the role of *Radio Saint Lucia* in this context."[[1557]](#footnote-1557)
449. In this regard, the IACHR recalls that rules regulating radio broadcast must be designed in such a way as to grant sufficient guarantees against possible arbitrary acts of the State. In order for this goal to be met, the following requirements, *inter alia,* must be met: (1) the rules establishing rights and obligations must be clear and precise; (2) the rules must provide for transparent procedures and due process—which enable, among other things, judicial review of decisions made in the administrative realm—; (3) the permit must be granted for use of the frequency for a sufficient length of time to be able to carry out the communications project or to recover the investment and make it profitable; (4) there must be assurances that while the frequency is being used, further requirements will not be demanded than what is established in the law; and (5) decisions shall not be made that impair the exercise of freedom of expression based on the editorial or news line. These and other protections, which will be discussed hereunder, are essential for the existence of truly free and vigorous radio broadcast.
450. **SURINAME**
451. **Social Protest**
452. In April 2017 there were anti-government protests in the capital Paramaribo largely led by trade unions and other civil groups. These protests are said to revolve around economic policies and changes such as recent fuel hikes and government freezes which are said to have brought untold hardships on the people of Suriname. There were calls for the resignation of President Desi Bouterse and an insistence that the administration changes its policies. Reports are that the riot police prevented protesters from continuing street marches and arrested and detained several individuals including, a union leader.
453. It is reported that the District Commissioner of Paramaribo indicated that the organizers of the protest did not have a permit and that if organizers had applied for a license the police force would have provided security during the marches in order to prevent calamity and keep order.[[1558]](#footnote-1558) It is further reported that in response, the trade unions and other civil groups have signaled that they are filing a lawsuit against the government for violating their fundamental rights, in particular, the right to hold peaceful demonstrations everywhere in the country. [[1559]](#footnote-1559)
454. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[1560]](#footnote-1560) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[1561]](#footnote-1561)
455. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[1562]](#footnote-1562)
456. **Legal reforms**
457. On August 7, the digital media, *Caribbean News Now*, published a note indicating that the Government of Suriname sent a bill to parliament, called Electronic Legal Transactions, which would aim to fine or punish with imprisonment any person who insults the president through a media outlet. In this regard, Surinamese Association of Journalists (SAJ) and the Association of Caribbean MediaWorkers (ACMW) would have expressed their concern indicating that the bill would not only restrict freedom of expression but also protect the president's image. In addition, the Surinamese Association of Journalists sent a letter to Parliament requesting reconsideration of the bill[[1563]](#footnote-1563).
458. **TRINIDAD & TOBAGO**
459. **Progress**
460. On August 25, the Minister of Communication and Public Administration, Maxie Cuffie, announced the prompt reopening of public television *Trinidad & Tobago Television* (TTT), which had been closed in January 2005 due to financial problems. In this regard, the Minister indicated that TTT will focus on promoting local programming and publishing government information, while representing a source of employment for many local producers who will work for the media.
461. In turn, he would have expressed that the decision was made in accordance with the recommendations made by the Board of Directors of the Caribbean New Media Group/Government Information Services Limited (CNMG / GISL) in relation to the role of state media in the country[[1564]](#footnote-1564). At the closing of this report, no progress has been made regarding the government announcement.
462. **Attacks, threats, and intimidation against journalists and the media**
463. On 13 September, photographer Kristian De Silva of *Trinidad Guardian*, *One Caribbean Media* cameraman Phil Britton and *Newsday* reporter Jeff Mayers were reportedly assaulted while covering the alleged "fake oil" scandal involving the company A & V Oil and Gas Ltd. Da Silva would have been attacked by two people and his equipment would have been destroyed in the vicinity of the aforementioned company. Likewise, Britton was allegedly attacked by people who threw glass bottles at his vehicle, while the reporter, Mayers, allegedly received threats from a security guard in this same context. According to the information available, the events were reported to the police but only in one of them a guard was reportedly being investigated[[1565]](#footnote-1565). The Prime Minister, Keith Rowley, issued a statement condemning the acts of violence against social media workers, while the Executive Director of A & V Oil and Gas Ltd., Hanif Baksh publicly apologized to the respective media[[1566]](#footnote-1566).
464. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
465. **Stigmatizing statements**
466. On May 25, the congressional representative for the Naparima party, Rondey Charles, while referring to the increase in crime in the country, would have publicly expressed that the media "co-conspire" (sic) together with the People’s National Movement (PNM) wanting to generate a "state of complacency" among citizens. The following day, Media Association of Trinidad & Tobago (MATT) demanded a public apology from Rodney Charles, after noting that the media in Trinidad and Tobago have been characterized by their commitment and respect to the principles of journalism[[1567]](#footnote-1567). According to the information available, Rodney Charle would not have yet offered the respective public apologies.
467. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that public servants have the duty to ensure that their statements do not infringe upon the rights of those who contribute to public deliberation through the expression and dissemination of their thoughts, such as journalists, media outlets, and human rights defense organizations. They must be mindful of the context in which they express themselves in order to ensure that their statements do not constitute, in the words of the Court, “forms of direct or indirect interference or harmful pressure on the rights of those who seek to contribute with public deliberation through the expression and diffusion of their thoughts.”[[1568]](#footnote-1568)
468. **Legal reforms**
469. On June 23, the Minister of Communications and Public Administration, Maxie Cuffie, announced that the Parliament's Joint Select Committee (PJSC) would be close to finalizing the deliberations regarding the Cybercrime Bill. In this context, he would have indicated that all stakeholders, including the press and the media, will be happy with their results. However, different civil society organizations such as the Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACMW), the Media Association of Trinidad and Tobago (MATT), or The Center for Law and Democracy (CLD) would have expressed their concern in this regard, since they considered that the law could have the potential to restrict the activity of those journalists working on matters of public interest while it could criminalize those expressions that lack legal support or justification, for example, information obtained through a source that wants to be protected. Therefore, they would have proposed that the project include legal exceptions against journalists and whistleblowers[[1569]](#footnote-1569). On August 7, the Minister of Communication and Public Administration issued a statement through which he indicated that the Cybercrime Bill will ensure the correct administration and dissemination of content in the era of "new media."[[1570]](#footnote-1570)
470. **URUGUAY**
471. During 2017 the Office of the Special Rapporteur observed with concern the information received regarding the increase in criminal complaints alleging defamation [*difamación e injurias*] filed against journalists by public servants claiming to be adversely affected by publications on issues of public interest connected to their performance. The office also received reports of stigmatizing statements made by public figures and government employees against journalists and media outlets.
472. The Office of the Special Rapporteur takes note of the actions undertaken by the Communications Services Regulatory Unit [*Unidad Reguladora de Servicios de Comunicaciones*] (URSEC) to apply and implement a number of specific provisions of the Audiovisual Communication Services Act [*Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual*]. At the close of this report, the Honorary Advisory Commission for Audiovisual Communication Services [*Comisión Honoraria Asesora de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual* ](CHASCA) had been set up. However, the regulation of the law had not yet been approved and the implementation of the planned institutional framework for its full implementation remained pending.
473. Through 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur received with concern information on the attack with a firearm against a journalist and emphasizes the importance of the investigation with due diligence of this event to clarify its possible relation to journalistic activity.
474. **Progress**
475. A judgment handed down on November 28, 2016 by First Administrative Law Judge [*Juez Letrado en lo Contencioso Administrativo de 1er Turno*] Gabriel Ohanián set a precedent regarding the exercise of freedom of expression by public servants and the scope of their duty of confidentiality.[[1571]](#footnote-1571) The judgment held that “the general principle is freedom of expression,” and therefore the duty of confidentiality that governs public servants in specific circumstances “must be assessed restrictively,” so that “it cannot refer to an opinion regarding the functioning of the government agency for which he or she works.”[[1572]](#footnote-1572) It further stated that “the government cannot attempt to control the opinion of its subordinates, and public criticism coming from subordinates has been, is, and will be tolerated by the government. Secrecy runs completely counter to the meaning of Republicanism.” The judgment, which ordered an agency to pay damages to a public servant, was appealed.
476. On December 14, 2016, the First Civil Court of Appeals [*Tribunal de Apelaciones Civil de 1er Turno*] ordered the Ministry of the Interior to pay non-pecuniary damages to press photographer Alejandro Moreira, who in 2014 reported having been assaulted by police while covering incidents that took place after a soccer game. The Court found that “excessive police action had been clearly proven,” and raised concerns about the fact that Moreira had been ordered to leave during one of the incidents. The Court held that “the legitimacy of that order is at least questionable, as it ignores the fact that the plaintiff was working as a journalist covering the events that took place at the end of the soccer match.”[[1573]](#footnote-1573)
477. On January 27, the Access to Public Information Unit issued a decision affirming the prohibition against the general classification of information, the requirement of proof of harm for purposes of imposing restrictions on access to information, and the unenforceability of confidentiality when the information requested refers to human rights violations or is relevant to investigate, prevent, or avoid such violations.[[1574]](#footnote-1574)
478. On May 16, the Third Administrative Disputes Court [*Juzgado Letrado de lo Contencioso Administrativo de 3er Turno*] ordered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to turn over information requested by a citizen about the hiring of a lawyer to represent the Uruguayan State in the Plan Condor trial in Rome.[[1575]](#footnote-1575) The Ministry reportedly complied with the judgment, but it also filed an appeal, which was rejected.[[1576]](#footnote-1576)
479. **Attacks, Threats, and Harassment Against Journalists and Media Outlets**
480. Throughout 2017, some episodes of serious attacks and threats against journalists, that had not yet been clarified by the courts, were reported in Uruguay[[1577]](#footnote-1577).
481. According to the information available, on February 7, journalist Isabel Prieto Fernández, of the website *Caras y Caretas*, was approached in Montevideo by unknown persons who shot at her from a motorcycle while she was driving her car; bullets struck her vehicle and grazed the back of her head.[[1578]](#footnote-1578) Organizations promoting freedom of expression in Uruguay urged the authorities to investigate the possibility that the attack may have been linked to Prieto’s work as a journalist.[[1579]](#footnote-1579) During a meeting held on February 9, authorities from the Ministry of the Interior reportedly told the journalist that their strongest working theory was that the attack was an attempted robbery, although they indicated that they would continue to investigate.[[1580]](#footnote-1580)
482. On February 9, journalist Julio Ríos, host of the program “*Las Voces del Fútbol*” on radio *1010 AM,* reported that he had been threatened by Gustavo Torena, a businessman involved with sporting events, who burst into the radio station’s studios while Ríos was on air.[[1581]](#footnote-1581) According to the information available, was prosecuted without being held in pretrial detention for a crime of violence after the journalist filed the criminal complaint. News coverage related to professional soccer and events involving soccer-related violence gave rise to other incidents in which the work of journalists and media outlets was publicly disparaged, heightening the risk that journalists could be subject to some kind of retaliation by fans.[[1582]](#footnote-1582)
483. In addition, in July, journalist Juan Correa, of the news portal *Agesor*, of the Department of Soriano reported having been threatened by a leader of the Lions Club of Mercedes after publishing an article stating that a former member of the military accused of serious human rights violations during the military dictatorship (1973-1985) had been elected president of the club.[[1583]](#footnote-1583) The act was condemned by APU and theNational Human Rights Institute [*Institución Nacional de Derechos Humanos*]. Other intimidating actions taken against journalists during the period covered by this report were evidently carried out on social media.[[1584]](#footnote-1584) One of the most well-known cases was that of *Televisión Nacional Uruguay* (TNU) journalist Georgina Mayo, who on January 4 was the victim of a harassment campaign on social media as a result of her coverage of an act of soccer-related violence. According to the information available, the objective of the campaign was to get the journalist fired from the public channel.[[1585]](#footnote-1585)
484. With respect to the violence against journalists and others because of their exercise of freedom of expression, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has underscored, based on the inter-American doctrine and case law, the importance of three positive obligations arising from the rights to life, humane treatment, and freedom of expression, to wit: the obligation to prevent, the obligation to protect, and the obligation to investigate, prosecute, and criminally punish the persons responsible for those crimes. As the Office of the Special Rapporteur has stated, these obligations are complemented reciprocally: in order for there to be free, robust, and unrestricted public debate, it is necessary to combat violence against journalists through a comprehensive policy of prevention, protection, and the pursuit of justice.[[1586]](#footnote-1586)
485. The Uruguayan Press Association [*Asociación de la Prensa Uruguaya*] (APU) and the Archive and Access to Public Information Center [*Centro de Archivo y Acceso a la Información Pública*](CAinfo) indicated that between April 1, 2016 and March 31, 2017, 23 cases were registered throughout the country that threatened the free exercise of journalism[[1587]](#footnote-1587).
486. Principle 9 of the IACHR’s Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression states that: “The murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation.”
487. **Social Protest**
488. According to information in the public domain, on March 20 the Executive Branch issued Order 76/017 regulating new provisions concerning demonstrations on public thoroughfares. The order established that the Ministry of the Interior “shall take pertinent measures” to “preserve the public use of streets, roads, or highways on which traffic may be blocked or disrupted by persons, vehicles, or objects of any kind.”[[1588]](#footnote-1588) To this end, “the Office of the Minister may directly request assistance from other public agencies, as well as coordinate, in such case, activities to enforce” the order. Once the orders have been issued, the Ministry of the Interior “must immediately report the police intervention to the Judiciary,” which “will be conducted in order to ensure the right to free movement, public order, and tranquility.” The provision would not apply to the blocking of public thoroughfares by trade unions exercising the right to strike. On March 22, the National Human Rights Institute recommended that the national authorities adhere to international standards.[[1589]](#footnote-1589) For their part, social organizations expressed their opposition to the Order.[[1590]](#footnote-1590) In March, nine trade unions and at least three business associations reportedly challenged the provision in administrative court, calling for its revocation.[[1591]](#footnote-1591) On March 23, Executive Order 76/017 was reportedly applied by officers from the Ministry of the Interior in the area of Conchillas, Department of Colonia.[[1592]](#footnote-1592)
489. In a statement released on June 16, the Ministry of the Interior reported that, following an urgent administrative investigation, it had determined that a police officer “failed to respect the operational protocol with regard to his full identification as a police officer” at a student demonstration that took place on June 9. The Federation of University Students reportedly publicly condemned the act. The statement emphasized that “Police officers are forbidden—by express mandate of political and police authorities—from infiltrating citizen demonstrations held in the full exercise of that right to public expression.”[[1593]](#footnote-1593)
490. The IACHR has reiterated that social protest is a fundamental tool for defending human rights and it is essential for expressing social and political criticism on the activities of the authorities. The Commission has stated that “in principle, criminalization per se of demonstrations in public thoroughfares is inadmissible when they are carried out in exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of assembly”[[1594]](#footnote-1594) and that “the exercise of the right of assembly through social protest must not be subject to authorization on the part of the authorities or to excessive requirements that make such protests difficult to carry out.”[[1595]](#footnote-1595)
491. Also, the Joint Declaration on violence against journalists and media workers in the context of protests, adopted in 2013, establishes that the rights of assembly and freedom of expression “are fundamental, and guaranteeing them is a vital condition to the existence and proper functioning of a democratic society. A State may impose reasonable limitations on demonstrations for purposes of ensuring that they are conducted peacefully, or to disperse those that turn violent, provided that such limits are governed by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In addition, the breaking-up of a demonstration must be warranted by the duty to protect individuals, and authorities must use the measures that are safest and least harmful to the demonstrators. The use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[1596]](#footnote-1596)
492. **Stigmatizing Statements**
493. According to the information available, during a press conference held on February 1, the Minister of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries, Tabaré Aguerre, made sarcastic and disqualifying remarks calling into question the credibility of a journalist, and the newspaper *La Diaria*, for which he writes, because of an article about a loan that the minister had reportedly received in his capacity as a rice producer from the Fund to Finance and Restructure the Rice Sector.[[1597]](#footnote-1597)
494. In June, the “711 List,” a political faction led by then-Vice President of the Republic, Raúl Sendic, issued a statement saying that “part of the press” had engaged in “a systematic and petty attack” in its coverage of a journalistic and political debate that took place after information came out about purchases Sendic had made with the corporate credit card of the State entity ANCAP.[[1598]](#footnote-1598) On June 8, through the use of the Access to Public Information Law, the weekly newspaper *Búsqueda* revealed the former official’s alleged improper use of that corporate credit card at stores in Uruguay and other countries, which resulted in the Vice President’s resignation from office months later. While still in office, Sendic called into question the media’s work on the different investigations involving him and announced that he was evaluating the possibility of bringing legal actions against journalists Patricia Madrid and Viviana Ruggiero because of information published in a book they had authored.[[1599]](#footnote-1599)
495. On July 27, the director of theState Health Services Administration[*Administración de Servicios de Salud del Estado*] (ASSE), Susana Muñiz, maintained that journalists and “bottom-dwelling” politicians were conducting a smear campaign against ASSE.[[1600]](#footnote-1600) She later filed a complaint against a journalist alleging defamation, as discussed below. In addition, on August 29, the Uruguayan Press Association reported that the former Governor of the department of Flores, Carlos Mazzullo, attacked journalist Mariely Salvatto, of *Radio Cinco 89.7*, during a press conference.[[1601]](#footnote-1601)
496. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recalls that public servants have the duty to ensure that their statements do not infringe upon the rights of those who contribute to public deliberation through the expression and dissemination of their thoughts, such as journalists, media outlets, and human rights defense organizations. They must be mindful of the context in which they express themselves in order to ensure that their statements do not constitute, in the words of the Court, “forms of direct or indirect interference or harmful pressure on the rights of those who seek to contribute with public deliberation through the expression and diffusion of their thoughts.”[[1602]](#footnote-1602)
497. **Subsequent Liability**
498. According to the information available, in late August the weekly newspaper *Búsqueda*,[[1603]](#footnote-1603) the Uruguayan Press Association[[1604]](#footnote-1604) (APU), and the Center for Archives and Access to Public Information[[1605]](#footnote-1605) (Cainfo) reported an uptick in legal actions being brought and announced against journalists and media outlets, and warned of the chilling effect of such situations. In this context, Director Susana Muñiz of theState Health Services Administration (ASSE) filed a complaint alleging criminal defamation against journalist Gabriel Pereyra, of the newspaper *El Observador*, following the publication of an opinion piece in which he responded to disparaging statements Muniz had made about journalists and called into question the management of the government agency.[[1606]](#footnote-1606) According to the information available, the case was shelved by the 17th Criminal District Court [*Juzgado Letrado de Primera Instancia en lo Penal de 17º Turno*] after the journalist and Muniz reached an agreement at the hearing held on August 16, at which time the official withdrew the complaint. *El Observador* reported that the agreement had been reached after the journalist clarified that the column was not intended to offend the official; however, he did not retract his article.[[1607]](#footnote-1607) According to the information available, this case was followed days later by a criminal defamation complaint brought by the former director of ANCAP against the newspaper *El País* and journalist Daniel Isgleas. On September 14, the first hearing was held before the 18th Criminal District Court [*Juzgado Letrado de Primera Instancia en lo Penal de 18º Turno*], at which the parties failed to reach a conciliation agreement. The legal action was filed after the publication of an article reporting on the results of a parliamentary investigation into alleged irregularities in the construction of a regasification plant. The case was still pending before the court at the time of this writing.[[1608]](#footnote-1608) These two complaints were brought during a year in which other senior government officials and private individuals publicly announced the potential filing of criminal actions against journalists because of the publication and broadcasting of different investigations.[[1609]](#footnote-1609)
499. During 2017 the Office of the Special Rapporteur also learned of other cases of complaints filed by senior government officials seeking to have private citizens investigated for alleged defamation on social media, including Vice President Raúl Sendic [[1610]](#footnote-1610) and pro-government Senator Leonardo De León.[[1611]](#footnote-1611)
500. Additionally, according to the information available, on July 31 the 5th Office of the Prosecutor [*Fiscalía Penal de 5to Turno*] requested the criminal prosecution of humorist Marcel Keroglian for “the commission of repeated defamation offenses.”[[1612]](#footnote-1612) The weekly newspaper ***Búsqueda*** reported that the order from the prosecutor’s office came after the amendment of a complaint filed against the journalist by the Uruguay Football Referees' Association [*Asociación Uruguaya de Árbitros de Fútbol*] (Audaf) in view of repeated comments on Twitter that, in the complainants’ view, tarnished their reputations. The prosecutor’s office stated that Keroglian “was able to disseminate stories to various persons, together and separately, attributing words or deeds to specific individuals that, if they were true, exposed the complainants to public disparagement or hatred.”
501. On November 7, journalist Javier Bonilla, specialized in aeronautical and defense issues, and Albérico Barrios, editor of the newspaper *El Corresponsal* of Canelones, had to appear before the Criminal Court of First Instance in Criminal Matters [*Juzgado Letrado de Primera Instancia en lo Penal de 24 Turno*] following a defamation complaint made by the owner of the automotive company Autolider, Carlos Bustin, as a result of publications made on Twitter about the situation of the company and the possibility of it going to settlement. Two users of Twitter who replied to the information also had to attend the Court. The businessman withdrew the complaint after signing an agreement between the parties[[1613]](#footnote-1613).
502. The Inter-American Commission and the Inter-American Court have established that in a democratic society those in public office should have a higher threshold of tolerance for criticism, [[1614]](#footnote-1614) because “they have voluntarily exposed themselves to a stricter scrutiny and because they have an enormous capacity to call information into question through its convening power.”[[1615]](#footnote-1615) In this regard, the Inter-American Commission stated that “[t]his kind of political debate encouraged by the right to freedom of expression will inevitably generate some critical speeches or even offensive to those who hold public office or are intimately involved in the formation of public policy.”[[1616]](#footnote-1616) Therefore, as stated in Principle 10 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression adopted by the Inter-American Commission in 2000, “[t]he protection to reputation should only be guaranteed through civil sanctions in those cases which the person offended is a public official.” That is, the use of criminal mechanisms to punish speech on matters of public interest, and especially public officials or politicians does not respond to a pressing social need that justifies it, is unnecessary and disproportionate and it can be a means of indirect censorship given its chilling effect of the debate on matters of public interest
503. **Audiovisual Communication Services Act**
504. During the 162nd Extraordinary Session, the IACHR and the Office of the Special Rapporteur received information about delays in the comprehensive implementation of the Audiovisual Communication Services Act[[1617]](#footnote-1617) (LSCA)19.307, enacted in December 2014.[[1618]](#footnote-1618) During the public hearing held on May 26 in Buenos Aires, representatives of the Coalition for Democratic Communication [*Coalición por una Comunicación Democrática*] (CCD) called on the State to immediately issue regulations to the law and to set up the new institutions responsible for its implementation.[[1619]](#footnote-1619) Civil society reported that there had also been no progress in the implementation of the Public Radio and Television System, and maintained that, although public media outlets exist, they are not coordinated as provided for in the new law. The petitioners indicated that the failure to apply the law comprehensively has had repercussions on the processes for the allocation of radio and television frequencies.
505. The State, represented by the Communications Services Regulatory Unit (URSEC) and the Ministry of Industry, Energy, and Mines, maintained that the law had been “in full force” from the time of its enactment, and was being applied in different cases. The authorities were of the opinion that the establishment of the Audiovisual Communications Council [*Consejo de Comunicación Audiovisual*] and the Honorary Advisory Council of the Audiovisual Communication Service (CHASCA)—which at that time had not yet been set up—were not essential for the application of the law. They asserted that the delays in issuing regulations to the law reflected the fact that there were 29 pending lawsuits involving constitutional challenges, and that the President of the Republic had therefore determined that the regulations to the law should not be issued until the outcomes of those actions are known. The State indicated that from February 2015 to May 18, 2017, the URSEC passed 54 resolutions directly applying the law, and forwarded them to the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression. During the session, the State announced the imminent issuance of regulations to the law by Executive Branch. At the close of this report, a draft of the regulation was to publicly available information, CHASCA was convened to hold its first session on October 4. [[1620]](#footnote-1620)
506. In July, the newspaper *El Observador* reported, based on information provided by URSEC in response to a request for access to public information, that pursuant to the LSCA the body had imposed six financial penalties against private free-to-air television channels for excessive commercial breaks between May 2015 and February 2017.[[1621]](#footnote-1621) For its part, URSEC issued a statement on July 25, explaining the scope of the law and of the standards it had been applying to advertising.[[1622]](#footnote-1622) Additionally, on July 6, the body passed Resolution 101/ 2017, regulating Articles 60 and 61 of the LSCA, which provide for national music and production quotas. On September 7, 2017, URSEC issued Resolution 141, amending the system governing the national music quota, citing the need to simplify it.[[1623]](#footnote-1623)
507. Additionally, according to the information available, in Judgment 362/2017 of April 24, 2017, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of various provisions of the Audiovisual Communication Services Act designed to protect the communication rights of individuals.[[1624]](#footnote-1624)
508. The National Institute for Children and Adolescents [*Instituto Nacional del Niño y el Adolescente*] (INAU) filed a complaint against *Canal 12* of Cerro Largo, alleging that one of its central news broadcasts violated Articles 31 and 32 of the law protecting the rights and privacy of children and adolescents. On October 6, 2016, the station had aired a report about a case involving the alleged sexual abuse of two minor children, and interviewed one of the victims with his or her mother. The station denied having violated those rights and argued that the report had been done with the consent of the children’s mother, and that the images were broadcast in such a way that their faces could not be identified. On September 7, the 5th District Court of Melo [*Juzgado Letrado de Melo de 5to Turno*] ordered *Canal 12* to pay 10,000 Readjustable Units [*Unidades Reajustables*] (equivalent to US$ 350,000)—the maximum financial penalty amount provided for under the Audiovisual Communication Services Act (LSCA) for the violation of its provisions, after finding that the station violated the privacy rights of two minor children by broadcasting the news item in question without taking sufficient measures to ensure that they could not be identified, and asserting that the family could be identified by the mother’s face. The media outlet appealed the judgment. The National Association of Uruguayan Broadcasters (ANDEBU) argued that the judgment reflected an improper application of the LSCA and that the penalty imposed was disproportionate and “confiscatory,” and would entail the station’s closure.[[1625]](#footnote-1625)
509. **Access to Public Information**
510. On September 27, the Center for Archives and Access to Public Information and the Catholic University of Uruguay publicly released a report indicating that although government entities had improved the degree of overall compliance with their active transparency obligations, they still only published an average of 48% of the information that is subject to mandatory disclosure under Law on Acess to Public Information 18.381, in effect since October 2008, and the 2010 regulations thereto.[[1626]](#footnote-1626)
511. On February 13, through Order 45/2017, the Executive Branch amended Article 69 of Order 500/91, regulating the actions of public servants in relation to the production of requests, drafts, reports, opinions, and other documents in administrative proceedings of the Central Government.[[1627]](#footnote-1627) The new rule provided that, “Any public servant who makes public, discloses, or makes known to third parties” such documents, “except in those cases provided by law, will be considered to have committed a serious infraction, and is liable to be removed from employment.” On February 24, a number of civil society organizations belonging to the Open Government Network asserted that Order 45/2017 “is a step backwards in the regulation of access to public information and transparency.”[[1628]](#footnote-1628) The provision was challenged jointly by the Uruguayan Press Association (APU) and several journalists in an administrative appeal seeking its revocation. In view of the denial of that appeal, the organizations announced that they planned to challenge the provision in the Administrative Disputes Court.[[1629]](#footnote-1629)
512. The use of the Law on Access to Public Information by journalists and media outlets was evident during 2017, and reportedly facilitated the dissemination of information in the public interest. Nevertheless, the Office of the Special Rapporteur continued to receive information about the persistence of obstacles preventing access to public information under the protection of the law in different scenarios. For instance, on May 14, the newspaper *El Observador* published an report stating that its requests for information from different government bodies are frequently met with the assertion that no such information exists.[[1630]](#footnote-1630) Also in June, the Luz Ibarburu Observatory reported obstacles to obtaining information about actions carried out by the State to comply with the judgment handed down by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the case of *Gelman v. Uruguay*.[[1631]](#footnote-1631) On September 29, the Center for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights [*Centro de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos*] (CDH) and *REDES – Amigos de la Tierra Uruguay* reported that different public agencies refused to provide them with access to information on commitments undertaken by the Uruguayan State for the establishment of a second cellulose plant by the Finnish company UPM, which is required under Law 18.381.[[1632]](#footnote-1632)
513. On September 26, the 6th District Court [*Juzgado Letrado de Primera Instancia de 6to Turno*] of the Department of Maldonado dismissed a petition for a constitutional remedy [*amparo*] filed by a town councilman from Frente Amplio to obtain a copy of the US$ 18 million 500 thousand contract between the Municipal Government of Maldonado and an international corporation for the purchase of video surveillance equipment to be installed in different spots around the department, after his request for the document had been denied through administrative channels. The judgment held that the information requested fell within the scope of the public safety confidentiality exception. The judgment was on appeal at the time of this writing.[[1633]](#footnote-1633)
514. On October 23, after a request for access to public information made by a journalist from the newspaper *El Observador*, the Presidency of the Republic issued a resolution by which it classified as confidential "all [information] relative to the surveys of public opinion entrusted by the Presidency of the Republic". The resolution established that said information forms part of the deliberative processes for the adoption of public policies[[1634]](#footnote-1634).
515. On October 26, the General Archive of the Nation gave access to the contents of 152 documentaries linked to the work of military intelligence during the dictatorship (1973-1985), and of previous and subsequent years, in response to request of access to public information presented by the Luz Ibarburu Observatory. These documents had been declared as confidential information in a resolution issued by the agency in July 2011. The request for access was made by the Observatory on behalf of victims of human rights violations that occurred during the military dictatorship, on the understanding that the information contained therein could have relevance for the court cases that investigate the crimes of that period[[1635]](#footnote-1635).
516. In November, the Municipality of Maldonado filed an appeal for unconstitutionality against the Law on Access to Public Information [*Ley de Acceso a la Información Pública*] in the context of a judicial proceeding initiated against it by two departmental editors in response to the refusal of the agency to provide them with a set of information that they would have requested through 17 petitions for information. The legal department of the Municipality understands that the editors cannot use the Law on Access to Public Information because Article 284 of the Constitution provides for a specific mechanism for members of the Departmental Board to access information of the administration[[1636]](#footnote-1636).
517. Principle 4 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression which states that “[a]ccess to information held by the state is a fundamental right of every individual. States have the obligation to guarantee the full exercise of this right. This principle allows only exceptional limitations that must be previously established by law in case of a real and imminent danger that threatens national security in democratic societies.” Additionally, with regard to the principle of maximum disclosure the law must guarantee the effective and broadest possible access to public information, and any exceptions must not become the general rule in practice. Also, the exceptions regime should be interpreted restrictively and all doubts should be resolved in favor of transparency and access.
518. **Surveillance of Communications**
519. During the past year, Uruguay continued taking measures to implement the electronic communications surveillance system called “El Guardián.” Pursuant to the 2015 agreement reached between the Ministry of the Interior and the Judiciary, the Automated Lawful Interception System [*Sistema Automatizado de Interceptaciones Legales*] (SAIL) became operational on December 21, 2016. The system was developed for processing court-ordered interceptions.[[1637]](#footnote-1637) SAIL is independent of "El Guardián," which remains under the exclusive control of the Ministry of the Interior, as the Office of the Special Rapporteur indicated in its 2015 Annual Report.[[1638]](#footnote-1638)
520. The Office of the Special Rapporteur reiterates that surveillance programs must be designed and implemented in accordance with international human rights standards. Notably, States must guarantee that the interception, collection and use of personal information are clearly authorized by law in order to protect individuals from arbitrary or abusive interference with their privacy. Moreover, the decision to undertake surveillance activities that intrude upon individual privacy must be authorized by an independent judiciary and justified in terms of the objectives pursued in the specific case and the proportionality of the measure in relation to necessity and the interests pursued. States must ensure that the judicial authority is specialized and competent to make decisions on the legality of the communications surveillance, the technologies used, and its impact on the sphere of rights that could be involved, and that they have sufficient guarantees to fulfill its duties in an adequate manner. Finally, the Office of the Special Rapporteur observes that States should establish independent oversight mechanisms over the authorities in charge of conducting surveillance in order to ensure transparency and accountability.[[1639]](#footnote-1639)
521. **Other Relevant Situations**
522. On December 14, 2016, the Constitution and Legislation Committee of the House of Representatives passed a bill to regulate government advertising.[[1640]](#footnote-1640) The initiative was spearheaded by civil society, by the Center for Archives and Access to Public Information (CAinfo), through a legislative bill that was supported by different political parties and sought to bring the regulation into line with the relevant inter-American standards.
523. On June 26, the First Criminal Court of Appeals [*Tribunal de Apelaciones en lo Penal de 1er Turno*] upheld a lower court’s decision dismissing the accusation against the president of the Military Club [*Círculo Militar*], Retired Geneal Raúl Mermot, who was denounced for the crime of supporting torture because of statements in which he urged “not to confuse torture with physical coercion.”[[1641]](#footnote-1641) The Court concluded that, in making those statements, the retired member of the military had not committed a crime. In that regard, the Court held “that the fact that the distinction is unacceptable does not presume a risk of indirect incitement (...) in a specific case.” It held that, consistent with Law 18.515, the American Convention and other provisions of international human rights law, the reports of the IACHR and the judgments of the Inter-American Court include an “inevitable imperative that must be observed by the judges” called upon to adjudicate cases involving opinion, expression, and dissemination, provided that it does not diminish the standards of protection established in national law or recognized by national case law.
524. Finally, the parliamentary investigation into alleged spying —unlawful in a democracy—continued in 2017. According to different spokespersons, espionage that included following political figures, political parties, trade unions, journalists, judges, prosecutors, and civil society organizations was reportedly confirmed.[[1642]](#footnote-1642)
525. **VENEZUELA**[[1643]](#footnote-1643)
526. **Protesta social**
527. On March 30, 2017, a new wave of public demonstrations broke out in Venezuela when thousands of people mobilized in different cities to protest the decisions of the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) in which it repudiated the National Assembly (AN) ([Chapter II.A](#CapIIA).2). The protests intensified in May after the President issued Decree No. 2830 convening the National Constituent Assembly (ANC); the protests continued until the end of July. It is thought that between April 1 and July 31, there were 6,729 demonstrations throughout the country (equivalent to 56 per day)[[1644]](#footnote-1644) to make political and social demands and targeting specific institutions, such as the TSJ or the National Electoral Council (CNE).[[1645]](#footnote-1645) According to available information, the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) called for the protests at the national level,[[1646]](#footnote-1646) while many others broke out spontaneously in residential areas and low-income districts.[[1647]](#footnote-1647) In that regard, the State has said that during that period there were 9,435 “street actions,” 62.30 percent of which were purportedly violent.[[1648]](#footnote-1648)
528. The Commission has monitored with grave concern the situation of violence against demonstrators and stigmatization of social leaders and human rights defenders in Venezuela in 2017[[1649]](#footnote-1649). It is estimated that during the protests in these four months alone 133 people were killed, 4,000 were injured, and more than 5,000 were arbitrarily detained[[1650]](#footnote-1650) ([Chapter III.A.4](#_Detenciones_arbitrarias,_actos)). The commission has received reports about excessive and indiscriminate use of force by the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) and the Bolivarian National Police (PNB).[[1651]](#footnote-1651) Furthermore, as this section mentions, the Commission has received extremely troubling information about human rights violations against demonstrators during their detention and prosecution, including torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, rape, and the trial of civilians in military criminal tribunals.
529. **Regulatory Framework**
530. Any restrictions on freedom of assembly and the right to take part in public demonstrations should be regarded as exceptional and comply strictly with certain requirements, in accordance with Articles IV, XXI, and XXII of the Declaration.[[1652]](#footnote-1652) For any restriction of such rights to be legitimate, it must be expressly set down in a clear and precise way in a law in the formal and material sense, be justified by an imperative social interest, as well as being genuinely necessary in a democratic society and proportionate to achieving that aim.[[1653]](#footnote-1653) It is incumbent on States to demonstrate that restrictions imposed on public demonstrations and protests meet those requirements.[[1654]](#footnote-1654)
531. In that regard, the IACHR recalls that “in democracies, states should act based on the legality of protests or public demonstrations and under the assumption that they do not constitute a threat to public order.”[[1655]](#footnote-1655) That assumption should be clearly and expressly established in the laws of states and apply to all without discrimination.[[1656]](#footnote-1656) If legal provisions are not clear, they should be clarified or, as appropriate, interpreted in favor of those exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.[[1657]](#footnote-1657) Broad prohibitions and the establishment of authorization requirements for people to exercise the right to participate in peaceful protests are inherently unnecessary and disproportionate.Furthermore, the purpose of regulating them cannot be to establish grounds for prohibiting the meeting or demonstration.[[1658]](#footnote-1658) To be sure, the actions of the security forces should protect and facilitate, rather than discourage, the right to assembly and participation in social protests[[1659]](#footnote-1659).
532. In spite of the fact that the Venezuelan Constitution recognizes the right of individuals to demonstrate publicly, as well as the right of assembly without permission in advance,[[1660]](#footnote-1660) the IACHR notes with concern that in recent years reforms have been made to the Venezuelan regulatory framework that place illegitimate restrictions on the exercise of that right. The country's courts, for their part, have extended the content and scope of those restrictions in a manner incompatible with international standards in that regard.[[1661]](#footnote-1661) Such restrictions have been established as a response to a climate of protest against the Government. As is described later in this chapter, legal restrictions have resulted in a pattern of gross violations of demonstrators' human rights.
533. Law on Political Parties, Public Meetings, and Demonstrations (2010).[[1662]](#footnote-1662) Article 43 of this law provides that organizes of demonstrations “must give notice, at least twenty‐four hours in advance, in writing with a duplicate copy, during business hours, to the first civil authority of the jurisdiction, indicating the planned place or itinerary, day, time, and general objective pursued.” The authorities must “stamp on the copy that they give the organizers their acceptance of the location or itinerary and time.” That law also provides that if the first civil authority finds justified reasons to "fear" that staging public demonstrations in the same location might "cause disturbances of public order," it may order the demonstrations or public meetings to be held at a different places and times (Art. 44). Likewise, the law authorizes governors' and mayors' offices periodically to establish "places where public meetings or demonstrations may not be held, having first heard the opinions of the parties.”
534. In a decision of April 24, 2014, the Constitutional Division of the TSJ ruled on an application for an interpretation of the constitutionality of this law. The court held that it was mandatory for all citizens, parties and organizations to “exhaust the administrative procedure of authorization before the first civil authority of the appropriate jurisdiction” and failure to meet that requirement "absolutely limits the right to peaceful demonstration, thus impeding the holding of any kind of meeting or demonstration.”[[1663]](#footnote-1663) In that decision, the Constitutional Division ruled that a lack of authorization to exercise the right to peaceful demonstration could give rise to the police and security forces immediately dispersing the demonstration. Moreover, it ruled that if demonstrations are held when authorization had been denied or changing the pre-authorized conditions of time, manner and location, that may be grounds for liability to criminal prosecution for the crime of “disobedience of authority” envisaged at Article 483 of the Criminal Code.[[1664]](#footnote-1664)
535. Based on the Division's decision, demonstrations in public thoroughfares organized by political parties or social sectors linked to the opposition are not authorized and have been immediately dispersed; furthermore, mayors belonging to opposition parties who do not comply with the order to prevent such gatherings may be liable to imprisonment and removal from office for disobedience of authority[[1665]](#footnote-1665) ([Chapter II.B.2](#Situación_disidencia)).
536. Decree with the Rank, Value, and Force of an Organic Law on Security of the Nation.[[1666]](#footnote-1666) This decree-law provides that demonstrations and public meetings are prohibited in areas considered "security zones" by the authorities. According to Article 47 of the Decree, “security zones are considered to be those areas of the country that, because of their strategic importance, characteristics, and component elements, are subject to special rules as to the persons, property, and activities found in them in order to ensure the protection of such zones against internal or external hazards or threats.” Article 48, for its part, states that the following may be decreed security zones: areas that surround military and public facilities and essential services, areas adjacent to land communication routes, and “[a]ny other security zone considered necessary for the security and defense of the nation.” The Law establishes penalties of 5 to 10 years of imprisonment for anyone who engages in activities "that are intended to disrupt or impair the organization and functioning of military installations, utilities, essential industries and businesses, or the socioeconomic life of the country.”[[1667]](#footnote-1667)
537. According to the Ombudsperson's Office (Defensoría del Pueblo - DP), there are 103 zones in the country with that classification,[[1668]](#footnote-1668) covering some 30 percent of Venezuelan territory,[[1669]](#footnote-1669) where staging demonstrations is absolutely forbidden.[[1670]](#footnote-1670) They include government offices and state entities.[[1671]](#footnote-1671) For example, in 2016, the Second Administrative Court banned all unauthorized demonstrations outside offices of the National Electoral Council (CNE). In that regard, it urged the “executive branch to evaluate, pursuant to articles 47 and 48 of the Organic Law on National Security, declaring areas adjacent to the offices of the electoral authority as security zones.” It also instructed the GNB to “adopt the security measures necessary to permanently protect the offices of the National Electoral Council and their surroundings areas nationwide, in order to prevent unauthorized events, marches, protests, prohibited gatherings, and violent demonstrations.”[[1672]](#footnote-1672)
538. Decree 281 issued by the Office of the Mayor of Caracas. This decree, issued in 2014 by the mayor of Caracas, a member of the ruling party, bans public demonstrations on the basis of their political nature in extremely vague terms. In his decree, the mayor considered that "the practices in which some violent groups have been engaging are considered fascist demonstrations because they give rise to actions deliberately intended to damage the infrastructure of government institutions, intimidate workers in the service of the state, and, in general, cause anxiety in the citizenry, thus providing a space for anarchy.” Therefore, he declared the Municipality of Caracas to be a "zone of peace, free from fascism ... and a space for building consensus on ideas in a framework of respect for rights, in the struggle to attain Bolivarian socialism.” He also ordered the municipal authorities “to adopt the appropriate measures ... to fully enforce the contents of this decree.”[[1673]](#footnote-1673) In this municipality, for example, State authorities regularly setup military and police barriers and order public transport to be closed down so as to prevent demonstrators reaching that area.[[1674]](#footnote-1674)
539. States of emergency and other legal restrictions of a temporary nature. As this report analyzes, the declarations of states of emergency issued since January 2016 authorize in vague and very broad terms the suspension of the rights of assembly and freedom of expression[[1675]](#footnote-1675) ([Chapter IV.B.2](#estados_excepción)). For the ANC elections the executive branch published Decree No. 2,992, banning all demonstrations and public gatherings throughout the country for five days, from July 28 to August 1.[[1676]](#footnote-1676)
540. The IACHR notes with concern that the restrictions imposed by this law are founded on vague and imprecise concepts that originate from presidential decrees, regulations, or judicial decisions, not from laws in any formal sense.Indeed, the case law of the inter-American system considers that domestic provisions that States introduce to restrict the rights involved in social protest should have the rank of law, in both the material and the formal sense; in other words, they should emanate from the democratically legislature branch and be promulgated by the executive branch. Only formal law can restrict the enjoyment and exercise of such rights.[[1677]](#footnote-1677)
541. It is not sufficient for the law to be formal but, rather, they must be established in advance, expressly, restrictively and clearly.[[1678]](#footnote-1678) A set of provisions that authorizes state agents to ban demonstrations classed as "fascist" or "violent”; when "they fear" that they could “cause disturbances of public order”; in “zones surrounding public facilities” or in “any other security zone considered necessary for the security and defense of the nation” grants the authorities very broad discretionary powers that could be used to justify potentially arbitrary acts that might amount to prior censorship or impose disproportionate liability for the legitimate exercise of a right.[[1679]](#footnote-1679) It is also troubling that in many cases such restrictions may result in the imposition of criminal penalties, as well as the fact that they do not satisfy the requirements of the principle of strict legality in that regard.
542. Furthermore, as this report has already analyzed ([Chapter IV.B.2](#estados_excepción)), the IACHR notes that the restrictions invoke concepts of "national security," "public security," and "public order” that are not defined or interpreted from a democratic perspective and liken protest to a threat to that public interest. The Commission reiterates that such concepts cannot be invoked to suppress a human right, distort it, or deprive it of its real content. They must be interpreted in a manner that adheres strictly to the fair demands of a democratic society.[[1680]](#footnote-1680)
543. The State has also neglected to demonstrate the necessity and proportionality of such restrictions. On one hand, based on its monitoring of the situation of human rights in Venezuela, it is clear to the IACHR that the legal restrictions are imposed in a discriminatory way based on the nature or political content of the message to be disseminated, enabling the arbitrary restriction of protest by a sector of the population because of their political views. Indeed, the imposition (in a manner incompatible with inter-American standards on protection of human rights and best practices) of a system of authorizations for public demonstrations has allowed the authorities to deny permission for legitimate public demonstrations convened by those sectors, as well as authorizing the security forces to break them up.
544. On the other hand, the restrictions regarding the "venue" of demonstrations seem to be designed to prevent the message of march and protest´s organizers and participants with which the government disagrees from reaching public eyes and ears.[[1681]](#footnote-1681) The IACHR has repeatedly stated that social protests are indispensable for strengthening democracy, hence the State’s obligation to ensure the processing of the demands and the underlying social and political conflicts so as to channel the claims. Sweeping bans against demonstrating outside government offices not only have a negative impact on the transmission of the message, which may end up being silenced, but are an assault on the right of everyone to express political opinions, petition the State, and exercise societal oversight of their rulers. In short, they are disproportionate and unjustified because they undermine the very purpose of protest in a democratic society.
545. The presence of a few individuals who commit acts of violence in and around a protest—including agents provocateurs—is not grounds for the authorities to brand entire demonstration as violent or illegal or to prohibit it in broad and sweeping terms. Nor is it license for the security forces to use force and indiscriminately detain demonstrators. The State has as a positive obligation to isolate those who commit violent acts and to protect demonstrators. Furthermore, as the IACHR has repeatedly stated, when a demonstration or protest leads to situations of violence it should be understood that the State was not capable of guaranteeing the exercise of this right.[[1682]](#footnote-1682)
546. **Excessive Use of Force**
547. Between April 1 and July 31, 2017, the Public Prosecutors' Office (Ministerio Público - MP), registered 124 deaths linked to social protests, 46 of which corresponded to demonstrators who lost their lives as a result of the actions of the security forces, and 27 due to the actions of armed pro-government militia groups known as colectivos.[[1683]](#footnote-1683) According to the same source, 15 children and 7 women were among those killed.[[1684]](#footnote-1684) This official figure was announced while Attorney General Ortega was still in office; however, since her departure on August 5, 2017, there has been a lack of official information about the number of people killed in the protests. In that connection, the State has said that the deaths were the results of acts of violence and has even referred to them as hate crimes. In addition, it has highlighted that the deaths include 9 members of the security forces.[[1685]](#footnote-1685)
548. For its parts, the FPV recorded 136 killed in protests between April and August 2017.[[1686]](#footnote-1686) In that regard, it said that 102 deaths were the consequence of acts of repression involving state officials or armed civilians acting with its acquiescence. None of these cases has apparently been condemned.[[1687]](#footnote-1687) As of July 31, 2017, that organization said that 101 people were murdered as a direct result of the repression of the demonstrations. At least 83 percent of those killed in these cases died from gunshot wounds. At the same time, 32 people were said to have been killed in indirectly connected incidents.[[1688]](#footnote-1688)The IACHR expresses its most vigorous rejection of the fact that in just four months dozens of people were murdered while exercising their right to protest to have their rights upheld in Venezuela.
549. Another 4,000 people were reportedly injured.[[1689]](#footnote-1689) By contrast, the State has reported that in this context, 1,455 people were wounded, 71 percent whom were said to have been members of State security agencies.[[1690]](#footnote-1690) The situation is all the more serious when one considers the crisis affecting the health-care system, including a shortage of medicine and medical supplies State medical assistance groups, such as Protección Civil or Grupo de Rescate Venezuela, are reportedly unable to provide care in any situation unless given instructions to do so and, according to available information, such instructions apparently do not include providing assistance to wounded opposition supporters.[[1691]](#footnote-1691) Civil society, in particular medical students, has had to organize and create the “Cruz Verde” (Green Cross).[[1692]](#footnote-1692) The Commission condemns the fact that this organization’s volunteers have been attacked in variety of ways by State officials, making it difficult for them to do their work.[[1693]](#footnote-1693)
550. According to available information, the high numbers of dead and injured are the result of use of firearms and excessive deployment of less lethal weapons, such as teargas and bird shot.[[1694]](#footnote-1694) Available information suggests that the MP has received at least 1,958 complaints of injuries sustained in such contexts, 60 percent of which were allegedly inflicted by members of the security forces.[[1695]](#footnote-1695)
551. The security forces are alleged to have misused less lethal weapons. In particular, teargas was purportedly used directly against homes and buildings in residential areas, launched against civilians at close range, or fired directly at demonstrators.[[1696]](#footnote-1696) For example, on April 8, during the protest staged at Henrique Capriles’ headquarters prompted by his disqualification, teargas was reportedly used that is said to have caused a fire in those offices.[[1697]](#footnote-1697)
552. The IACHR expresses concern at the particular harm that excessive use of force has caused to the rights of children and adolescents, due largely to the significant involvement of the student movement in the demonstrations. According to the MP, 13 adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 years old were killed during the recent protests. Cecodap recorded the deaths of six other minors, making 19 in all.[[1698]](#footnote-1698) It is worth mentioning that at least 10 of those killed reportedly died from gunshot wounds.[[1699]](#footnote-1699) For example, the killing was reported of Carlos José Moreno, a 17-year-old adolescent who was standing in a public place in the vicinity of an opposition demonstration in Caracas when he was struck in the head by a bullet. The MP is investigating the incident.[[1700]](#footnote-1700) The case was also heard of Fabián Urbina Barrios, 17 years old, who died during the “takeover of Caracas" from a gunshot wound to the chest.[[1701]](#footnote-1701) Furthermore, the MP received 53 complaints of injuries sustained by children and adolescents during the protests.[[1702]](#footnote-1702) In addition at least 356 children and adolescents reportedly lost their parents as a result of the repression of protests between May and July 2017 in Caracas.[[1703]](#footnote-1703)
553. The attack was also reported on a maternal and child hospital in El Valle, Caracas, on April 20, 2017, which forced the evacuation from it of 54 newborns for safety reasons.[[1704]](#footnote-1704) That led various civil society organizations to call for an inquiry into the indiscriminate and excessive use of teargas by State security personnel during that operation.[[1705]](#footnote-1705) In light of the situation, the Commission recalls that States have the obligation to avoid excessive use of force by public law enforcement in protest marches and demonstrations, an obligation that must be taken into account especially in the case of children and adolescents.[[1706]](#footnote-1706)
554. There were also complaints of unlawful raids on homes in the context of the State’s response to the protests. The information received by the IACHR mentions operations conducted in residential areas involving the GNB, SEBIN, and PNB. Such operations were recorded in June in the states of Mérida, Lara, Táchira, Carabobo, Zulia, and Miranda, as well as in various parts of Caracas.[[1707]](#footnote-1707) Residential buildings were directly attacked with teargas projectiles and live fire, while security personnel reportedly violently raided dozens of homes, causing property damage and robbing residents.
555. Likewise, a report recently published by the OHCHR mentioned that the demonstrations were accompanied by violent raids in housing compounds by security forces with the alleged objective of detaining protesters.The report also said that security forces carried out arbitrary, violent, illegal raids, breaking into homes by force, which particularly affected women—many of them heads of household and in charge of the domestic work—who were at home during the operations.[[1708]](#footnote-1708)
556. There were also reports of acts of gender-based violence committed as part of the repression against demonstrators, in violation of women's fundamental rights.[[1709]](#footnote-1709)The Commission was also troubled by reports of excessive force used against older persons in peaceful protests. According to the information received, the PNB has sometimes sprayed older persons with pepper gas.[[1710]](#footnote-1710)
557. Apart from excessive use of force, the fatalities caused have to do in general with the adoption of a position whereby the exercise of the right to protest is regarded as a citizen security problem. That much is clear from that fact that the social protests that took place between April and July 2017 were apparently grounds for activating the so-called “green phase” of the Zamora Plan (PZ).That led strategies for tackling domestic security problems and crime being used to deal with demonstrations. Thus, the problems noted in the area of citizen security, such as militarization of security activities and civilian participation in such activities, also manifest themselves in specific actions taken by the State to repress social protests ([Chapter IV.B.](#_Respuesta_estatal_ante)).
558. As a result, there was a visible militarization of the control of demonstrations in several states.[[1711]](#footnote-1711) In addition to increases in personnel, including soldiers, the aim of the PZ was to train security forces to pursue demonstrators or dissidents as if there were internal enemies, an approach befitting the national security doctrine.[[1712]](#footnote-1712) That coincides with information that dozens of people were detained while exercising their right to protest and then charged with committing military offenses that are reportedly being prosecuted as crimes in the military courts[[1713]](#footnote-1713) ([Chapter III.A.3](#_Estigmatización_y_criminalización) and [4](#_Detenciones_arbitrarias,_actos)). Groups of armed civilians are said to have taken part in the repression of the recent protests. According to available information, such groups are responsible for violent acts that have resulted in serious injuries and death to demonstrators and passersby, including children and adolescents.[[1714]](#footnote-1714) They also said to have detained and physically assaulted people, and even of firing on demonstrators.[[1715]](#footnote-1715)The extremely serious consequences of the foregoing have been confirmed by the IACHR: dozens of people killed; thousands arbitrarily detained; acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment committed; men and women raped; and attempts to prosecute civilians for criminal offenses in military courts ([Capítulo III.A.4](#_Detenciones_arbitrarias,_actos) and [5](#_Acceso_a_la)).
559. In that regard, the IACHR recalls that the criminalization of legitimate social mobilization and protest through the direct repression of demonstrators is incompatible with a democratic society,[[1716]](#footnote-1716) since the legitimate exercise of the right peacefully to express one's opinion is not a matter of public security. The IACHR emphatically reiterates that the State should publicly recognize and protect the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression without discrimination on the grounds of public opinion and exclude the participation of soldiers and civilian groups in controlling public demonstrations, among other operations.[[1717]](#footnote-1717)
560. In view of the above, the Commission considers that one of the aspects of greatest concern with respect to Venezuela is the situation of the right to peaceful demonstration. Social protest is one manifestation of the right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, recognized in Articles XXI and IV of the American Declaration. Social protest is a fundamental tool in the defense of human rights and is essential for engaging in political and social criticism of authorities' activities as well as for establishing positions and plans of action with regard to human rights.[[1718]](#footnote-1718) In particular, the IACHR reiterates that participation in demonstrations has an imperative social interest and forms part of the well‐ordered functioning of the democratic system inclusive of all sections of society.[[1719]](#footnote-1719) It also underscores that the relationship between political rights, freedom of expression, and the right of peaceful assembly is plain, especially when they are exercised jointly to demand effective democracy.[[1720]](#footnote-1720)
561. With reference to the use of force during demonstrations, the IACHR has stated that “it is possible to impose reasonable limits on demonstrators to preserve the peace as well as to disperse demonstrations that are turning violent.”[[1721]](#footnote-1721) However, such measures must not discourage the right of assembly, but rather protect it; therefore, the dispersal of a demonstration must be justified by the duty to protect persons.[[1722]](#footnote-1722) The Commission reiterates that the use of force at public demonstrations must be an exception, used only under strictly necessary circumstances consistent with internationally recognized principles.”[[1723]](#footnote-1723) The IACHR notes with concern that the actions of the security forces during the protests have not been consistent with the principles of necessity and proportionality that should govern the use of force.[[1724]](#footnote-1724)
562. The IACHR recalls that when using less lethal weapons, one should bear in mind not only the design or characteristics of the weapon, but also other factors related to their use and control.[[1725]](#footnote-1725) Less lethal weapons can have indiscriminate effects and, in some instances, fatal consequences.[[1726]](#footnote-1726) In that regard, the IACHR considers that launching teargas at demonstrators from close range and from helicopters, as well as using it directly in health care facilities, homes, and residential buildings, are not only not absolutely necessary (given the existence of other less harmful means), but would have a disproportionate impact on the public owing to their possible indiscriminate effects.[[1727]](#footnote-1727) There were also reports of the use of expired teargas canisters against demonstrators, which reportedly resulted in a person being killed.[[1728]](#footnote-1728)
563. As was noted, agents of the security forces used firearms extensively as a means to suppress down demonstrations. The Commission is deeply concerned by multiple serious complaints that GNB personnel used firearms directly against demonstrators at close range.[[1729]](#footnote-1729)
564. The IACHR reiterates its concern about Resolution No. 008610, *Rules on the Actions of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces in Functions of Public Order, Social Peace, and Citizen Co-existence in Public Assemblies and Demonstrations*, issued by the Ministry of People’s Power for Defense and in force since January 23, 2015.[[1730]](#footnote-1730) The resolution, which governs the functions of the Venezuelan armed forces in controlling public gatherings, in and of itself constitutes an interference by the armed forces in the regular management of public order and allows security forces personnel to use firearms.[[1731]](#footnote-1731) The Resolution also gives the FANB excessively broad leeway to use lethal weapons during social protests, including firearms. According to Article 15.9 of the law, "firearms shall not be carried or used to control public demonstrations, *unless carrying and using them is necessary to respond to the demonstrations*.”[[1732]](#footnote-1732) This is despite the fact that the Constitution of Venezuela establishes that the use of firearms and toxic substances such as tear gas to control demonstrations is prohibited.[[1733]](#footnote-1733)The Commission deeply regrets that, despite contravening international law, on July 27, 2016, the Political and Administrative Division of the TSJ rejected an application for *amparo* (constitutional relief) presented on February 3, 2015 against that resolution by deputies of the AN.[[1734]](#footnote-1734)
565. The Commission has repeatedly recommended to the Venezuelan state that firearms should be excluded from the devices used to control social protests.[[1735]](#footnote-1735) The prohibition on officials who might have contact with demonstrators carrying firearms and lead munitions has proven to be the best measure for preventing lethal violence and deaths in contexts of social protest.[[1736]](#footnote-1736) Furthermore, considering the gravity of the current situation in Venezuela, it is crucial that complaints concerning disproportionate use of force not remain in impunity and that the necessary measures are urgently taken more rigorously to prevent such practice by agents of the security forces.[[1737]](#footnote-1737)
566. The Commission urges the Venezuelan State to stop all repression of peaceful demonstrations and immediately to adopt appropriate measures to protect the public, including women, children, and older persons, from all forms of violence. It also underscores that the American Declaration states in its Article VII that “[a]ll children have the right to special protection, care and aid.” Therefore, in operations concerning public security, States must adopt all necessary and appropriate measures to protect the rights to life and well-being of children.[[1738]](#footnote-1738)
567. In light of the foregoing, the Commission urges the State to take the necessary steps to fulfill its duty to facilitate demonstrations and protests, including refraining from requiring prior authorization for staging public demonstrations, or any other excessive requirements that might obstruct them; exclude the participation of military personnel in operations for managing public demonstrations; exclude firearms from the devices used to control social protests; and adopt and rigorously implement specific protocols on the gradual and proportional use of less lethal weapons and punish their indiscriminate use.
568. **Stigmatization and Criminalization of social Protest**
569. The Commission has observed that senior government officials use the media to stigmatize and criminalize those who organize and participate in public demonstrations, referring to them as "terrorists" or "armed insurgents." [[1739]](#footnote-1739) Dozens of instances have been documented of individuals being singled out by name and stigmatized by the most high-ranking officials, such as the Minister for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace, Néstor Reverol, and National Assembly Deputy Diosdado Cabello, who have accused demonstrators and opposition leaders who organize protests of carrying out a "terrorist plan."[[1740]](#footnote-1740)
570. Human rights organizations denounced that the forensic police used social media (Twitter) to single out individuals who have demonstrated against the TSJ and President Maduro's government. According to reports, the Scientific, Criminal and Forensic Investigations Corps (CICPC) used a Twitter account with the username “*Prensa CIPC*” to disseminate the likenesses of seven people that they consider “provokers of violence” and invited people to expose them,[[1741]](#footnote-1741) with the post “Wanted. If you see this terrorist, inform the authorities, who will come after him,” along with the hashtags #*SeBuscaTerroristas* (#TerroristsWanted), #*TerroristasVanPresos* (#TerroristsGoToPrison) and #*DenunciaTuZona* (#ReportYourArea).
571. The Commission reiterates its rejection of any kind of intimidating expressions or discourse from high State officials against citizens and opposition leaders as a way of deterring the right to protest.[[1742]](#footnote-1742) Furthermore, the Commission underscores that stigmatizing statements made by public officials publicly incriminating people for alleged crimes not declared as such by the courts may violate the right to be presumed innocent. That right may also be tacitly violated when actions suggest an indisputable attitude of harassment and intimidation that prejudges the responsibility of the individual.[[1743]](#footnote-1743)
572. The IACHR has also received troubling reports of acts of harassment involving both government officials[[1744]](#footnote-1744) and private citizens[[1745]](#footnote-1745) breaking into the homes of human rights defenders. It is worth mentioning that the Commission has granted precautionary measures in favor of Theresly Malavé, a human rights defender. Mrs. Malavé has been the target of threats and intimidation as a result of representing various Voluntad Popular activists who are deprived of their liberty, including a purported attempt to kidnap her in December 2014, as well as being the subject of verbal remarks made by Diosdado Cabello.[[1746]](#footnote-1746)In that regard, the IACHR reiterates that threats and harassment aimed at belittling the physical and mental capacity of human rights defenders amount to a violation of the right to humane treatment.[[1747]](#footnote-1747)
573. The Commission has also received disturbing information about Adriana Flores Márquez, a member of the Barinas Justice First Party who works with civil society organizations to keep a record of human rights violations committed during the protests in 2017. She claims to have been the victim of political persecution since 2014, when she first expressed her dissent with the Government. There is reported to be an outstanding warrant for her arrest issued by a military court, which accuses her, among other things, of the crime of “assaulting a guard” in the context of an alleged attack on the Zone No. 33 Command Center on May 22, 2017. Adriana Flores has said that she was documenting a protest that day and that her rights to liberty, to personal safety, and even to life, are at risk.[[1748]](#footnote-1748)
574. The Commission is deeply troubled by the criminalization of human rights defenders. In that regard, as the next section addresses, there have been reports of arrests made by the SEBIN without a court order, activists being prosecuted for military offenses, and the imposition of pretrial detention without justification, among other measures.[[1749]](#footnote-1749) The commission reiterates that the criminalization of legitimate social mobilization and protest, whether through direct repression of demonstrators, or through investigation, arbitrary detention of demonstrators and criminal prosecution, is incompatible with a democratic society where people have the right to express their opinion" peacefully.[[1750]](#footnote-1750)The IACHR also recalls that the misuse of vaguely and ambiguously worded criminal offenses, such as "disobedience of authority,” has a chilling effect on the exercise of the right to protest and is contrary to democratic principles.[[1751]](#footnote-1751) The Commission further reiterates that in Venezuela lack of independence and impartiality in the judiciary has enabled the punitive power of the State to be used to repress peaceful protest.[[1752]](#footnote-1752)
575. **Arbitrary Detentions, Torture, and Sexual Violence during the Social Protests**

Arbitrary Detentions

1. The Commission notes that unlawful and arbitrary detentions have continued in Venezuela, reaching alarmingly high figures over the past year.[[1753]](#footnote-1753) According to the information, between January 1, 2014, and October 31, 2017, 11,993 individuals were arbitrarily detained, of which 7,040 have been released conditionally.[[1754]](#footnote-1754) Likewise, as of November 19, the FPV had identified 317 individuals deprived of liberty for political reasons.[[1755]](#footnote-1755) It is worth noting that that figure fluctuates constantly as a result of what has been termed the “revolving-door effect.” That effect explains why the number of persons deprived of liberty in Venezuela remains roughly constant from month to month, since while new prisoners are detained, others are released.[[1756]](#footnote-1756) Thus, as at July 31 there were 620 persons deprived of liberty due to political reasons in Venezuela,[[1757]](#footnote-1757) whereas at August 31 that figure had dropped to 590.[[1758]](#footnote-1758) The IACHR also notes with concern that several human rights defenders have been arrested and harassed for defending detainees or reporting on the situation in the country.[[1759]](#footnote-1759) The Commission has also received information that 19 people have not been set free by the authorities in spite of having release orders.[[1760]](#footnote-1760)
2. Just in the protests that took place between April 1 and August 31, 2017, 5,341 people were reportedly arrested arbitrarily.[[1761]](#footnote-1761) In July alone, 1414 people were arrested, 391 of whom were detained on July 20 during the 24-hour national civic strike.[[1762]](#footnote-1762) The Commission is concerned by this high number of people detained while exercising their right to social protest, and by information that suggests that the detentions were politically motivated and aimed at repressing demonstrators.[[1763]](#footnote-1763) In that connection, the Commission would remind the State of Venezuela that blanket bans on exercising the right to participate in peaceful protests cannot serve as justification for surveillance, detention, and prosecution of demonstrators or social leaders who are simply expressing their opinions about a government policy or measure.[[1764]](#footnote-1764) By the same token, an individual must only be deprived of their liberty for a specific deed that warrants their arrest, which must be a crime and envisaged in law as such; the risk that an individual might commit a crime cannot, therefore, be grounds for arresting them.[[1765]](#footnote-1765)
3. The Commission also notes that 90 percent of those detentions were allegedly made without a court order.[[1766]](#footnote-1766) In that regard, the OHCHR found that security forces have often claimed after people were detained without an arrest warrant that they were caught *in flagrante delicto*.[[1767]](#footnote-1767) However, they were apparently arrested on their way to, during, or after demonstrations; others were arrested even though they were not demonstrating, but simply perceived to support the opposition.[[1768]](#footnote-1768) Similarly, Amnesty International has alerted about the discretionary and arbitrary use of the concept of *in flagrante delicto* in which the person detained was very often going about their daily activities, which were not of a criminal nature.[[1769]](#footnote-1769) The IACHR is profoundly concerned by these reports and recalls that an arrest can only be made on the basis of a court order or while a crime is being committed, otherwise it is unlawful.
4. The IACHR has been informed of circumstances that would appear to violate the rights of detainees. In the majority of cases they were allegedly not informed of the reasons for their detention until they were brought before a judge.[[1770]](#footnote-1770) They were also not permitted to contact relatives or lawyers until that moment.[[1771]](#footnote-1771) Cases have also been reported of incommunicado detention[[1772]](#footnote-1772) and arbitrary transfers between detention centers during pre-dawn hours and without notice.[[1773]](#footnote-1773) The Commission has also learned of cases in which people have not been set at liberty, despite the existence of a release order.[[1774]](#footnote-1774) There have also been complaints of judges requiring that bail be guaranteed by one or more guarantors as a condition for release, needlessly prolonging the detention.[[1775]](#footnote-1775)
5. Regarding individuals deprived of liberty in the context of demonstrations, the Commission takes note that on November 14, 2017, a preparatory meeting began in Santa Domingo, Dominican Republic, toward restarting the process of "Peace Dialogue." It was attended by the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Nicholás Maduro, and representatives of the opposition. This meeting was attended by the Vice President of Communication and Culture, Jorge Rodríguez, who also led the delegation of the Venezuelan government, and the president of the ANC, Delcy Rodríguez; the opposition was represented by former CNE rector Vicente Díaz, Gustavo Velázquez, and José Luis Cartaya.[[1776]](#footnote-1776) In December 2017, a recommendation was received from the Truth, Justice, Peace, and Public Tranquility Commission, created by the ANC (the all-powerful body comprised solely of supporters of the government) recommending evaluation of measures in lieu of deprivation of liberty for approximately 80 individuals detained or sentenced to prison. According to public sources, starting on the morning of December 23, the Venezuelan government freed several dozen individuals deprived of liberty during the protests that took place between 2014 and 2017. At the time of aproval of this report the IACHR had no information on the legal situation of the individuals released.[[1777]](#footnote-1777)
6. The Commission expresses its strongest possible rejection of such situations, which are contrary to both the right to personal liberty and the right to a fair trial. In that regard, the IACHR recalls that the American Declaration enshrines the right of protection against arbitrary arrest at Article XXV, which provides: “No person may be deprived of his liberty except in the cases and according to the procedures established by pre-existing law.” That article also provides: “Every individual who has been deprived of his liberty has the right to have the legality of his detention ascertained without delay by a court, and the right to be tried without undue delay or, otherwise, to be released.” In that connection, the IACHR reiterates that a detention is arbitrary and illegal when not carried out for the reasons, and according to the formalities, established by law; when carried out without adherence to the standards established by law; and when it involves misuse of the authority to arrest--in other words, when carried out for purposes other than those envisaged and stipulated by law. Furthermore, detention for improper purposes is in itself a sort of sentence without trial, or an unlawful penalty that violates the guarantee against imposition of punishment without benefit of trial and encourages the term "arbitrary" to be considered synonymous with “irregular,” “abusive,” or “contrary to law.”[[1778]](#footnote-1778)
7. Accordingly, the Commission urges the State to refrain from practices involving massive, collective, or indiscriminate arrests and to comply with all requirements imposed by domestic laws and international standards with regard to the arrests that security forces make in contexts of social protests, particularly to ensure that those detained and their families receive accurate information regarding the reasons for their arrest and the place where the person is being held.

Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment

1. The Commission has been monitoring extremely troubling reports about alleged torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment committed by agents of the state against persons deprived of their liberty in Venezuela.Prior to 2017 there were already complaints of such highly reprehensible acts. Specifically, in 2015, the IACHR received information about 51 cases of alleged acts of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment committed between January and June alone, marking a 28 percent rise relative to the year before.[[1779]](#footnote-1779) In July 2016, it was alleged that since May the SEBIN and the GNB had detained 21 people, most of whom said they were tortured or suffered other ill treatment while in custody.[[1780]](#footnote-1780) The IACHR also received information about the individual identification of 18 torture victims, which would represent an increase of 300 percent compared with 2015.[[1781]](#footnote-1781) In 2016, 473 victims were identified of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment (320 less than in 2015) as well as "cases involving groups of more than 10 victims that occurred in incarceration facilities.”[[1782]](#footnote-1782)
2. According to information provided to the Commission, in the demonstrations since April 2017 the number of complaints of torture and other mistreatment rose markedly, which suggests the use of that practice as a tool to deter or punish social protest.The alleged torture is purportedly used for a number of purposes, including obtaining confessions, bringing charges against another person, or to send a repressive message.Thus, CASLA says that it recorded at least 120 cases of people tortured between April 1 and June 12, 2017.[[1783]](#footnote-1783) For its part, the FPV said in June that “[o]f the 3,880 people arrested since April, at least 15 percent have been subjected to torture or cruel and inhuman treatment.”[[1784]](#footnote-1784). By contrast, the DP informed the OHCHR that between April 1, and July 10, 2017, it received 2 complaints of torture and 122 complaints of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.[[1785]](#footnote-1785)
3. The alleged torture is reputedly carried out at government facilities by different security agencies, such as the SEBIN, the GNB, and the PNB, as well as regional or municipal police agents. In the case of the SEBIN, instances of torture were recorded at the Helicoide and Plaza Venezuela (known as *La Tumba* [The Tomb]) facilities.[[1786]](#footnote-1786) As regards the GNB, alleged acts of torture were reported at the command center known as “Ciudad Chavez,”[[1787]](#footnote-1787) Command Center 433,[[1788]](#footnote-1788) and La Ciega detention center.[[1789]](#footnote-1789) Cases of torture have also been documented at the CICPC offices in Villa del Rosario,[[1790]](#footnote-1790) and at the PNB headquarters in Aragua State.[[1791]](#footnote-1791) The IACHR has also received information about alleged torture at different prisons, including La Pica,[[1792]](#footnote-1792) DESUR detention center,[[1793]](#footnote-1793) CENAPROMIL (Ramo Verde) Military Prison,[[1794]](#footnote-1794) Uribana prison, and 26 de Julio Remand Center.[[1795]](#footnote-1795) Torture is also said to have been inflicted at improvised places of detention for holding demonstrators detained for hours, such as theCorporación Eléctrica Nacional(CORPOELEC) building in the Amparo sector and Fundación Servicio de Atención del Zulia (Funsaz 171) on Av. La Limpia, both in the city of Maracaibo, Zulia State.[[1796]](#footnote-1796) The IACHR also received information of detained demonstrators being physically and psychologically mistreated at other moments, including in the course of their arrest and transfer to detention centers.[[1797]](#footnote-1797)
4. The Commission notes with deep concern that the SEBIN allegedly has a facility known as “The Tomb” (*La Tumba*) located in a basement five floors underground at its Plaza Venezuela headquarters. Acts of torture are allegedly committed at that facility, where detainees are placed in very small cells with the lights never turned off, they are unable to see sunlight or breathe fresh air, the temperatures are below 8°C, and they are held incommunicado and even in isolation for long periods.[[1798]](#footnote-1798)
5. The torture allegedly includes physical blows to all parts of the body using such instruments as sticks, metal bars, helmets, and firearms.[[1799]](#footnote-1799) Other alleged forms of torture are the application of electric shocks,[[1800]](#footnote-1800) forcing victims to assume inhuman positions (such as kneeling and being tied up for long periods, squatting, and being manacled by the hands and feet).[[1801]](#footnote-1801) There were also reports of teargas grenades being deployed in cells,[[1802]](#footnote-1802) in transport vehicles,[[1803]](#footnote-1803) and even directly into detainees' faces[[1804]](#footnote-1804). There were reports of alleged smothering with bags impregnated with chemical substances, such as ammonia or insecticide,[[1805]](#footnote-1805) and the use of *piroca* gas (which has effects similar to those of teargas) on the face and anus.[[1806]](#footnote-1806) The OHCHR also documented testimony of that nature.[[1807]](#footnote-1807) It was also reported that the lack of water and food at detention facilities meant that relatives of detainees had to take them food and drink on a regular basis;[[1808]](#footnote-1808) that the food provided was not fit for human consumption;[[1809]](#footnote-1809) and that, in some cases, detainees were forced to eat food off the floor.[[1810]](#footnote-1810)
6. The IACHR has also received reports of acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment through its precautionary measures mechanism. It received allegations of torture and cruel treatment, both physical and psychological, suffered by three members of the Voluntad Popular party, who were reportedly physically assaulted and forced to assume inhuman positions and had teargas grenades thrown into their cells. In addition, one of them was held in an unventilated cell measuring 2 m² in which there was human excrement, where he was subjected to psychological torture and not even allowed to go to the toilet.[[1811]](#footnote-1811) The Commission granted precautionary measures to Leopoldo López and Daniel Ceballos, both of whom were detained at the Ramo Verde facility in 2014, where there were locked in their cells for 23 hours a day and reportedly held in solitary confinement without natural light on more than one occasion.[[1812]](#footnote-1812) Precautionary measures were also granted to Lorent Saleh and Gerardo Guerrero, who were held in solitary confinement at the SEBIN in cold cells without access to sunlight or fresh air, and with scant opportunity to exercise.[[1813]](#footnote-1813)
7. The Commission was also informed about 10 youths who were reportedly detained by the PNB during the demonstrations on May 15, 2017, in El Limón, Aragua State. According to information provided to the Commission, the youths were “subjected to appalling torture at the police station [and] sustained multiple blows and kicks to sensitive areas, such as the ribs and face.” According to reports, "toxic gases and powders were sprayed directly into their eyes while they were kneeling, in addition to which they were suspended by the arms” and forced to “engage in indecent acts with each other.” Allegedly, the youths "were also threatened with death, rape, and intimidation.”[[1814]](#footnote-1814)
8. The Commission reiterates its utmost rejection of any act of torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, especially when it appears to have become commonplace, as in this instance. It would remind the State, that the prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment is a *ius cogens* norm of international law.[[1815]](#footnote-1815) That prohibition is enshrined in Articles XXV and XXVI of the American Declaration as well as in Article 5 of the Inter-American Convention to Prevent and Punish Torture.[[1816]](#footnote-1816) Furthermore, the Commission reiterates that this peremptory prohibition of any form of torture is the corollary of the State's duty to treat everyone deprived of their liberty humanely and with respect for their dignity.[[1817]](#footnote-1817) The Commission emphasizes that the investigation of cases of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment “must be conducted *ex officio* and be governed by the principles of independence, impartiality, competence, diligence, and promptness,”[[1818]](#footnote-1818) and that “in cases involving persons deprived of liberty, the State's duty to investigate has to meet a higher standard,”[[1819]](#footnote-1819) since they are in its custody.

Sexual Violence

1. The IACHR has received extremely troubling information about allegations of sexual violence during detentions in the context of the recent social protests. It regrets deeply that sexual violence against people arrested in social demonstrations is not a new problem in Venezuela.[[1820]](#footnote-1820)
2. In relation to the recent events, women's organizations informed the IACHR of at least six cases in which PNB and GNB personnel had groped or sexually violated women and men deprived of their liberty.[[1821]](#footnote-1821)AVESA denounced 25 cases of sexual violence in the context of the repression of the demonstrations, in which 56 percent of the victims were women. According to the same source, the violence took different forms, including exposure to sexual violence (60 percent), groping (20 percent) and rape (16 percent). The assailants reportedly belonged to the PNB (68 percent), the Aragua Police (20 percent), and the GNB (12 percent).[[1822]](#footnote-1822) Other sources also report different forms of violence inflicted by agents of the State.[[1823]](#footnote-1823)At the same time, it is worth noting that there is a high level of underreporting of cases due to “victim shame or intimidation, non-recognition of offenses, and/or lack of human rights defenders and public officials trained in identifying them.”[[1824]](#footnote-1824)
3. The IACHR has also received reports of acts of this nature through its precautionary measures mechanism. For instance, in relation to the group of 27 students of Universidad Experimental Pedagógica Libertador (UPEL) who were detained in July 2017 as they spent the night at the university during demonstrations, the IACHR was informed that the women alleged to have been sexually assaulted with pipes inserted through their trouser pants as well as being groped.[[1825]](#footnote-1825)The Commission also heard how youths detained by the PNB on May 15, 2017, in El Limón, Aragua State, were reportedly sexually assaulted with pipes.[[1826]](#footnote-1826)
4. Another case that was brought to the attention of the IACHR involved two UCAB students in Guayana, who were arrested on June 1 during the demonstrations and alleged to have been the victims of indecent acts inside the personnel carrier that took them away.[[1827]](#footnote-1827) There was also reports of sexual violence against 10 youths who were arrested on May 15 near an area where protests were being staged.[[1828]](#footnote-1828) Another recorded case was that of D.E., a woman who was detained on May 17, 2017, by GNB personnel and claimed to have been sexually abused. Specifically she alleged that after being put in a pickup truck, was physically assaulted and subjected to indecent acts, before being given a powder that made her lose consciousness.[[1829]](#footnote-1829) A man detained in Villa del Rosario, Zulia State, alleged that he was raped with a broom handle.[[1830]](#footnote-1830) There were also allegations concerning the frequent use of threats of a sexual nature.[[1831]](#footnote-1831)
5. The IACHR expresses its utter repudiation of such alleged abuses and calls on the State to implement the recommendations made by the IACHR in that regard in this report at the earliest opportunity. In particular, the IACHR reiterates that States have a special duty to act with due diligence to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence and discrimination against women.[[1832]](#footnote-1832) It also underscores that the risks of being subjected to physical, sexual, and psychological violence, as well as other forms of abuse, are accentuated when women are deprived of their liberty and in the custody of State authorities.[[1833]](#footnote-1833) In that connection, the obligation of the State to prevent and eradicate violence against women is more acute in such contexts. Therefore, States should adopt all necessary comprehensive measures to ensure that their rights are effectively observed and guaranteed, so that they are not the object of discrimination and are protected from all forms of violence or exploitation.[[1834]](#footnote-1834)
6. **Access to Justice and Due Process**
7. The Commission notes with deep disquiet that civilians are reportedly being prosecuted and tried in military criminal courts. It received information that as of May 2017 there were at least 52 such cases, including those of Santiago Guevara, a professor from the University of Carabobo (prosecuted in February 2017), and Stayci Escalona (a young woman arrested with Deputy Caro and prosecuted in January 2017 in the Sixth Military Oversight Tribunal).[[1835]](#footnote-1835) The IACHR was also informed that between April 1 and October 23, 2017, 757 civilians were prosecuted in military tribunals and that 207 of them are still in custody. The Commission was also made aware that between April 1 and October 31, 2017, 757 civilians were tried before military tribunals, 198 of which are still imprisoned.[[1836]](#footnote-1836)
8. According to publicly available information, the prosecution of civilians in military courts increased from March 2017 onward, when Attorney General Ortega announced that she did not support the Government’s “directives for violating human rights.” That apparently had to do with the decision to prosecute a number of cases in the military jurisdiction, rather than in the regular courts.[[1837]](#footnote-1837) This alarming increase is apparently connected with the implementation of the Zamora Plan, under which detained civilians have reportedly been turned over to the military courts. In that regard, the AN passed a resolution repudiating the implementation of the Zamora Plan and the unconstitutional practice of installing military tribunals that usurp the jurisdiction of the regular courts, violating human rights.[[1838]](#footnote-1838) The Attorney General also disputed the competence of military tribunals to prosecute civilians.[[1839]](#footnote-1839)
9. The information available indicates that in a high proportion of cases civilians are charged with the offenses of "treason," "rebellion," and “assaulting a guard” classified at Articles 464, 476-487, and 501-502, respectively, of the Organic Code of Military Justice.[[1840]](#footnote-1840) The State, for its part, has justified the use of the military criminal courts by the fact that there have reportedly been at least 12 attacks on military facilities, which apparently qualifies as the offense of “assaulting a guard.”[[1841]](#footnote-1841) However, the IACHR is surprised that people unconnected with the armed forces are being charged with offenses of a clearly military nature. Furthermore, in breach of the principle of legality, the definition of the offense of "assaulting a guard” is extremely broad and vague, allowing its application to such conduct as striking or verbally insulting an official.[[1842]](#footnote-1842) In addition, the IACHR recalls that military judges and prosecutors do not satisfy the requirement of independence for the reason that they are active members of the armed forces, part of the military hierarchy, and subject to the authority of the Minister of the People's Power for Defense and the President.[[1843]](#footnote-1843)
10. [[1844]](#footnote-1844)The Commission notes that the above also violates the Constitution of Venezuela, Article 49(4) of which recognizes the right to a competent tribunal, while Article 261 expressly provides that “common crimes, human rights violations, and crimes against humanity shall be tried by the courts of the ordinary jurisdiction.”[[1845]](#footnote-1845)In addition, the Inter-American Court has referred to the use of the military criminal jurisdiction in Venezuela and has ordered the State to “establish ... through its legislation, limits on the competence of military tribunals, in such a way that the military jurisdiction will be used only with respect to those crimes relating to military functions. Likewise, the State must repeal all domestic legislation that is not in conformance with said ... jurisprudence ... within a reasonable time.[[1846]](#footnote-1846)
11. The Commission strenuously repudiates such acts and stresses that the use of the military criminal jurisdiction to prosecute civilians entails a violation of a series of rights, such as the right to an independent and impartial natural judge. It also vitiates judicial guarantees across the entire process, which has serious consequences for the effectiveness of the rule of law.[[1847]](#footnote-1847) The Commission emphatically reiterates that military justice should be used only to judge active-duty military officers for the alleged commission of strictly service-related offenses, and that military courts do not satisfy the requirements of independence and impartiality that judges are expected to meet.[[1848]](#footnote-1848) In the opinion of the IACHR, that is clearly not the case in the above instances where civilians are alleged to have committed offenses of a military nature.
12. The IACHR notes with concern inaction and lack of diligence on the part of justice operators where human rights violations committed in Venezuela are concerned. The Commission acknowledges the work of the former Attorney-General, Luisa Ortega, under whose stewardship the MP published statistics on people killed in social protests. Investigations opened into those deaths identified 41 members of the security services as alleged perpetrators and ordered their arrest.[[1849]](#footnote-1849) However, it regrets the alleged lack of cooperation on the part of the security forces in those investigations,[[1850]](#footnote-1850) as well as the lack of disclosure of the number of fatalities during protests, which coincided with the assumption of the position of the Attorney General by Tarek William Saab. The Commission notes that the State has said that of the 124 deaths that, according to the MP, occurred during the protests in 2017, the State was presumed responsible in 16 cases, a very low figure considering the facts described above and the circumstances in which they took place. The State also reported that 78 percent of cases were still under investigation.[[1851]](#footnote-1851) Therefore, the IACHR calls upon the State rigorously to fulfill its duty to investigate those allegations with due diligence and within a reasonable time, in order to prevent their impunity.[[1852]](#footnote-1852) Regarding the recognition of the work done by the Attorney General, the State indicates in its comments that "it is surprising that the Commission would recognize the ‘performance’ of the former Attorney General when its own draft Country Report states that the Public Ministry and its head at the time—Ms. Luisa Ortega Díaz—has, as the body in charge of criminal investigations, ‘also been seriously deficient in the performance of its functions.’”[[1853]](#footnote-1853)
13. The IACHR is also disturbed by allegations that in cases where rape has been used as torture, the MP has only brought charges of cruel treatment. There is no open investigation in the majority of complaints alleging torture.[[1854]](#footnote-1854) The Commission also laments the failure of the DP to speak up about such situations, which has prompted civil society to call for the resignation of the erstwhile ombudsperson and current Attorney General, Tarik William Saab.[[1855]](#footnote-1855) As a result, impunity extends to 98 percent of human rights violations in Venezuela.[[1856]](#footnote-1856)
14. In this context, the Commission laments profoundly that the judiciary and the MP are not fulfilling their constitutionally ordained role of administering justice in the country[[1857]](#footnote-1857) ([Chapter II.A.1](#PJ) and [4](#MP)), which should be insulated from all political interests.[[1858]](#footnote-1858) It also reiterates that in the context of the serious situation in Venezuela it is crucial that excesses committed by personnel of the security forces not go unpunished.[[1859]](#footnote-1859)
15. The Commission notes that on March 24, 2017, the Commission for Justice and Truth submitted its report with a view to the investigation and punishment of politically motivated crimes, disappearances, torture, and other human rights violations committed between 1958 and 1998. A total of 10,071 victims of human rights violations, including torture, murder, and forced disappearance, were identified.[[1860]](#footnote-1860) The Commission for Justice and Truth was brought into being by presidential decree on February 27, 2012, to investigate politically motivated crimes, disappearances, torture, and other human rights violations committed during the period from 1958 to 1998.[[1861]](#footnote-1861) It was installed in April 2016.[[1862]](#footnote-1862) Although the State's efforts to recover the truth and historical memory are laudable, the IACHR reiterates that truth commissions are not a substitute for judicial process, and that the obligations of the State to combat impunity and provide reparation to victims of gross human rights violations remain.[[1863]](#footnote-1863)

The IACHR also observes that the State has recognized that it faces a challenge on the matter of impunity and has said that one step it has taken to combat this problem was the creation of the ANC, whose objectives include a top-to-bottom review of the justice system.[[1864]](#footnote-1864)The IACHR observes that the foregoing is related to the establishment by the ANC of the Commission for Truth, Justice, Peace, and Public Tranquility in August 2017. Nonetheless, as the IACHR has already noted, the initiative raises questions about a possible overreach by the ANC of its functions and would increase persecution of dissent ([Chapter II.A.2](#_Actuación_de_la)). Furthermore, on this point the IACHR underscores that truth commissions are extrajudicial bodies whose purpose is to advance the right of the victims and society to know the truth but are "not an adequate substitute for the judicial process.”[[1865]](#footnote-1865) In that connection, it reiterates that it is particularly important for the State to take steps to ensure a judicial investigation of abusive use of force, whether by agents of the state, or by third parties, in order to impose criminal penalties on those responsible and provide adequate redress to the victims.[[1866]](#footnote-1866)

1. **Freedom of Thought and Expression**
2. The right to freedom of expression established in Article IV of the American Declaration provides that "[e]very person has the right to freedom of investigation, of opinion, and of the expression and dissemination of ideas, by any medium whatsoever." The organs of the inter-American system have recognized that this right constitutes a key element on which the existence of democratic societies is based, due to its indispensable structural relationship with democracy[[1867]](#footnote-1867).
3. The Human Rights Committee of the United Nations[[1868]](#footnote-1868), the European Court of Human Rights[[1869]](#footnote-1869), and the African Commission and Court on Human and Peoples' Rights[[1870]](#footnote-1870) have also recognized, in the same terms, the transcendental importance of freedom of expression in a democratic society. Article 4 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter characterizes freedom of expression and the press as "essential components of the exercise of democracy."[[1871]](#footnote-1871) In the same way, the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression adopted by the IACHR in 2000 recalls that "freedom of expression in all its forms and manifestations is a fundamental and inalienable right of all individuals. Additionally, it is an indispensable requirement for the very existence of a democratic society." For the same reasons, it’s been affirmed that States must promote, and not inhibit, a vigorous, plural, and uninhibited deliberation on all public matters.
4. For more than a decade, the IACHR and the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression have followed with special attention the situation of freedom of expression in Venezuela and have documented the progressive deterioration of the exercise of this right in the country[[1872]](#footnote-1872).
5. Throughout 2017, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur continued to document severe restrictions on the right to freedom of expression in the country, including censorship, closure of media, attacks on journalists, and in general patterns of harassment and criminalization of those who issue political opinions or disseminate information that does not have state approval. As will be analyzed in this chapter, these measures do not respond to a legal framework compatible with international obligations subscribed by the Venezuelan State in this matter. On the contrary, these measures are applied outside the law or based on ambiguous and excessively broad legal provisions. According to the information obtained, the authorities tend to justify restrictions on the right to freedom of expression under the protection of assets linked to national security, sovereignty, and peace, but in practice, these measures have been aimed at silencing critical voices of the current Government. The impact of these measures on Venezuelan democracy is evident and deserves priority attention.
6. **The compatibility of the current legal framework with the State’s international obligations regarding the right to freedom of expression**
7. Restrictions on the right to freedom of expression must be defined in a precise and clear manner through a formal and material law, aimed at achieving legitimate ends and be necessary and proportionate in a democratic society for the achievement of those compelling purposes it pursues. In addition, the subsequent liabilities arising from the exercise of freedom of expression must always be ordered by an independent and impartial judicial or jurisdictional authority, respecting the due process guarantees. In all cases, these measures must not be discriminatory or produce discriminatory effects, nor can they constitute censorship through direct or indirect means. The IACHR considers that the Venezuelan legal framework, described below, imposes restrictions on the freedom of expression and access to information in a way that is incompatible with these requirements, and have been used to initiate judicial or administrative proceedings against those who disseminate information contrary to the government’s interests, and inhibit criticism and political debate.
8. *Law on Social Responsibility in Radio, Television, and Electronic Media* [*Ley de Responsabilidad Social en Radio, Televisión y Medios Electrónicos*]: The IACHR has repeatedly indicated the need to review the legal framework in which the media operates in Venezuela[[1873]](#footnote-1873) and, in particular, the need to amend the Law on Social Responsibility in Radio, Television, and Electronic Media[[1874]](#footnote-1874). In recent years, this regulation has served as a basis for closing or threatening the closure of audiovisual media and the blocking of online media (*infra*). For example, article 29 of said law establishes that the providers of radio, television, and electronic media services will be sanctioned with high fines, suspension of their transmissions and even the revocation of the concession, when they broadcast messages that "promote, advocate, or incite disturbances of public order," or "promote, advocate, or incite crime," or "foster distress in the public or disturb public order," "ignore the legitimately constituted authorities," or "are contrary to the safety of the Nation"[[1875]](#footnote-1875). In addition, this law authorizes the State to restrict access to Internet content or websites that, in its judgment, disseminate this type of prohibited content[[1876]](#footnote-1876). In particular, the law authorizes the National Telecommunications Commission [*Comisión Nacional de Telecomunicaciones*] (Conatel), a body directly dependent on the executive power, to order electronic media "to refrain from broadcasting messages that violate the circumstances established" in the law[[1877]](#footnote-1877), forces Internet service providers to create mechanisms "that allow restricting [...] the dissemination"[[1878]](#footnote-1878) of such messages, and establishes the liability of those companies for expressions of third parties when they do not take measures to restrict those speeches at the request of Conatel[[1879]](#footnote-1879).
9. *Desacato offenses and other offenses against honor:* the Criminal Code[[1880]](#footnote-1880) and the Code of Military Criminal Justice[[1881]](#footnote-1881) uphold the norms of protection of honor and reputation of state officials against the issuance of critical expressions that may be considered offensive, such as vilification and offense to the authority. The Criminal Code also maintains the crime of defamation[[1882]](#footnote-1882). The IACHR has already established in the study of individual cases regarding Venezuela[[1883]](#footnote-1883), according to its doctrine and established case law[[1884]](#footnote-1884), that these provisions are incompatible with the principle strict legality in criminal law and the right to freedom of expression, for which it has recommended to the Venezuelan State its repeal.
10. *Crimes against national security*: all through 2017, the IACHR documented the arrest and start of criminal proceedings for crimes against national security, including of a military nature, such as treason, rebellion, and espionage, against social referents, journalists, politicians, and protesters (*infra*). These are provisions that typify behaviors in a broad, vague, and ambiguous way that lend themselves to abuse in order to suppress political and critical expressions that have nothing to do with national security, from a democratic perspective. For example, the crime of treason, prescribed in articles 128 and 129 of the Organic Criminal Code, and in article 464 of the Code of Military Criminal Justice, establishes prison up to 30 years for those who "conspire" against the republican institutions of the homeland or "antagonize them by any means", or "threat in any way national sovereignty". Likewise, the crime of military rebellion establishes that "rebellion is a military crime even for non-military", when "they antagonize in any way the national forces." [[1885]](#footnote-1885) Likewise, any person who "reveals documents, news, or information of a military nature that in the interest of national defense must remain secret"[[1886]](#footnote-1886), commits the crime of espionage. For its part, the Decree-Organic Law on Security of the Nation [*Decreto-Ley Orgánica de Seguridad de la Nación][[1887]](#footnote-1887)* provides prison for those who refuse, within the framework of the law, to provide information to the authorities on national security, or to those who disclose data or provide information to "any particular or to another State compromising the security and defense of the Nation."
11. *Hate Speech*: On November 8, 2017, the Constituent National Assembly (ANC for its acronym in Spanish) of Venezuela approved the bill of *Constitutional Law against Hatred, for Pacific Coexistence and Tolerance* presented by President Maduro. The approved law sets restrictions to the exercise of the right to freedom of expression in Venezuela that are incompatible with the Inter-American Legal Framework on this matter. First, the law establishes broad, vague and ambiguous criminal figures to punish persons who “foster, promote or incite hatred” or promote “fascism”, attributing an unacceptable measure of discretion to triers at the moment of establishing what type of violence and hate was promoted, thus placing freedom of expression at risk and compromising the principle of legality. The terms mentioned by this law, such as “promotion and encouragement” of all types of “discrimination” and “fascism” are too broad and imprecise, and exceed the provisions of international human rights law in this matter. This law does not seem to have a legitimate aim. In its general provisions, it evokes the objectives of promoting diversity and tolerance, while eradicating hate, discrimination and violence by discriminatory reasons. However, the declarations issued by authorities of the government and ANC members indicate that it will be used to persecute the political opposition, legitimize censorship and criminalize expressions against the political ideas of the government[[1888]](#footnote-1888). As the President of the Republic presented the bill of the new law, he pointed that “anyone who should go into the streets and express intolerance and hate will be captured, judged and punished with severe penalties ranging from 15 to 25 years of prison”[[1889]](#footnote-1889). During the debates on the bill, ANC President and former Venezuelan Chancellor Delcy Rodríguez pointed that the State should take action against the use of social networks as “psychological war laboratories”. Mrs. Rodríguez affirmed that “there is an imported hate, which is part of a plan to attack the people’s integrity. Such imported hate is bringing the most racist and classist expressions of the Venezuelan right-wing”.[[1890]](#footnote-1890) For instance, she stated that “the mayor of Caracas was threatened by a twitter message from an opposition-party. Such death threats and hate expressions must end in Venezuela, and for this reason, this law will provide for the punishment of hate crimes, with sanctions and regulations for media outlets"[[1891]](#footnote-1891). Also ANC Vice-President Earle Herrera pointed that “extremist sectors of the opposition […] have harassed Chavist workers and representatives, and Venezuelan citizens were burned exclusively on account of their political ideology”[[1892]](#footnote-1892). The law sets severe penalties, but their necessity and proportionality were not demonstrated. Its Article 20 establishes from “10 to 20 years” of prison, as well as the imprescriptibility of the crimes defined by it. Art. 22 provides for the revocation of official licenses to radio and television services that “disseminate messages propagandizing in favor of war or advocating for national, racial, religious or political hate, or any other form of hatred”. This section also considers a fine of 50,000 to 100,000 tax units for legal persons held responsible for social networks and electronic media outlets that do not suspend messages with such features within six hours after they are published, in addition to the applicable criminal and civil penalties. Article 23 sets financial sanctions of three to four per cent of the raw income of radio or TV providers who “do not fulfill their obligation to reserve free broadcast spaces for messages that promote diversity, tolerance and mutual respect, and for the prevention and eradication of all forms of political violence, hate and intolerance".
12. *States of exception*: as already explained, Presidential Decree No. 2849[[1893]](#footnote-1893) of May 13, 2017 established a new state of exception and economic emergency in the entire territory of Venezuela that grants wide discretionary powers to the Executive to repeal human rights through "special and forceful" measures ([Chapter III.B.2](#_Uso_arbitrario_de)). It has been a matter of serious concern that such powers are invoked to arbitrarily restrict the right to freedom of expression. The decree aims to combat the "hostile and destabilizing attitude against the Republic" promoted by "opposition political sectors, with the support of foreign spokespersons and institutions." In particular, the decree considers that sectors of the opposition "maintain a siege against the recovery of the Venezuelan economy" and execute "new and perverse forms of attacks", such as "the use of the information technology systems and the use of the cyberspace to foment hatred and create a distortion of our economy [...] and the dissemination of false news about the ability or disposition of payment of the Republic or of PDVSA, regarding the financial instruments issued." The decree of state of exception gives the authority to the executive power to: 1) "design and execute special public security plans that face destabilizing actions that conspire against the peace of the Nation", and 2)" dictate forceful, transitory, and exceptional regulations that prevent campaigns of destabilization and distortion of the economy, driven by national and foreign factors through computer technology and cyberspace". As reported, the decree has authorized the filtering, blocking, and monitoring of content on the Internet and the people have not had mechanisms of transparency or independent judicial control over these measures[[1894]](#footnote-1894).
13. *Financial crimes*: in 2015 the President of the Republic issued the Decree Law on the Exchange Regime and its Illicit [*Decreto Ley del Régimen Cambiario y sus Ilícitos*], which establishes sanctions of ten to fifteen years in prison for those who broadcast "via electronic means, television, radio, or communication of any kind, writings, signals, images or sounds,” false or fraudulent "information" about the exchange rate of the Venezuelan currency with respect to the dollar. The information will be understood as "false" or "fraudulent" when it contradicts or distorts the values ​​applicable to the exchange rate set by the Executive and the Central Bank of Venezuela."[[1895]](#footnote-1895) The extent of this type of crime can unduly limit access to information of public interest in economic matters, at a time when Venezuela is going through an economic and financial crisis that has led to the devaluation of the bolivar against the dollar at historic lows, and at a time when serious obstacles to access timely and reliable state information exist (*infra*).
14. *Law for the Defense of Political Sovereignty and National Self-Determination* [*Ley de Defensa de la Soberanía Política y la Autodeterminación Nacional]* [[1896]](#footnote-1896): this law establishes in its Article 8 sanctions of high fines to any Venezuelan national who invites to the country a foreign person or organization to issue opinions that may offend "the institutions of the State, its high officials, or affect the exercise of sovereignty."[[1897]](#footnote-1897) The same rule provides that foreigners who participate in these activities will be expelled from the territory of the Republic, it also provides sanctions to impose on the nationals who have invited them.
15. The IACHR notes with concern the proliferation of legal provisions in the Venezuelan legal system that restrict the right to freedom of expression under ambiguous and overly broad definitions of concepts such as national security, public order, or hate speech. In most cases, these are laws adopted by the executive branch without a legislative process with a broad consultation and public debate. This type of norms gives the administrative authorities in charge of applying them a discretion incompatible with the full validity of the right to freedom of expression[[1898]](#footnote-1898). Indeed, the provisions examined do not limit the discretion of the executive authorities to determine the meaning of these concepts, which is a synonym of Government or official political power interest[[1899]](#footnote-1899).
16. While it is true that the protection of national security, the safeguarding of public order, and the protection of the rights of individuals are legitimate objectives for establishing subsequent liabilities for the exercise of freedom of expression, they must be invoked and interpreted in accordance to "the just demands of the general welfare and the advancement of democracy"[[1900]](#footnote-1900). The need for these new laws to protect legitimate interests in a democratic society and to address specific and objectively verifiable threats is not clear[[1901]](#footnote-1901). Particularly, the IACHR recalls that national security cannot be used "as a pretext for imposing vague or arbitrary limitations and may only be invoked when there exists adequate safeguards and effective remedies against abuse."[[1902]](#footnote-1902) It is also worrying that the regulations contemplate sanctions of the greatest severity: long prison sentences, suspension of transmissions, revocation of a concession, as well as blocking and removal of content on the Internet[[1903]](#footnote-1903). This type of measures must be subject to a strict judgment of necessity and proportionality in order to ensure that they are not used to pressure and punish or reward and privilege the media according to their editorial lines or to prevent people from searching, receiving, and disseminating, information of public interest[[1904]](#footnote-1904).
17. Therefore, and as it did in previous reports, the IACHR concludes once again that Venezuela's legal system contains regulations that are incompatible with its international obligations regarding freedom of expression. Consequently, the IACHR urges the Venezuelan State to urgently adapt its legislation in accordance with the standards described herein.
18. **Assaults, attacks, detentions, and other acts of harassment against journalists**
19. Violence against journalists and social media workers continues to be a pressing problem in Venezuela. In recent years, the IACHR continued to receive information on numerous acts of physical aggression, threats, detentions, robberies, or dispossessions of media workers’ work equipment in Venezuela, perpetrated by security forces and groups of armed civilians, with the intention of silencing them and limiting their coverage in different contexts[[1905]](#footnote-1905).
20. For example, the IACHR learned of several cases in which public officials threatened journalists and stripped them of their work equipment[[1906]](#footnote-1906). In other cases, security forces would not have only stripped journalists of their work equipment, but also assaulted them[[1907]](#footnote-1907). The assaults for recording sections of a film during its launch[[1908]](#footnote-1908), the withholdings to prevent the transmission of a session of the AN[[1909]](#footnote-1909), the attacks by public officials for supposedly being "yellow press,"[[1910]](#footnote-1910) are other examples of the different situations where physical violence was used in against journalists and media workers.
21. The IACHR has also registered cases of journalists who were victims of assault, threats, and harassment after publishing investigations and reports on corruption and transgressions related to the activity of public officials[[1911]](#footnote-1911).

1. Likewise, the IACHR noted with concern the withdrawal and cancellation of passports to journalists by migration authorities, after they had made comments contrary to the interests of the Government. On May 17, state officials canceled the passport of journalist César Miguel Rondón and media worker Floralicia Anzola and prevented them from leaving the country at Simón Bolívar airport in Maiquetía, Caracas. The day before, President Nicolás Maduro had publicly declared that Miguel Rondón and *El Nacional* columnist Tulio Hernández should be detained[[1912]](#footnote-1912).
2. The IACHR recorded several attempts and cases of robbery and assault against journalists exercising their work. Criminals would have violently deprived them of various types of work material such as cameras, cellphones, and even cars[[1913]](#footnote-1913). Likewise, multiple episodes of theft of journalistic equipment have been recorded through invasions of media headquarters, especially in radio broadcasting[[1914]](#footnote-1914).
3. During the days of protest that began in April, there was also a pattern of acts of harassment, theft, and destruction of equipment and journalistic records - in many cases with physical aggression[[1915]](#footnote-1915). The IACHR received information about dozens of assaults[[1916]](#footnote-1916) and theft of equipment that were perpetrated by public officials[[1917]](#footnote-1917). Civilians and armed groups or "collectives"[[1918]](#footnote-1918) would also have been responsible for these events. Similarly, there have been multiple cases of theft of journalistic equipment by criminals in the context of protests[[1919]](#footnote-1919). A high number of detentions of reporters has been registered during the social protests initiated in April 2017[[1920]](#footnote-1920). For the most part, the detentions last for a few hours and appear to be aimed at intimidating journalists and media workers[[1921]](#footnote-1921). In some situations, detentions have lasted longer, as was the case of the journalist Yonanthan Guédez, who the GNB arrested on April 24 while covering a protest in the State of Lara and released 16 days later under the regime of presentation before courts[[1922]](#footnote-1922).
4. Venezuelan civil society organizations have reported that most cases of violence against journalists and media workers remain unpunished. These processes are characterized by the lack of due diligence in the investigations, the sluggishness of the processes initiated, and political pressures against the judiciary[[1923]](#footnote-1923).
5. The IACHR recalls that "[t]he murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats to social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression. It is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate such occurrences, to punish their perpetrators and to ensure that victims receive due compensation."[[1924]](#footnote-1924) States should ensure that crimes against freedom of expression are subject to independent, prompt, and effective investigations and judicial proceedings. In addition to criminal investigations, disciplinary procedures should be put in place when there is evidence that public officials have committed violations of freedom of expression during their professional work. As has been pointed out on other occasions, the lack of sanctions against material and intellectual perpetrators of homicides, assaults, threats, and attacks related to the exercise of journalistic activity leads to new crimes and generates a notorious effect of self-censorship that seriously undermines the possibilities of a true open, free, and democratic debate.
6. In the context of demonstrations and situations of social unrest, the work of journalists and media workers, as well as the free flow of information through alternative media such as the social networks, is essential to keeping the public informed of the events. At the same time, it plays an important role in reporting on the conduct of the State and of law enforcement authorities toward the protesters, preventing the disproportionate use of force and the abuse of authority. Attacks against journalists who cover these events violate both the individual aspect of freedom of expression—insofar as they prevent journalists from exercising their right to seek and disseminate information, and creates a chilling effect—as well as its collective aspect —in that they deprive society of the right to know the information that journalists obtain. The State has the duty to ensure that journalists and media workers reporting on public demonstrations are not arrested, threatened, assaulted, or limited in any manner in their rights as a result of practicing their profession. Their work materials and tools must not be destroyed or confiscated by the authorities[[1925]](#footnote-1925).
7. **Detention and expulsion of foreign journalists**
8. The IACHR expressed alarm over what has become a pattern of detention, harassment, and expulsion of foreign journalists who investigate events of public interest in Venezuelan soil or disseminate information on the management of government. According to Venezuelan civil society records, as of 2016, at least 30 foreign journalists were either expelled or prevented from entering the country[[1926]](#footnote-1926). Highlights were the cases of *Deutsche Welle* correspondent Aitor Sáez[[1927]](#footnote-1927); Brazilian journalists Leandro Stoliar and Gilson Fred Oliveira, from Record TV[[1928]](#footnote-1928); Chilean journalist Patricio Nunes, from Canal 13[[1929]](#footnote-1929); British journalists Ian O’Reilly and Stephen Sackur, from *BBC*[[1930]](#footnote-1930); French journalists Sebastián Pérez and Didier Barral, from Agencia CAPA[[1931]](#footnote-1931); Argentine journalist Jorge Lanata[[1932]](#footnote-1932); Chilean journalist Gabriela Donoso, from *Reuters*[[1933]](#footnote-1933); and Dutch journalist Bram Ebus[[1934]](#footnote-1934).
9. In all the above-mentioned cases, the journalists who were victims of harassment would have been carrying out investigations into corruption or the political and economic crisis in the country. According to the information available, the government has maintained that the expulsions and prohibitions of entry to the Venezuelan territory are due to the lack of accreditation of foreign journalists[[1935]](#footnote-1935).
10. The IACHR strongly rejects this practice and reminds the Venezuelan State that the right to freedom of expression protects the right of every person to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers. In view of the important role of control exercised by journalists and the media in the democratic system, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur have been emphatic in stating that journalists should not be required to hold a license or registration to carry out their work. The registration and accreditation schemes of journalists are only appropriate if they are necessary to provide them with privileged access to places or events, such schemes must be supervised by independent bodies and by decisions on this accreditation, having a fair procedure, based on clear, reasonable transparent, and previously published criteria. In addition, decisions on accreditation should be neutral against the content and cannot discriminate on the basis of the editorial line or type of coverage.
11. **Criminalization of criticism and journalistic work**

1. The IACHR has continued to register the start of criminal proceedings against journalists and the media, university professors, and citizens in general, aimed at punishing and inhibiting critical expressions of state authorities’ actions or issues of public interest. As described below, on the one hand, the criminalization of criticism and journalistic work has been the result of the application of criminal offenses that, due to their vagueness or ambiguity, violate the principle of legality and inter-American standards, such as the offenses of criminal defamation[[1936]](#footnote-1936), treason, and instigation to violence. In other cases, criminalization has been the product of criminal proceedings based on events on which there is no evidence, or the evidence is directly false. These criminal proceedings are generally protracted and within their framework, afflictive measures are authorized against individuals and the media, such as pretrial detention, measures of censorship, bans on leaving the country, and high bails. In several of these cases, investigations and legal proceedings were initiated after the highest authorities of the State called on public entities to "act" against the persons prosecuted.
2. The criminal proceedings and convictions described below have a systemic effect on the general conditions for the free exercise of freedom of expression in Venezuela. In addition to the individual dimension of the impact of these measures on the individuals accused, criminalization exerts an intimidating effect (*chilling effect*) on society as a whole, which may lead to preventing or hindering public debate and criticizing public officials[[1937]](#footnote-1937).

**Case El Nacional, La Patilla and Tal Cual**

1. On April 21, 2015, the president of the AN, Diosdado Cabello, criminally and civilly sued the media *El Nacional, La Patilla* and *Tal Cual,* and their directors, Henrique Miguel Otero, Alfredo Ravell, and Teodoro Petkoff for defamation, after the media broadcasted a story of the Spanish newspaper *ABC* in which a former trusted official of Cabello linked him to drug trafficking, an accusation that the official denied[[1938]](#footnote-1938). In May, the judiciary ordered a ban to leave the country for the 22 directors involved and their periodic presentation before the courts. According to Cabello's lawsuit, this measure was requested under "reasonable presumptions" of flight risk and obstruction of justice. Diosdado Cabello also filed a civil suit for moral damages against the three newspapers and the court in charge ordered a measure banning the sale or bonding of their assets[[1939]](#footnote-1939). On its website, the TSJ expressed its solidarity with the then president of the AN, and without a hearing before the court in charge of the case nor respect for due process guarantees, the TSJ advanced its opinion stating that the disclosure of information made by the three media "lacking veracity carry the sanctions provided in the national legal system."
2. **On August 24, 2015, the IACHR and the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression issued a statement in which they expressed their deep concern at the stigmatization and judicial harassment against the three media outlets**[[1940]](#footnote-1940)**.**
3. On November 9, 2015, the IACHR adopted precautionary measures in favor of Miguel Henrique Otero, president-editor of *El Nacional*; Alberto Federico Ravell, director of *La Patilla*, and his daughter Isabel Cristina Ravell; and Teodoro Petkoff, director of *Tal Cual*[[1941]](#footnote-1941). In adopting this decision, the IACHR assessed the existence of repeated stigmatizing statements made by high-level officials, acts of monitoring and surveillance, expedited criminal and civil proceedings for defamation initiated by Cabello, banning them from leaving the country, prejudgment by the TSJ, and seizure of property[[1942]](#footnote-1942). The IACHR understood that in the Venezuelan context, the media that belonged to the beneficiaries of the measure were the only print media with national distribution that still maintained an editorial line independent of the Government.
4. The criminal trial, which could lead to convictions of up to four years in prison and high fines, has lasted until the date of this report. According to the information available, in September 2017, the case against journalist Teodoro Petkoff, director of *Tal Cual,* was dismissed. The renowned politician and journalist of 85 years of age was declared civilly incompetent, for health reasons. This decision has been qualified by Petkoff's lawyers as arbitrary and illegal.[[1943]](#footnote-1943)
5. The IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur have indicated that the use of these criminal offenses, such as defamation as a mechanism for assigning subsequent liabilities when dealing with specially protected speeches, contravenes the freedom of expression protected by Article IV of the American Declaration. In this regard, the Commission and the Inter-American Court have been emphatic in holding that this type of expression enjoys greater protection within the framework of the inter-American system for the protection of human rights[[1944]](#footnote-1944). Such protection has been justified, among other reasons, by the importance of maintaining a legal framework that encourages public deliberation based on the fact that officials have voluntarily exposed themselves to greater social scrutiny, and have greater and better conditions to respond to public debate[[1945]](#footnote-1945).

###### The case of Braulio Jatar

1. On September 3, 2016, SEBIN agents arrested journalist Braulio Jatar[[1946]](#footnote-1946). Jatar is a journalist and director of the digital media *Reporte Confidencial*, a columnist for the medio *Reporte Economía,* and a radio programs host in Isla de Margarita, in the state of Nueva Esparta. The arrest occurred the day after the visit that President Nicolás Maduro made to the municipality of Villa Rosa on the island, and during which there was a demonstration of protest (*cacerolazo*) that would have led the president to confront some of the protesters directly. According to the information known, the protest left some 30 people arrested who were later released. The videos that documented the mobilization were published on the night of September 2 in the digital media run by Jatar. Hours after the publication of the videos, at 8:45 the next morning, SEBIN members arrested him in Porlamar, Nueva Esparta state, while he was on his way to his radio program, without a court order[[1947]](#footnote-1947).
2. The information available indicates that in addition to arresting the journalist on September 3, SEBIN officers hooded and armed with long weapons would have presented themselves at Jatar’s home in order to carry out a search, allegedly without a warrant. On September 4, 2016, Silvia Martínez - wife of Braulio Jatar - was able to visit him for the first time at the SEBIN facilities and reported that he had suffered assaults. On September 5, 2016, the journalist was able to contact his lawyers and was presented before a judge, where he was accused of being a "CIA agent" and of "organizing terrorist activities," and would have been formally charged with a crime typified in the Organic Law against Organized Crime and Terrorist Financing [*Ley Orgánica contra la Delincuencia Organizada y Financiamiento al Terrorismo]* known as "legitimation of capital", the penalty for this crime is estimated between 10 and 15 years, as reported to the IACHR[[1948]](#footnote-1948).
3. During his detention he was transferred to prisons in different regions of Venezuela, was prevented from contacting his relatives and lawyers for long periods, and his health deteriorated. Therefore, on December 22, 2016, the Commission granted precautionary measures in favor of the journalist, after considering that Braulio Jatar was in a situation of seriousness and urgency since his life and personal integrity were at risk as a result of the deterioration of his health and the lack of access to medical treatment in addition to the situation of isolation in which he would be[[1949]](#footnote-1949). The petitioners of the precautionary measures also indicated several irregularities in the process followed against the journalist, as well as the situation of keeping him incommunicado and transferring him from prison on two occasions without giving notice to his family and defenders[[1950]](#footnote-1950).
4. On April 27, 2017, in a joint press release, the Special Rapporteur of the UN on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, and the Special Rapporteur for freedom of expression of the IACHR, Edison Lanza, rejected censorship, arrests, and attacks against journalists in Venezuela, and noted that, in an unprecedented event, the journalist Braulio Jatar remained in detention since September 2016, after having broadcasted a video that showed people protesting against President Maduro. The IACHR recognizes that in May 2017 the journalist was released and put under house arrest[[1951]](#footnote-1951). The process against him would remain open.
5. In June 2017, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention established that the deprivation of liberty of the journalist is arbitrary and although the journalist had been transferred to house arrest "a preventive measure of deprivation of liberty remains in force under said modality"[[1952]](#footnote-1952). In this regard, the group considered that the arrest under the supposed figure of flagrante delicto and its subsequent incrimination for the crime of money laundering, had as its motive the exercise of his right to freedom of expression, particularly for his work as a journalist and for the electronic portal *Reporte Confidencial*, which produces information and critical reflections about the Government. Also, indicated that the Working Group identifies a systematic practice in recent years, by the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, of depriving political opponents of physical freedom, in contravention of fundamental norms of international law, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Covenant[[1953]](#footnote-1953).
6. The Working Group indicated that the State should "put Braulio Jatar immediately at liberty and grant him the effective right to obtain compensation and other types of reparation, in accordance with international law." The Venezuelan State has not complied with this measure.
7. In its response to this report, the Venezuelan State stated that "it is not the practice or policy of the State to arrest or assault journalists or limit their professional practice. In Venezuela there are no communicators arrested or subjected to judicial proceedings because of their professional activity”[[1954]](#footnote-1954).
8. The IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur recall that the use of criminal law by public officials as a tool for intimidating journalists and criminalizing criticism is a practice that is openly contrary to the principles and standards of freedom of expression, in particular, when criminalization is the product of manipulation of the punitive power of the State by state and non-state actors with the objective of controlling, punishing, or preventing the exercise of the right to freedom of expression. On many occasions, stigmatizing statements by public officials precede the initiation of these criminal proceedings.[[1955]](#footnote-1955)

###### The case of professor Santiago Guevara

1. The case of the professor of the University of Carabobo, Santiago Guevara, is also of particular concern. On February 23, the Prosecutors Office charged him with the crime of "treason" after being tried in a military court in Caracas. The General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence [*Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar*] (DGCIM) executed the arrest after the publication of a series of opinion articles on the economic crisis in the country[[1956]](#footnote-1956).
2. According to the information received, the detention and trial of Professor Santiago Guevara would be framed in a context of threats, intimidating or discrediting attacks, or acts of criminalization or aggression, to professors for their activities or academic work, or because of their condition of member of the academic community, and because of their professional opinions on the critical situation of services such as health, electricity, or infrastructure[[1957]](#footnote-1957).
3. Since Professor Guevara was deprived of his freedom at the headquarters of the General Direction of Military Counterinsurgency on February 21, 2017, his health condition seriously worsened. For this reason, the IACHR ordered the State of Venezuela to “adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the life and personal integrity of Mr. Guevara García, particularly, by providing him with adequate medical attention, in conformity with his illnesses and according to the applicable international standards”[[1958]](#footnote-1958). The IACHR notes that on December 23, the court in charge of the case granted Mr. Guevara conditional liberty. On that day, he was release from the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence. According to the State's communication, Mr. Guevara must report periodically to the military court[[1959]](#footnote-1959).
4. **Indirect censorship and mass closure of media**
5. The IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur have also condemned the closure of more than 50 media outlets throughout 2017 in Venezuela under procedures that depart from the principles that guarantee freedom of expression.
6. According to the information received, on August 24, subscription television providers in Venezuela removed the Colombian channels *Caracol TV* and *RCN* from the programming grid, on the orders of Conatel[[1960]](#footnote-1960). William Castillo, Deputy Minister for International Communication of the Ministry of Popular Power for Foreign Affairs [*Ministerio del Poder Popular para Relaciones Exteriores*], declared in an interview to the official media that "*RCN* and *Canal Caracol* are instruments of a media war that, in Venezuela, have behaved as machines of aggression to the Venezuelan identity and to the legitimate authorities." The minister accused *Caracol TV* of committing "a series of extremely serious crimes, of offenses against Venezuela, its authorities and our laws." A similar criterion would have previously been used to order the suppression of *CNN* and *NTN 24* signals.
7. In addition, the use of state power to assign frequencies continues to be used by the Government as a mechanism to reward or punish media in accordance to its editorial line. During 2016, the processes of renewal and granting of radio and television concessions continued to be deferred by the authorities, a situation that is a matter of concern for the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur, as the uncertainty generated by the absence of a government response to requests for endorsement of concessions can induce media workers to self-censor and become an indirect means of undue restriction on freedom of expression[[1961]](#footnote-1961). In this regard, on April 21 various civil organizations, as well as university students, gave the Conatel management a letter in which they demanded that the agency speed up said processes. The signatories expressed their concern that "there is no plurality and diversity in the granting of concessions for radioelectric media, as the processes are not governed by clear criteria but by political criteria, given that there are about 200 media outlets with expired concessions, many of which have delivered the required documentation, and yet they are kept in a limbo that induces them to self-censor to avoid not having their license renewed."[[1962]](#footnote-1962)
8. The IACHR received information indicating that on the night of Friday August 25, representatives of Conatel entered the stations *92.9 FM* and *Mágica 99.1 FM* in the city of Caracas and ordered the definitive cessation of their transmissions. As reported, minutes after both media went of air the frequencies were taken by two new stations linked to the official party. The radio signal from the *92.9 FM* radio station, which had a large-audience journalistic program, was replaced that same night by *Radio Corazón Llanero*, which would be operated by a foundation under the control of an Army captain, former Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez's aide, and current member of the National Constituent Assembly. The signal of the *Mágica 99.1 FM* station was replaced by the station *Vinotinto FM*, whose owner is yet unknown. On September 5, Conatel would have ordered the cessation of broadcasts of station *88.1 FM* of the emblematic educational radio *Fe y Alegría* in the city of Maracaibo, and hours later, it would have revoked the order without providing any explanations. Previously, on July 16, Conatel, invoking lack of documents, also closed ULA TV, the television channel of the *Universidad de los Andes* in Mérida. In Santa Cruz de Mora and Tovar, towns located in the state of Merida, Conatel closed the local television stations *ZeaTv* and *Televisora Cultural de Tovar,* and the radio stations *Sky 95.5 Fm*, *Campesina Stereo 93.3 Fm*, and *Candela 98.3 Fm.*, supposedly for not being enabled to transmit, requiring them to go to Caracas to carry out the procedures[[1963]](#footnote-1963).
9. According to the information provided by several organizations, during 2017 there would be at least 49 closed national radio stations (among them, *Hit 90.7, Estudio 92.1, Radio Punto Fijo Stereo* y *Jet 95.3[[1964]](#footnote-1964), Yara104.3, K-ndela90.3, Más Network98.9, Rumbera106.5, Shaddai101.9, Mix98.3*, *Criollísima104.9[[1965]](#footnote-1965), Suena 101.7 FM, Sonora 99.3 FM, Cunaviche 106.3 FM, Top Stereo 90.3 FM,* and *Latín Top 101.1 FM*[[1966]](#footnote-1966)), television channels (*CNN*[[1967]](#footnote-1967), *El Tiempo Televisión[[1968]](#footnote-1968), Todo Noticias[[1969]](#footnote-1969), Antena 3*[[1970]](#footnote-1970)) and five international television channels removed from national television programming by subscription during the year 2017, on the orders of the Government. As stated by the Office of the Special Rapporteur in previous press releases, most of the media operates in Venezuela with expired licenses and the regulatory body does not have procedures with guarantees for the awarding and/or renewal of these frequencies.
10. In addition, Conatel started an administrative proceeding against the television network *Globovisión*. The entity considered the statements of congressman Freddy Guevara during the program *'Vladimir a la 1'* held on January 11, in which he urged Venezuelans to initiate "a process of peaceful resistance" to pressure the government and achieve the celebration of elections, violated the legislation[[1971]](#footnote-1971). On August 11, 2017, Conatel officials went to the offices of the *Televen* and *Venevisión* channels, notifying the start of an administrative proceeding for having violated the law[[1972]](#footnote-1972), after receiving threats of investigations by President Maduro.
11. Regarding the start of administrative investigations, the IACHR reaffirms that States have the power to regulate radio waves and to carry out sanctioning administrative procedures to ensure compliance with the legal provisions. Nonetheless, the IACHR reminds the Venezuelan State that, in the exercise of said power, it must guarantee that the use of State power in this matter is not intended to pressure and punish or reward and privilege social media workers and the media according to their editorial line.
12. The IACHR reminds the Venezuelan State that any restriction on the right to freedom of expression must be based on a law and be proportionate and strictly necessary to protect legitimate ends in a democratic society. The closure of media as punishment for maintaining a critical editorial line of a government arbitrarily suppresses the right that assists all Venezuelans to express themselves without fear of reprisals, and to receive plural and diverse information, and is also a form of censorship indirect under international law. Although the State has the regulated attribution to administer the radio spectrum, this must be done in accordance with the basic principles of international human rights law that prohibit the restriction of the right to freedom of expression through the abuse of the power to regulate and manage the radio frequencies. According to these principles, the processes of adjudication, revocation, and renewal of licenses must be strictly regulated by a law and be guided by objective, clear, impartial, and public criteria compatible with a democratic society; the process must be transparent; the decision that grants or denies the request must be duly motivated; and be subject to adequate judicial control. Furthermore, the administration of the radio spectrum must be guided by the principles of equality and non-discrimination, and must never be used to pressure, reward, or punish a media based on its editorial line or position with respect to the current government.
13. Venezuela had already been condemned by the Inter-American Court in June 2015 for violating these principles when it decided not to renew the *RCTV* television channel concession on May 27, 2007[[1973]](#footnote-1973). In the Inter-American Court opinion’s, *RCTV*'s closure involved "a misuse of power, since a State faculty was used with the objective of editorially aligning the media outlet with the government." The Court also pointed out that the misuse of power in that case "had an impact on the exercise of freedom of expression, not only in the workers and managers of *RCTV*, but also in the social dimension of that right." In effect, the Court stated "the real purpose was to silence critical voices against the government, which together with pluralism, tolerance, and the spirit of openness, constitute the demand of a democratic debate which, rightly, freedom of expression seeks to protect."
14. The IACHR notes that censorship has also been carried out against web portals V*PI[[1974]](#footnote-1974), VivoPlay[[1975]](#footnote-1975), Maduradas.com[[1976]](#footnote-1976), Dólar Today*[[1977]](#footnote-1977) and television programs, such as *'*La Voz del Pregón'[[1978]](#footnote-1978), *A Media Mañana*[[1979]](#footnote-1979) and '*El Comandante*', a series produced by Sony Pictures Entertainment and broadcasted by the Colombian channel *RCN*, inspired by the life of former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez[[1980]](#footnote-1980). The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR issued a press release together with the Office of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of the right to freedom of opinion and expression of the United Nations on April 26, in which it expressed its concern regarding the blockade of news programs that offered information of general interest in the country through the Internet under orders issued to service providers by Conatel[[1981]](#footnote-1981).
15. Likewise, the lack of supply and government control of newsprint continues to affect the free functioning of the written press. According to the information available, dozens of media outlets suffered from a lack of supply (such as El Impulso[[1982]](#footnote-1982), La Nación[[1983]](#footnote-1983)) and some of them ended up canceling its printed version (such as El Nuevo País[[1984]](#footnote-1984), *Diario Católico*[[1985]](#footnote-1985), La Verdad Impresa *de* El Carabobeño[[1986]](#footnote-1986), Diario Los Andes*[[1987]](#footnote-1987)*) due to lack of supplies by the Editorial Alfredo Manerio Complex [*Complejo Editorial Alfredo Manerio*] (CEAM), the state company that has the legal monopoly on the importation of newsprint and is responsible for distributing it to the media.
16. **Stigmatizing statements against journalists and the media based on the editorial line**
17. The censorship actions and practices described above have usually been preceded by a highly stigmatizing and intimidating speech promoted by State authorities against journalists and the media. President Nicolás Maduro, former congressman and member of the ANC, Diosdado Cabello and former Foreign Minister Delcy Rodríguez, repeatedly point to media outlets such as *El Nacional*, *Globovisión*, *CNN en español*, *NTN24*, of being "coup plotters", "conspirators", "Fascists", "spies", "squalid", and accuse them of "attacking the peace and democratic stability" of Venezuela, "defaming and distorting the truth", "manipulate information" or spread " war propaganda"[[1988]](#footnote-1988).
18. When not carried out directly by government authorities, stigmatization occurs through state media or those openly aligned with the government, who distribute and replicate offensive and stigmatizing speech towards journalists and the media[[1989]](#footnote-1989). The IACHR has reiterated concern about how these expressions of intolerance on the part of the authorities echo among civil groups sympathetic to the government or government clashing groups to intimidate those journalists who they consider enemies of the Government's political project[[1990]](#footnote-1990).
19. In two judgments issued by the Inter-American Court with respect to Venezuela, the court warned that public officials "Public servants must also bear in mind that they have a position as guarantors of the fundamental rights of individuals; as such, their statements cannot deny those rights or constitute forms of direct or indirect interference or harmful pressure on the rights of those who seek to contribute [to] public deliberation through the expression and dissemination of their thoughts. This special duty of care is heightened particularly in situations involving social conflict, breaches of the peace, or social or political polarization, precisely because of the risks such situations might pose for specific individuals or groups at a given time"[[1991]](#footnote-1991).
20. As the IACHR has already stated, the stigmatizing discourse against the press promoted by high State authorities is unacceptable within a democratic system, as it encourages violence against journalists, favors the legitimization of censorship of the media, and it erodes the public's confidence in journalism as the guardian of democracy. The IACHR reiterates once again that the authorities of the State can provide the simplest and most effective protection: the public and categorical recognition of the legitimacy of criticism and dissidence in a democracy. Accordingly, it urges the authorities to refrain from making stigmatizing statements that can lead to acts of violence or arbitrary decisions by public officials against journalists and social media.
21. **Internet and freedom of expression**
22. Violations to freedom of expression in the context of the internet in Venezuela are mainly due to censorship or cyber-attacks. In the context of cyber-attacks, they generally consist of Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, although other vulnerabilities are also eventually exploited, targeting news portals or civil society organizations. The organization *Provea*[[1992]](#footnote-1992) and the news portals *El Pitazo[[1993]](#footnote-1993)* and *Aporrea[[1994]](#footnote-1994)* have reported being victims of DDoS attacks while *Contrapunto*[[1995]](#footnote-1995), *Caraota Digital*[[1996]](#footnote-1996), *Correo del Caroni*[[1997]](#footnote-1997), *El Camubur*[[1998]](#footnote-1998), the organization Acción Solidaria[[1999]](#footnote-1999), and the Venezuelan Episcopal Conference[[2000]](#footnote-2000) reported having suffered attacks based on other types of vulnerabilities. The attacks, for the most part intend to prevent the availability of the websites of organizations and the media, making them inaccessible to the public for periods that can last several days. According to the information received, the blockades to web portals in Venezuela are also perpetrated for short periods in an arbitrary and discretional manner without having public scrutiny to restrict access to information sources at key moments, such as electoral periods or during protests[[2001]](#footnote-2001). Similarly, the IACHR noted with concern reports of digital attacks of kidnapping social network accounts against some journalists in Venezuela. The attacks make the owner of the account lose control and not be able to recover it through the standard mechanisms[[2002]](#footnote-2002).
23. **Access to public information**
24. For several years, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur have followed with concern the situation of the right to access to information in Venezuela[[2003]](#footnote-2003). Unlike the vast majority of countries in the region, Venezuela does not have a law on access to public information, and in the last decade, the AN and the Executive have issued dozens of regulations that establish generic and ambiguous exceptions to access public information[[2004]](#footnote-2004).
25. For example, *Presidential Decree No. 458* grants very broad powers to the Strategic Center for Security and Protection of the homeland [*Centro Estratégico de Seguridad y Protección de la Patria*] (CESPPA) [[2005]](#footnote-2005), which is a decentralized body of the Office of the Presidency in charge of "unifying the flow of information" on "Security, Defense, Intelligence, Internal Order, and External Relations", to assign the nature of "reserved, classified, or limited disclosure to any information, fact, or circumstance, that is processed in [that entity], and *that are of strategic interest for the Security of the Nation* [...]." Likewise, the decree law of the Central Bank of Venezuela [*Banco Central de Venezuela*] (BCV)*,* issued by the President of the Republic on December 30, 2015, authorizes the board of the BCV, "when required by the Executive, [to] temporarily suspend the publication of information for the period during which internal or external situations that represent a threat to National Security and the economic stability of the Nation are maintained"[[2006]](#footnote-2006). It also establishes that "during internal or external circumstances that threaten the National Security and the economic stability of the nation", the BCV may agree with the Executive "an information provision scheme" on the behavior of the national economy, international reserves level, and economic measures adopted.
26. In this regard, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur have indicated that in order to invoke the reservation of information for reasons of national security, "the laws that regulate secrecy must accurately define the concept of national security and clearly specify the criteria that must be used to determine if certain information may or may not be declared secret, in order to prevent abuse of the 'secret' classification to avoid the disclosure of information of public interest. " In this regard, the IACHR emphasizes that a restriction on access to public information that seeks to justify itself in the defense of national security must not be based on an idea of national security incompatible with a democratic society[[2007]](#footnote-2007). Likewise, any restriction on access to information for reasons of national security must be established in the law and be truly necessary in a democratic society. The mere assertion by the government that there is a risk to national security is not enough. This risk must be proven: the exception must pass a three-part test: a) it must be related to one of the legitimate objectives that justify it; b) it must be demonstrated that the disclosure of the information effectively threatens to cause substantial harm to that legitimate objective; and c) it must be demonstrated that the damage to the objective is greater than the public interest in having the information[[2008]](#footnote-2008).
27. On the other hand, the IACHR observes that not only is there no adequate legal framework for the protection and guarantee of the right to access to public information, but also the judicial and administrative remedies that could be used to access the information have repeatedly proved ineffective for that purpose[[2009]](#footnote-2009). Indeed, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur received information regarding the issuance of judgments in which, contrary to the provisions of the inter-American standards, the courts ruled inadmissible the appeals filed by citizens against the authorities' refusal to provide them with public information, based on a criterion adopted by the Constitutional Chamber of the TSJ, in June 2010, according to which, "even though the constitutional text recognizes the citizen's right to be informed, it establishes external limits to the exercise of such right, in the understanding of that there are no absolute rights." Based on this criterion, national courts systematically deny access to information held by the State.
28. For example, the Political-Administrative Chamber of the TSJ declared inadmissible a claim filed by the civil organization Espacio Público, against the Minister of People's Power for Prison Services [*Ministra del Poder Popular para los Servicios Penitenciarios*], Iris Varela, through which it was intended to obtain statistical information regarding the cases of death and the state of health of the inmates that are in the detention centers that the aforementioned unit administers[[2010]](#footnote-2010). This is because, in the opinion of said Court, the request did not comply with the requirement "that the magnitude of the information requested be proportional to the use and intended use of the requested information"[[2011]](#footnote-2011). The organization Espacio Público has reported that of the 26 lawsuits that it has filed over the course of eight years, in no case have the courts ruled in favor of the publication of the information requested[[2012]](#footnote-2012).
29. The foregoing evidences, as noted throughout this report, that there is a policy of secrecy and control of information on public affairs, which has serious consequences for the demand and promotion of other human rights in many different areas. The essential information on the operation of the State and public policies that must be published proactively by the authorities, such as data on annual food production, maternal and infant mortality rates, homicide rates, among others, is subject to reserve without legal basis or effective claim mechanisms.
30. In view of this, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur reiterate their recommendation to the State to adopt legislation on access to public information, in accordance with inter-American standards, with the purpose of granting all persons the tools to perform an effective monitoring of the state functioning, public management, and control of corruption, essential in the democratic process. Likewise, the IACHR and its Office of the Special Rapporteur call on the judicial authorities to guarantee this right and, at all times, to direct their judgments in accordance with international standards that govern the matter.

**CHAPTER III: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. As on previous occasions, the Office of the Special Rapporteur closes its annual report with a chapter of conclusions and recommendations. The objective of this practice is to begin a fluid dialogue with Member States that will enable the Americas to emerge as an example in the area of respect, protection, and promotion of the right to freedom of expression.

## Violence Against Journalists and Media Outlets

1. According to the information received by the Office of the Special Rapporteur, 22 journalists or media workers were killed during 2017 in the region, while several others disappeared or were dislocated from the areas in which they worked, for reasons that could have been related with their exercise of freedom of expression. In addition to these tragic events, there were dozens of complaints of violence, attacks, threats, and intimidation against communicators and media outlets, presumably in connection with their exercise of freedom of expression.
2. The Office of the Special Rapporteur observes with concern the manner in which journalists must increasingly stop investigating and disseminating information of great public interest for their local communities in order to avoid reprisals against their lives or physical integrity or that of their families. Over the last decade, diverse zones and communities in the hemisphere have become totally silenced due to the paralyzing effect generated by the climate of violence and impunity. In these places, journalists and many media outlets choose to abandon coverage of diverse topics or adapt their information lines to subjects that do not come into conflict with de facto local powers, which creates zones of silence. This situation gives rise to restrictions on information, with the end result that the societies in those localities are not sufficiently informed.
3. It is important to highlight that during 2017 there was also important progress in the investigation, trial, and punishment of some of those responsible for crimes committed against journalists in past years. This shows that it is possible to investigate as a priority the line linked to the profesional work of these victims and punish those responsible. However, despite these efforts, the majority of these crimes remain in a troubling state of impunity.
4. Likewise, during 2017, the General Assembly of the OAS adopted the Resolution AG / RES. 2908 (XLVII-O / 17) on the promotion and protection of human rights, which recognizes the importance of the work carried out on the security of journalists and the fight against impunity by the Office of the Special Rapporteur during its 20 years of existence, and urges States to implement comprehensive measures of prevention, protection, investigation and punishment of those responsible and put into practice strategies to end impunity for crimes against journalists.
5. On this point, the Office of the Special Rapporteur recommends that member States:
6. Adopt adequate preventive mechanisms in order to avert violence against media workers, including the public condemnation of all acts of aggression, omitting any statement that may increase the risk for journalists; the respect for journalists’ right to keep their sources of information; the training of public officials, particularly police and security forces, and, if necessary, the adoption of operation manuals or guidelines on the respect for the right of freedom of expression, determining appropriate sanctions proportionate to the damage done; as well as the development of accurate statistics on violence against journalists.
7. Adopt the measures necessary to guarantee the security of those who are at special risk by virtue of exercising their right to freedom of expression, whether the threats come from state agents or private individuals. Measures or protection programs must be suitable and sufficient for its purpose, in accordance with the views expressed in this report.
8. Carry out serious, impartial, and effective investigations into the murders, attacks, threats, and acts of intimidation committed against journalists and media workers, in accordance with this report. This entails the creation of specialized units and special investigative protocols, as well as the identification and exhaustion of all possible case theories related to the professional work of the victim.
9. Bring to trial, before impartial and independent tribunals, all those responsible for the murders, attacks, threats, and acts of intimidation based on the exercise of freedom of expression, remove legal obstacles to the investigation and punishment of these crimes, and provide the victims and their family members ample participation during the investigation and prosecution, as well as adequate compensation, and eliminate gender barriers that obstruct access to justice.
10. Adopt the necessary measures so that media workers in situations of risk who have been displaced or exiled can return to their homes in conditions of safety. If these persons cannot return, the States must adopt measures so that they can stay in their chosen place in conditions of dignity, with security measures, and with the necessary economic support to maintain their work and their family lives.
11. Adopt specific, adequate and effective measures to prevent attacks and other forms of violence perpetrated against women journalists, and prosecute and punish those responsible. States must adopt effective measures to encourage reporting of cases of violence against women journalists and combat the impunity that characterizes those crimes.

## Social Protests

1. The Office of the Special Rapporteur also views with concern the manner in which certain state authorities reacted to social protests in the Americas in 2017. In particular, information was received about dozens of detentions, threats and aggressions committed against journalists, communicators, protesters and users of social networks who reported on demonstrations.
2. In a similar vein, the Office of the Special Rapporteur notes that it is necessary for States to design regulatory frameworks to protect and facilitate the exercise of social protest. States must not fail to take into account that, when faced with institutional frameworks that do not favor participation, or with serious barriers to the access of more traditional mass communication forms, public protest may become the only medium that actually allows disgruntled sectors of the population - but not aligned with political parties - and groups discriminated against or marginalized from public debate to voice their views and influence public debate.
3. On this point, the Office of the Special Rapporteur recommends that member States:
   1. Guarantee the legitimate exercise of social protest and prevent the application of disproportionate restrictions that can be used to inhibit or suppress critical or dissident expressions. In order to be consistent with international obligations on human rights, any national regulation affecting the right to social protest must meet requirements of legality, necessity and proportionality.
   2. Initiate the necessary legislative reforms to eliminate from the legal system requirements for the previous authorization or permission to carry out demonstrations and protests in public spaces, and expressly establish the general presumption in favor of the exercise of this right.
   3. Ensure protection of individuals and refrain from stigmatizing or stereotyping protesters and their demands, avoiding generalizations based on the behavior of particular groups or isolated events. If security forces must act in a demonstration, they shall use the safest and least harmful measures to individual rights. The response of security forces should aim to protect and facilitate rights, not to repress them. The general principles on the use of force, applied to the context of protests and demonstrations, require that security operations be carefully and thoroughly planned by persons with specific experience and training for this type of situation.
   4. In the context of positive obligations to guarantee the right and protect the person exercising it as well as third parties, States should establish specific rules and action protocols for security forces acting in situations of social protest and public demonstrations. These guidelines should aim for police agents to act in the knowledge that their obligation is to protect the participants in a public meeting, demonstration or concentration, to the extent that it is the exercise of a human right.
   5. Guarantee that firearms are excluded from the devices used to control social protests. The ban on carrying firearms and lead ammunition by officials who may come into contact with protesters has been proven as the best measure of preventing lethal violence and deaths occurring in a context of social protests. Operations may provide for the availability of firearms and lead ammunition somewhere outside the range of the demonstration for those exceptional cases in which a violent situation warranting such use occurs. In this extreme scenario, there shall be explicit rules regarding who has the power to authorize their use and the ways in which this authorization is to be properly documented.
   6. Adopt special measures to protect journalists who are reporting on situations of armed conflict and social unrest, and guarantee that they are not detained, threatened, attacked or have their rights limited in any way for the exercise of their profession; that their work materials and tools are not destroyed nor confiscated by the authorities, according to what was laid out in this report; and create special protocols to protect the press in circumstances of social unrest.

## Criminalization of Expression and Proportionality of Subsequent Liability

1. Some Member States witnessed criminal complaints filed by State officials in response to the publication of opinions or information related to matters in the public interest. It is true that in some of the cases studied, the criminal proceedings were dismissed. In others, however, judges issued criminal convictions against the journalists. The Office of the Special Rapporteur verifies that there are still criminal codes that have yet to be adjusted to inter-American standards on the subject of freedom of expression because they criminalize speech related to public officials and public interest matters, and other criminal provisions that allow for the imposition of disproportionate measures that can have the kind of chilling effect that is incompatible with a democratic society. Similarly, the Office of the Special Rapporteur received information on the need to adjust civil laws to prevent the disproportionate use of pecuniary sanctions.
2. In regard to statutes that criminally or civilly sanction expression, the Office of the Special Rapporteur recommends that Member States:
   1. Promote the repeal of contempt (*desacato*) laws, whatever their form, given that these norms are contrary to the American Convention and restrict public debate, an essential element of the practice of democracy.
   2. Promote the repeal of laws on criminal defamation, and in particular abstain from using criminal proceedings to protect honor and reputation when information is disseminated about issues of public interest, about public officials, or about candidates for public office. Protecting the privacy or the honor and reputation of public officials or persons who have voluntarily become involved in issues of public interest, should be guaranteed only through civil law.
   3. Promote the inclusion of inter-American standards in civil legislation so that civil proceedings against individuals who have made statements about public officials or about matters of public interest apply the standard of actual malice, in accordance with principle 10 of the Declaration of Principles, and are proportionate and reasonable.
   4. Promote the modification of ambiguous or imprecise criminal laws that disproportionally limit the right to freedom of expression, such as those aimed at protecting the honor of ideas or institutions, with the aim of eliminating the use of criminal proceedings to inhibit free democratic debate about all issues of public interest.

## Statements of High-Level State Authorities

1. In 2017, the Office of the Special Rapporteur continued to receive information on statements made by high-ranking State officials discrediting and stigmatized the journalistic work of some communicators, media outlets and non-governmental organizations. It is particularly concerning that in some of these cases, the statements were followed by violence or the opening of disciplinary procedures that threatened the permanent withdrawal of operating concessions, permits, or licenses of critical media outlets. The Office of the Special Rapporteur exhorts State authorities to contribute decisively to building an environment of tolerance and respect in which all individuals can express their thoughts and opinions without fear of being attacked, punished, or stigmatized for them.
2. Regarding statements of high-level State officials, the Office of the Special Rapporteur recommends that member States:
   1. Encourage democratic debate through public declarations, practices, and policies that promote tolerance and respect of all individuals, under equal conditions, whatever their thoughts or ideas.
   2. Exhort the authorities to refrain from making public statements or using state media outlets to carry out public campaigns that can encourage violence against individuals because of their opinions. In particular, avoid statements that could stigmatize journalists, media outlets, and human rights defenders.

## Prior Censorship

1. The Office of the Special Rapporteur received information about judicial decisions and government measures that prohibited the exercise of journalism, the operation of media outlets or the circulation of information of public interest this year. Member States must take into account that article 13.2 of the American Convention explicitly establishes that the exercise of the right to freedom of expression shall not be subject to prior censorship.
2. On this point, the Office of the Special Rapporteur recommends that member States:
   1. Eliminate any norm that enables prior censorship by any state organ, and also any prior condition that may imply censorship of freedom of expression, such as prior requirements of truthfulness, timeliness, or impartiality of information.

## Indirect Censorship

1. The Office of the Special Rapporteur received complaints pertaining to distribution of government advertising that was intended to punish or reward media outlets according to their editorial positions. It is necessary for member States to have statutory frameworks that establish clear, transparent, objective, and non-discriminatory criteria for determining the distribution of official advertising. The Office of the Special Rapporteur received complaints about the use of other mechanisms of state power, such as tax and administrative control, in order to pressure and punish or reward and provide privileges to journalists and media outlets depending on their editorial position.
2. On this point, the Office of the Special Rapporteur recommends that member States:
   1. Abstain from using public power to punish or reward media and journalists in relation to their editorial stance or coverage of certain information, whether through the discriminatory and arbitrary assignment of government advertising or other indirect means aimed at impeding communication and the circulation of ideas and opinions.
   2. Regulate these matters in accordance with the current inter-American standards on freedom of expression.
   3. Adopt legislation to regulate the State's authority to control and supervise the allocation of public goods or resources related directly or indirectly with the exercise of freedom of expression. On this point, the task is to adjust institutional frameworks with two central objectives: first, to eliminate the possibility that State authority is used to reward or punish media outlets according to their editorial positions, and second, to foster pluralism and diversity in the public debate.

## Internet

1. The Office of the Special Rapporteur observes that various States in the region have promoted attempts to regulate some aspect of Internet use and access or have adopted decisions in this regard, in response to the need to prevent crime and protect the fundamental rights of third parties. It must be pointed out that many of these initiatives fail to take into account the special characteristics of this technology and, as a result, unduly restrict freedom of expression. In evaluating the proportionality of a restriction on freedom of expression on the Internet, the impact that said restriction could have on the capacity of the Internet to guarantee and promote freedom of expression must be weighed against the benefits that the restriction would provide for the protection of other interests.
2. Furthermore, the Office of the Special Rapporteur highlights the promotion of regulation in certain countries of the hemisphere to ensure there is no discrimination, restriction, interference or blocking in the transmission of Internet traffic, in accordance with the principle of net neutrality.
3. In this sense, the Office of the Special Rapporteur recommends that the Member States:
   1. Abstain from applying regulatory approaches to the Internet that have been developed for other communications media – such as telephony or radio and television – and design an alternative regulatory framework specifically for this medium, addressing its particularities, pursuant to currently-in-effect international standards in the field of freedom of expression.
   2. Encourage self-regulation as an effective tool to deal with defamatory expressions that could be disseminated on the Internet.
   3. Protect the actors who participate as Internet intermediaries and provide technical services from any responsibility for contents generated by third parties and which are disseminated through these services, pursuant to international standards on the matter.
   4. Promote universal Internet access to guarantee universal and effective enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression through this medium.
   5. Ensure that the processing of data and Internet traffic is not subject to any discrimination based on factors such devices, content, author, source and / or destination of the material, service or application, in accordance with the principle of net neutrality.

## Surveillance Programs and Confidential Sources

1. The Office of the Special Rapporteur has expressed concern over the existence of security programs and practices that can generate serious damage to the universal rights to privacy and freedom of thought and expression. As a result, the Office of the Special Rapporteur has urged the corresponding authorities to review relevant legislation and modify their practices, with the aim of ensuring their adjustment to international principles in the field of human rights.
2. The Office of the Special Rapporteur recommends that the Member States:
   1. Review their legislation to establish limits on the power to oversee private communications, their necessity and proportionality, pursuant to the public’s universal rights and the principles of international law that have been taken up in this report.
   2. Ensure that the public can have access to information on programs for surveillance of private communications, their scope and the existing controls to guarantee that they cannot be used arbitrarily. In any case, States must establish independent control mechanisms to ensure the transparency and accountability of these programs.
   3. Abstain from punishing journalists, members of the media or members of civil society who have access to and disseminate reserved information about this type of surveillance programs, considering it to be of public interest. Confidential sources and materials associated with dissemination of reserved information must be protected by law.
   4. Establish regulations to guarantee that individuals who expose wrongdoing, serious maladministration, a breach of human rights, humanitarian law violations or other threats to the overall public interest, for example in terms of safety or the environment, should be protected against legal, administrative or employment related sanction, even if they have otherwise acted in breach of a binding rule or contract, as long as at the time of the disclosure they had reasonable grounds to believe that the information disclosed was substantially true and exposed wrongdoing or the other threats noted above.

## Access to Public Information

1. During this period, the Office of the Special Rapporteur once more noted the incorporation of the inter-American system’s standards on access to information into the domestic legal regimes of several States, either through the approval of special access to information laws or through decisions by their domestic courts. However, it was noted that in several Member States there continue to be difficulties in regulating the exceptions to the exercise of this right and in the implementation of some laws.
2. With regard to access to information, the Office of the Special Rapporteur recommends that Member States:
   1. Continue promulgating laws that permit effective access to information and complementary norms that guarantee its adequate implementation, in conformity with the international standards in this area.
   2. Guarantee effectively, both *de jure* and *de facto*, the right of *habeas data* of all persons, this being an essential element of freedom of expression and the democratic system.
   3. Encourage the effective and efficient implementation of norms on access to information, adequately training public employees and informing the citizenry in order to eradicate the culture of secrecy and provide citizens the tools to effectively monitor state activities, public administration and the prevention of corruption, all essential to the democratic process.
   4. Strengthen the institutional structure for supervision of the implementation of laws regarding access to public information, pursuant to the highest standards in this field, such as those adopted by the General Assembly of the OAS, in its Resolution AG/RES. 2607 (XL-O/10), by means of which it adopts the “Model Inter-American Law on Access to Information.”
   5. Promote the widespread dissemination of information on the human rights of women and how to uphold them, the mechanisms of protection available to women at potential risk of suffering violence and how to access them, the programs for free legal assistance available to women victims of violence and discrimination, and all other mechanisms for addressing these issues.
   6. Step up efforts to move towards the effective implementation of comprehensive systems for compiling information on discrimination and violence against women that incorporate information from all State organs with authority in this area, especially the judicial systems. Based on the information collected, States should produce complete statistics on violence and discrimination against women, as well as other kinds of quantitative and qualitative information in this respect. Those statistics should be updated periodically and should include information that is disaggregated at least by sex, gender identity, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and situation of disability so as to make it possible to construct an accurate image of the specific forms in which violence and discrimination affect the women in most vulnerable situations. The statistical information produced should be proactively published.
   7. Establish systematic policies for the education and training of state officials, in particular judicial officers, on international standards in relation to access to information and violence and discrimination against women. In addition, train the civil society organizations in the use of the mechanisms available to make requests of information to the state.

## Diversity and Pluralism in the Allocation of Radio Frequencies

1. The Special Rapporteur received complaints about the lack of recognition of the community and indigenous broadcasting sector in some countries in the region. It also received information about the absence of regulatory mechanisms to ensure access to frequencies to this type of media as well as the existence of obstacles to their proper functioning. The Office of the Special Rapporteur also noted that concentration of public and private media is still a problem in some countries in the region.
2. During this period, the Office of the Special Rapporteur continued to emphasize the need for Member States to have a competent authority in charge of radio broadcasting that is technical, independent of the government, autonomous in the face of political pressure, and subject to due process guarantees and strict judicial review. In this regard, this Offices noted that in several countries there still obstacles for allocating licenses or frequencies that are open, public, and transparent, subject to clear and pre-established rules, and only those requirements that are strictly necessary, just, and equitable, have not been implemented. Also, the Office of the Special Rapporteur observes that today, the countries in the region are transitioning from analogue to digital television, while others have just begun this process.
3. On this point, the Office of the Special Rapporteur recommends that Member States:
   1. Ensure the existence of transparent, public, and equitable criteria for the allocation of radio frequencies and the new digital dividend. These criteria must take into account the concentration of ownership or control of communications media, and assign the administration of the radio electric spectrum to an organ independent from political and economic interests, subject to due process and judicial oversight.
   2. Promote effective policies and practices that permit access to information and the equal participation of all sectors of society so that their needs, opinions, and interests will be contemplated in the design and adoption of public policy decisions. Additionally, adopt legislative and other measures that are necessary to guarantee pluralism, including laws that prevent the existence of public or private monopolies.
   3. Legislate in the area of community radio broadcasting, in a manner that will produce an equitable division of the spectrum and the digital dividend to community radio stations and channels. The allocation of these frequencies must take into account democratic criteria that guarantee equal opportunities to all individuals in the access and operation of these media in conditions of equality, without disproportionate or unreasonable restrictions, and in conformity with Principle 12 of the Declaration of Principles and the “Joint Declaration on Diversity in Broadcasting.”
   4. Ensure that respect for freedom of expression, including media diversity according to editorial position or type of property, is ensured in the digital terrestrial transition process. To that aim, States should ensure that decision-making processes relating to the digital terrestrial transition take place in a transparent and fully consultative manner, allowing for all stakeholders and interests to be heard.

**APPENDIX**

**Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and "Fake News", Disinformation and Propaganda**

March 7, 2017

The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Organization of American States (OAS) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information,

*Having* discussed these issues together with the assistance of *ARTICLE 19* and the *Centre for Law and Democracy* (CLD);

*Recalling and reaffirming* our Joint Declarations of 26 November 1999, 30 November 2000, 20 November 2001, 10 December 2002, 18 December 2003, 6 December 2004, 21 December 2005, 19 December 2006, 12 December 2007, 10 December 2008, 15 May 2009, 3 February 2010, 1 June 2011, 25 June 2012, 4 May 2013, 6 May 2014, 4 May 2015 and 4 May 2016;

*Taking note* of the growing prevalence of disinformation (sometimes referred to as "false" or "fake news") and propaganda in legacy and social media, fuelled by both States and non-State actors, and the various harms to which they may be a contributing factor or primary cause;

*Expressing concern* that disinformation and propaganda are often designed and implemented so as to mislead a population, as well as to interfere with the public’s right to know and the right of individuals to seek and receive, as well as to impart, information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, protected under international legal guarantees of the rights to freedom of expression and to hold opinions;

*Emphasising* that some forms of disinformation and propaganda may harm individual reputations and privacy, or incite to violence, discrimination or hostility against identifiable groups in society;

*Alarmed at* instances in which public authorities denigrate, intimidate and threaten the media, including by stating that the media is "the opposition" or is "lying" and has a hidden political agenda, which increases the risk of threats and violence against journalists, undermines public trust and confidence in journalism as a public watchdog, and may mislead the public by blurring the lines between disinformation and media products containing independently verifiable facts;

*Stressing* that the human right to impart information and ideas is not limited to "correct" statements, that the right also protects information and ideas that may shock, offend and disturb, and that prohibitions on disinformation may violate international human rights standards, while, at the same time, this does not justify the dissemination of knowingly or recklessly false statements by official or State actors;

*Highlighting* the importance of unencumbered access to a wide variety of both sources of information and ideas, and opportunities to disseminate them, and of a diverse media in a democratic society, including in terms of facilitating public debates and open confrontation of ideas in society, and acting as a watchdog of government and the powerful;

*Reiterating* that States are under a positive obligation to foster an enabling environment for freedom of expression, which includes promoting, protecting and supporting diverse media, something which has come under growing pressure due to the increasingly difficult economic environment for the traditional media;

*Acknowledging* the transformative role played by the Internet and other digital technologies in supporting individuals’ ability to access and disseminate information and ideas, which both enables responses to disinformation and propaganda, while also facilitating their circulation;

*Reaffirming* the responsibilities of intermediaries, which facilitate the enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression through digital technologies, to respect human rights;

*Deploring* attempts by some governments to suppress dissent and to control public communications through such measures as: repressive rules regarding the establishment and operation of media outlets and/or websites; interference in the operations of public and private media outlets, including by denying accreditation to their journalists and politically-motivated prosecutions of journalists; unduly restrictive laws on what content may not be disseminated; the arbitrary imposition of states of emergency; technical controls over digital technologies such as blocking, filtering, jamming and closing down digital spaces; and efforts to "privatise" control measures by pressuring intermediaries to take action to restrict content;

*Welcoming and encouraging* civil society and media efforts aimed at identifying and raising awareness about deliberately false news stories, disinformation and propaganda;

*Concerned* about some measures taken by intermediaries to limit access to or the dissemination of digital content, including through automated processes, such as algorithms or digital recognition-based content removal systems, which are not transparent in nature, which fail to respect minimum due process standards and/or which unduly restrict access to or the dissemination of content;

*Adopt*, in Vienna, on 3 March 2017, the following Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and "Fake News", Disinformation and Propaganda:

1.     General Principles:

a.     States may only impose restrictions on the right to freedom of expression in accordance with the test for such restrictions under international law, namely that they be provided for by law, serve one of the legitimate interests recognised under international law, and be necessary and proportionate to protect that interest.

b.     Restrictions on freedom of expression may also be imposed, as long as they are consistent with the requirements noted in paragraph 1(a), to prohibit advocacy of hatred on protected grounds that constitutes incitement to violence, discrimination or hostility (in accordance with Article 20(2) of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*).

c.     The standards outlined in paragraphs 1(a) and (b) apply regardless of frontiers so as to limit restrictions not only within a jurisdiction but also those which affect media outlets and other communications systems operating from outside of the jurisdiction of a State as well as those reaching populations in States other than the State of origin.

d.     Intermediaries should never be liable for any third party content relating to those services unless they specifically intervene in that content or refuse to obey an order adopted in accordance with due process guarantees by an independent, impartial, authoritative oversight body (such as a court) to remove it and they have the technical capacity to do that.

e.     Consideration should be given to protecting individuals against liability for merely redistributing or promoting, through intermediaries, content of which they are not the author and which they have not modified.

f.      State mandated blocking of entire websites, IP addresses, ports or network protocols is an extreme measure which can only be justified where it is provided by law and is necessary to protect a human right or other legitimate public interest, including in the sense of that it is proportionate, there are no less intrusive alternative measures which would protect the interest and it respects minimum due process guarantees.

g.     Content filtering systems which are imposed by a government and which are not end-user controlled are not justifiable as a restriction on freedom of expression.

h.     The right to freedom of expression applies "regardless of frontiers" and jamming of signals from a broadcaster based in another jurisdiction, or the withdrawal of rebroadcasting rights in relation to that broadcaster’s programmes, is legitimate only where the content disseminated by that broadcaster has been held by a court of law or another independent, authoritative and impartial oversight body to be in serious and persistent breach of a legitimate restriction on content (i.e. one that meets the conditions of paragraph 1(a)) and other means of addressing the problem, including by contacting the relevant authorities of the host State, have proven to be demonstrably ineffective.

2.     Standards on Disinformation and Propaganda:

a.     General prohibitions on the dissemination of information based on vague and ambiguous ideas, including "false news" or "non-objective information", are incompatible  with international standards for restrictions on freedom of expression, as set out in paragraph 1(a), and should be abolished.

b.     Criminal defamation laws are unduly restrictive and should be abolished. Civil law rules on liability for false and defamatory statements are legitimate only if defendants are given a full opportunity and fail to prove the truth of those statements and also benefit from other defences, such as fair comment.

c.     State actors should not make, sponsor, encourage or further disseminate statements which they know or reasonably should know to be false (disinformation) or which demonstrate a reckless disregard for verifiable information (propaganda).

d.     State actors should, in accordance with their domestic and international legal obligations and their public duties, take care to ensure that they disseminate reliable and trustworthy information, including about matters of public interest, such as the economy, public health, security and the environment.

3.     Enabling Environment for Freedom of Expression:

a.     States have a positive obligation to promote a free, independent and diverse communications environment, including media diversity, which is a key means of addressing disinformation and propaganda.

b.     States should establish a clear regulatory framework for broadcasters which is overseen by a body which is protected against political and commercial interference or pressure and which promotes a free, independent and diverse broadcasting sector.

c.     States should ensure the presence of strong, independent and adequately resourced public service media, which operate under a clear mandate to serve the overall public interest and to set and maintain high standards of journalism.

d.     States should put in place other measures to promote media diversity which may include, as warranted by the situation, some or all of the following:

                             i.    Providing subsidies or other forms of financial or technical support for the production of diverse, quality media content;

                            ii.    Rules prohibiting undue concentration of media ownership; and

                           iii.    Rules requiring media outlets to be transparent about their ownership structures.

e.     States should take measures to promote media and digital literacy, including by covering these topics as part of the regular school curriculum and by engaging with civil society and other stakeholders to raise awareness about these issues.

f.      States should consider other measures to promote equality, non-discrimination, inter-cultural understanding and other democratic values, including with a view to addressing the negative effects of disinformation and propaganda.

4.     Intermediaries

a.     Where intermediaries intend to take action to restrict third party content (such as deletion or moderation) which goes beyond legal requirements, they should adopt clear, pre-determined policies governing those actions. Those policies should be based on objectively justifiable criteria rather than ideological or political goals and should, where possible, be adopted after consultation with their users.

b.     Intermediaries should take effective measures to ensure that their users can both easily access and understand any policies and practices, including terms of service, they have in place for actions covered by paragraph 4(a), including detailed information about how they are enforced, where relevant by making available clear, concise and easy to understand summaries of or explanatory guides to those policies and practices.

c.     In taking actions covered by paragraph 4(a), intermediaries should respect minimum due process guarantees including by notifying users promptly when content which they created, uploaded or host may be subject to a content action and giving the user an opportunity to contest that action, subject only to legal or reasonable practical constraints, by scrutinising claims under such policies carefully before taking action and by applying measures consistently.

d.     The standards outlined in paragraph 4(b) should, subject only to legitimate competitive or operational needs, also be applied to any automated processes (whether algorithmic or otherwise) run by intermediaries for taking action either in relation to third party content or their own content.

e.     Intermediaries should support the research and development of appropriate technological solutions to disinformation and propaganda which users may apply on a voluntary basis. They should cooperate with initiatives that offer fact-checking services to users and review their advertising models to ensure that they do not adversely impact diversity of opinions and ideas.

5.     Journalists and Media Outlets

a.     The media and journalists should, as appropriate, support effective systems of self regulation whether at the level of specific media sectors (such as press complaints bodies) or at the level of individual media outlets (ombudsmen or public editors) which include standards on striving for accuracy in the news, including by offering a right of correction and/or reply to address inaccurate statements in the media.

b.     Media outlets should consider including critical coverage of disinformation and propaganda as part of their news services in line with their watchdog role in society, particularly during elections and regarding debates on matters of public interest.

6.     Stakeholders cooperation

a.   All stakeholders – including intermediaries, media outlets, civil society and academia – should be supported in developing participatory and transparent initiatives for creating a better understanding of the impact of disinformation and propaganda on democracy, freedom of expression, journalism and civic space, as well as appropriate responses to these phenomena.

1. Declaration of Santiago. Second Summit of the Americas. April 18-19, 1998. Santiago, Chile. “Official Documents of the Summit Process from Miami to Santiago.” Volume I. Office of Summit Follow-up. Organization of American States. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Plan of Action. Second Summit of the Americas. April 18-19, 1998. Santiago, Chile. “Official Documents of the Summit Process from Miami to Santiago.” Volume I. Office of Summit Follow-up. Organization of American States. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Plan of Action. [Third Summit of the Americas](http://www.summit-americas.org/iii_summit/iii_summit_poa_en.pdf). April 20-22, 2001. Québec, Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. IACHR. Annual Report 2004. [Annual Report 2004. Annual Report of the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression](http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/expression/docs/reports/annual/2004.pdf?DocumentID=142). OEA/Ser.L/V/II.222. Doc. 5 rev. 23 February 2005. Chapters II, V and VII. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. IACHR. [Annual Report 2005. Annual Report of the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression](http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/expression/docs/reports/annual/LE2005%20ENG.pdf). OAS/Ser.L/V/II.124 Doc. 7. 27 February 2006. Chapter V and VI. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. IACHR. Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression. [Estudio Especial sobre el Derecho de Acceso a la Información](http://www.cidh.oas.org/relatoria/section/Estudio%20Especial%20sobre%20el%20derecho%20de%20Acceso%20a%20la%20Informacion.pdf). August, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. OAS. [The Model Law and its Implementation Guide](http://www.oas.org/dil/access_to_information_model_law.htm) Resolution AG/RES 2607 (XL-O/10). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Articles 40 and 41 of the American Convention and Article 18 of the Statute of the IACHR. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. IACHR. July 21, 2008. [Press Release No 29/08. IACHR Elects Catalina Botero Marino as Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression](http://www.cidh.org/Comunicados/English/2008/29.08eng.htm) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Case I.V.\* v. Bolivia. Judgment of November 30, 2016 (Preliminary objections, merits, reparations, and costs), Paras.156 and following. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Case of Lagos del Campo v. Peru. Judgment of August 31, 2017 (Preliminary objections, merits, reparations, and costs), para. 76 et seq. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. IACHR decision issued June 18, 1999, and expanded on July 19, 1999, requesting that the Chilean government adopt precautionary measures for the benefit of Bartolo Ortiz, Carlos Orellana, and Alejandra Matus, in light of detention orders against the first two and an order prohibiting the distribution and sale of a book, stemming from the publication of the *Libro Negro de la Justicia Chilena* [*Black Book of Chilean Justice*], written by Mrs. Matus. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. IACHR decision of March 1, 2001, requesting that the State of Costa Rica adopt precautionary measures for the benefit of journalist Mauricio Herrera Ulloa and the legal representative of the newspaper *La Nación*, who had received criminal and civil convictions due to the publication of reports against an official in the Costa Rican Foreign Service, with the sentences not having fully materialized at the time the measures were adopted. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. IACHR decision of February 7, 2001, requesting that the State of Venezuela adopt precautionary measures for the benefit of journalist Pablo López Ulacio, who had accused a businessman of benefiting from state insurance contracts in the context of a presidential campaign. The journalist was ordered detained and prohibited from publicly mentioning the businessman in the daily *La Razón.* [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. IACHR decision of March 2003, requesting that the State of Chile adopt precautionary measures, for the benefit of writer Juan Cristóbal Peña. Consisting on lifting the judicial order, seizing and withdrawing from circulation a biography of a popular singer who sought the order on the grounds that the account was considered grave slander. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. IACHR decisions of October 3 and October 24, 2003, requesting that the State of Venezuela suspend administrative decisions to seize operating equipment from the Globovisión television station and that it guarantee an impartial and independent trial in this case. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. IACHR decision of September 15, 2005, requesting that the State of Panama suspend a detention order against Santander Tristán Donoso, stemming from his failure to comply with a monetary fine imposed for the alleged commission of the crime of libel and slander. Mr. Tristán Donoso denounced that the Prosecutor General of the Nation had divulged taped telephone call conversations. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. IACHR decision adopted following the presentation of an individual petition in 2002, in the name of Eduardo Yáñez Morel, who was prosecuted for committing the crime of *desacato*, having severely criticized the Supreme Court of Justice on a television program in 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. IACHR decision of November 3, 2008, in which the IACHR requested that the State of Guatemala take the measures necessary to guarantee the life and humane treatment of Pelicó and his family, because of the grave and constant threats received by the journalist as a result of his investigations and publications on drug trafficking. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. IACHR decision adopted on July 3, 2008, for the purpose of preventing the destruction of electoral ballots from the 2006 presidential elections in Mexico. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. IACHR decision of April 26, 2011, requesting that the State of Honduras adopt any necessary measures to guarantee the life and physical integrity of Leo Valladares Lanza and his wife, Daysi Pineda Madrid, and so that Leo Valladares Lanza could continue to carry out his activities to defend and promote human rights under safe conditions. The decision also requested that the State reach agreement with the beneficiaries and their representatives on the measures to be adopted. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. IACHR decision of April 18, 2011, asking the State of Honduras to adopt any necessary measures to guarantee the life and physical integrity of the journalists from La Voz de Zacata Grande, and to reach agreement with the beneficiaries and their representatives on the measures to be adopted. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. IACHR decision of November 14, 2011, requesting that the State adopt any necessary measures to guarantee the life and integrity of Lucía Carolina Escobar Mejía, Cledy Lorena Caal Cumes, and Gustavo Girón; reach agreement with the beneficiaries and their representatives on the measures to be adopted; and inform the Commission on the steps taken to investigate the events that led to the adoption of the precautionary measure. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. IACHR decision of February 21, 2012 requesting the State of Ecuador to immediately suspend the effects of the judgment of February 15, 2012, in order to guarantee the right to freedom of expression. On March 9, 2012, the IACHR lifted these precautionary measures and filed the case file, after receiving a communication dated February 29, 2012, whereby the applicants requested said removal, since the causes for immediate urgency that motivated them had ceased. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Extension of precautionary measure. IACHR decision of May 25, 2012, requesting the State of Honduras to inform the IACHR about the agreement with the beneficiaries of the implementation of MC 399/09, which protects several workers of Radio Progreso in Honduras, broken down from CM 196/09 on April 1, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. IACHR decision of November 9, 2012, requesting the State of Cuba to adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the life and physical integrity of Yoani María Sánchez Cordero and her family, to coordinate the measures to be adopted with the beneficiary and her representatives, and to report on the actions taken in order to investigate the deeds that gave rise to the adoption of precautionary measures. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. IACHR decision of January 26th, 2015, requesting the State to adopt the necessary measures to determine the situation and exact location of José Moisés Sánchez Cerezo, to protect his life and personal integrity, and to inform about the ongoing actions in order to investigate the events that prompted the adoption of the precautionary measure. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. IACHR decision of November 9th, 2015, requesting the State to adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression by Miguel Henrique Otero, Alberto Federico Ravell, Isabel Cristina Ravell, and Teodoro Petkoff without being subjected to acts of stigmatization and harassment while carrying out their journalistic activities; to coordinate the measures to be adopted with the beneficiaries and their representatives; and to adopt the necessary actions in order to avoid the repetition of the events that prompted the present precautionary measure. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. IACHR decision of November 16, 2015, requesting the State to adopt the necessary measures in order to preserve the life and personal integrity of X and his/her family members; to adopt the necessary measures so that X may carry out the work related to his/her journalistic activities without being subject to acts of violence and harassment; to coordinate the measures to be adopted with the beneficiaries and their representatives; to inform about the ongoing actions to investigate the alleged events that prompted the adoption of the precautionary measure, and, thus, avoid their repetition. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. IACHR Decision of April 28th, 2016, requesting the State to adopt the necessary measures in order to preserve the life and personal integrity of the beneficiary; to adopt the necessary measures so that César Obando Flores Rodríguez may carry out the work related to his journalistic activities without being subject to acts of violence and harassment; to coordinate the measures to be adopted with the beneficiaries and their representatives; to inform about the ongoing actions to investigate the alleged events that prompted the adoption of the precautionary measure, and, thus, avoid their repetition. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. IACHR Decision of June 4th, 2016, requesting the State to adopt the necessary measures in order to preserve the life and personal integrity of Lester Toledo and family members; to adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the political rights of Lester Toledo so that he may carry out the work related to his activities as deputy of the legislative council in the state of Zulia and leader of the opposition, without being subject to acts of violence and harassment; to arrange the measures with the beneficiary and their representatives and to inform about the ongoing actions to investigate the alleged events that prompted the adoption of the precautionary measure, and, thus, avoid their repetition [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. IACHR Decision of December 22nd, 2016, requesting the State to adopt the necessary measures in order to preserve the life and personal integrity of Mr. Braulio Jatar. In particular to provide adequate medical attention according to his pathologies; to ensure that the conditions of detention are in accordance with international standards, taking into consideration his current state of health; and arrange the measures to be adopted with the beneficiary and representatives. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. IACHR decision of January 14, 2017 requesting the State to adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the life and personal integrity of i) David Smolansky, Freddy Guevara, Ismael León and Juan Pablo López Gross, members of the Voluntad Popular party, ii) Theresly Malavé, human rights defender, and iii) Alexander Tirado; Raúl Emilio Baduel, Ángel Contreras, Yon Goicoechea and Delson Guárate, detained in the Centro para Procesados 26 de julio and El Helicoide; to adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the political rights of David Smolansky, Freddy Guevara, Ismael León and Juan Pablo López Gross so that they can carry out their activities as opposition leaders without being subjected to harassment, threats or acts of violence; to take the necessary measures to ensure that Theresly Malavé can carry out her activities as a human rights defender without being subjected to acts of violence and harassment for carrying out her work; to ensure that the conditions of detention of the beneficiaries housed in the Centro para Procesados 26 de julio and El Helicoide are in accordance with international standards; to arrange the measures to be adopted with the beneficiaries and their representatives; and to report on the actions taken in order to investigate the alleged events that gave rise to the adoption of this precautionary measure and thus prevent its repetition. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. IACHR decision of January 20, 2017 requesting the State to adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the life and personal integrity of Lorenzo Mendoza and his family; to arrange the measures to be adopted with the beneficiaries and their representatives, and to report on the actions taken in order to investigate the alleged events that gave rise to the adoption of this precautionary measure and to prevent its repetition. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. IACHR decision of April 7, 2017 requesting the State to adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the life and personal integrity of Mr. Luis Florido, and ensure that he can exercise his political rights as a member of the National Assembly without being subjected to threats, harassment or acts of violence; to arrange the measures to be adopted with the beneficiaries and their representatives, and to report on the actions taken in order to investigate the alleged events that gave rise to the adoption of this precautionary measure and to prevent its repetition. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. IACHR decision of June 2, 2017 requesting the State to adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the life, personal integrity and political rights of Mr. Henrique Capriles Radonski without being subjected to threats, harassment or acts of violence; to arrange the measures to be adopted with the beneficiaries and their representatives, and to report on the actions taken in order to investigate the alleged events that gave rise to the adoption of this precautionary measure and to prevent its repetition. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. IACHR decision of July 27, 2017 requesting the State to adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the life and personal integrity of Milagro Sala; to arrange the measures to be adopted with the beneficiary and her representatives; and, taking into account the exceptional nature of pre-trial detention and the aggravation of the risk situation to her life and personal integrity as a result of the peculiarities of the continued deprivation of liberty of the beneficiary, that the competent authorities adopt, in light of the described standards, alternative measures to preventive detention, such as house arrest, or else, that the beneficiary may face the trial in liberty with measures such as electronic surveillance. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. IACHR decision of October 27, 2017 requesting the State to adopt the necessary measures to protect the life and personal integrity of the beneficiaries; to take the necessary measures so that they can develop their journalistic activities, in the exercise of freedom of expression, without being subjected to acts of intimidation, threats and harassment; and to arrange the measures to be adopted with the beneficiary and their representatives. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
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    <http://www.cidh.oas.org/relatoria/docListCat.asp?catID=16&lID=1> [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
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1693. According to the information provided by George Simon and Federica Dávila, members of the Cruz Verde, during the OAS hearings on November 16, 2017, Bolivarian National Guardsmen arrested Cruz Verde volunteers who were caring for injured protesters. In addition, in May 2017, tear gas bombs were fired at one of the Cruz Verde’s SUVs that was there to offer aid. Also, a guardsman fired pellets at a Cruz Verde volunteer at pointblank range [Livestream, [Public hearings before the OAS regarding Venezuela](https://livestream.com/OAS2/LIVE/videos/166027120), OAS, November 16, 2017; and Youtube video, [Venezuela #31May GNB disparó contra un rescatista de la Cruz Verde UCV](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dgLuE3bdPMs), El Acertijo Cretino, June 1, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1693)
1694. According to information from the FPV, at least 83% of the 133 deaths recorded between April 1 and July 31 were from gunshot wounds [FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Julio 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/08/11/julio-2017/) August 8, 2017, pg. 1]. According to members of the Cruz Verde, initially, the injuries they attended to during the 2017 protests were suffocation from the use of tear gas. However, over time, the injuries they dealt with predominately changed to gunshot wounds [Livestream, [Public hearings before the OAS regarding Venezuela](https://livestream.com/OAS2/LIVE/videos/166027120), OAS, November 16, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1694)
1695. OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-1695)
1696. El Universal, [Observatorio Venezolano de la Salud alerta sobre uso de gases lacrimógenos](http://www.eluniversal.com/noticias/estilo-vida/observatorio-venezolano-salud-alerta-sobre-uso-gases-lacrimogenos_650222), May 29, 2017; Huffington Post, [La policía venezolana dispersa con gases lacrimógenos una nueva marcha de la oposición a Maduro](http://www.huffingtonpost.es/2017/05/03/la-policia-venezolana-dispersa-con-gases-lacrimogenos-una-nueva_a_22067824/), May 3, 2017; and Runrun, [El uso del gas pimienta en protestas es inconstitucional](http://runrun.es/nacional/303715/el-uso-del-gas-pimienta-en-protestas-es-inconstitucional.html), April 4, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1696)
1697. Deutsche Welle (DW), [Incendio en el comando de campaña de Capriles](http://www.dw.com/es/incendio-en-el-comando-de-campa%C3%B1a-de-capriles/av-38356258), April 8, 2017; and NTN24, [Comando Capriles se incendió tras ser atacado con bombas lacrimógenas: El Cicpc se presentó en la madrugada para "investigar"](http://www.ntn24america.com/noticia/henrique-capriles-denuncia-que-fue-atacado-con-bombas-lacrimogenas-dentro-de-su-comando-de-campana-137999), April 8, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1697)
1698. Entorno Inteligente, [VENEZUELA: Cecodap registra 19 adolescentes muertos durante cuatro meses de protestas en Venezuela](http://www.entornointeligente.com/articulo/10384439/VENEZUELA-Cecodap-registra-19-adolescentes-muertos-durante-cuatro-meses-de-protestas-en-Venezuela), July 29, 2017. Previously, Cedocap had recorded 14 deaths of adolescent in the context of the protests as at July 5 [Cecodap, Communication to the IACHR, September 2017, para. 18]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1698)
1699. Sinergia, Asociación Venezolana de Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil, Sociedad Civil en la Mira: Informe sobre las garantías y ejercicio de los derechos de participación y asociación en Venezuela 2016-2017, p. 22; Diario Las Américas, [Confirman muerte del joven herido de bala en manifestación opositora de Caracas](http://www.diariolasamericas.com/america-latina/confirman-muerte-del-joven-herido-bala-manifestacion-opositora-caracas-n4120031), April 19, 2017; REDHNNA, [Respeto y protección a los niños, niñas y adolescentes en el control del orden público y situaciones de conflictividad social](http://aulaabiertavenezuela.org/index.php/2017/04/23/comunicado-respeto-y-proteccion-a-los-ninos-ninas-y-adolescentes-en-el-control-del-orden-publico-y-situaciones-de-conflictividad-social/), April 29, 2017; and Cecodap, Communication to the IACHR, September 2017, para. 17-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-1699)
1700. Diario Las Américas, [Confirman muerte del joven herido de bala en manifestación opositora de Caracas](http://www.diariolasamericas.com/america-latina/confirman-muerte-del-joven-herido-bala-manifestacion-opositora-caracas-n4120031), April 19, 2017; and REDHNNA, [Respeto y protección a los niños, niñas y adolescentes en el control del orden público y situaciones de conflictividad social](http://aulaabiertavenezuela.org/index.php/2017/04/23/comunicado-respeto-y-proteccion-a-los-ninos-ninas-y-adolescentes-en-el-control-del-orden-publico-y-situaciones-de-conflictividad-social/), April 29, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1700)
1701. According to his father, Ivan Urbina, as the demonstrators were in the Altamira highway interchange, the guardsmen began shooting with firearms at the people who were at the front of the march. As a result, five people were injured, including Fabián Urbina, who died minutes later due to the severity of his wounds. As of November 16, 2017, three national guardsmen were being held in connection with this case. However, no one has been convicted [Livestream, [Public hearings before the OAS regarding Venezuela](https://livestream.com/OAS2/LIVE/videos/166027120), OAS, for 16, 2017; and El Nacional, [El último adiós a Fabián Urbina](http://www.el-nacional.com/noticias/protestas/ultimo-adios-fabian-urbina_188837), June 21, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1701)
1702. OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-1702)
1703. Cecodap, Communication to the IACHR, September 2017, para. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1703)
1704. REDHNNA, [Respeto y protección a los niños, niñas y adolescentes en el control del orden público y situaciones de conflictividad social](http://aulaabiertavenezuela.org/index.php/2017/04/23/comunicado-respeto-y-proteccion-a-los-ninos-ninas-y-adolescentes-en-el-control-del-orden-publico-y-situaciones-de-conflictividad-social/), April 29, 2017; Noticias24, [Bandas armadas contratadas por la oposición atacaron hospital materno-infantil de El Valle](http://www.noticias24.com/venezuela/noticia/date/2017/04/20/), April 20, 2017; and Resumen Latinoamericano, [Venezuela: Extremista atacan Hospital Materno-Infantil en Caracas](http://www.resumenlatinoamericano.org/2017/04/21/venezuela-extremistas-atacan-hospital-materno-infantil-en-caracas/), April 21, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1704)
1705. REDHNNA, [Respeto y protección a los niños, niñas y adolescentes en el control del orden público y situaciones de conflictividad social](http://aulaabiertavenezuela.org/index.php/2017/04/23/comunicado-respeto-y-proteccion-a-los-ninos-ninas-y-adolescentes-en-el-control-del-orden-publico-y-situaciones-de-conflictividad-social/), April 29, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1705)
1706. IACHR, [2015 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2015/doc-es/InformeAnual2015-Cap4-Venezuela-ES.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela, para. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-1706)
1707. IACHR, Press Release No. 084/17, [IACHR Strongly Condemns Indiscriminately Repressive Military Operations in Venezuela](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/084.asp), June 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-1707)
1708. A victim reported to the OHCHR that she was subjected to sexual assault in front of her two children, when a national guard touched her breasts during a raid. OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-1708)
1709. Red Naranja, [100 Organizaciones rechazan la Violencia Sexual en el contexto de alta violencia e intolerancia política en Venezuela](http://rednaranja.com.ve/comunicado-100-organizaciones-rechazan-la-violencia-sexual-en-el-contexto-de-alta-violencia-e-intolerancia-politica-en-venezuela/), July 28, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1709)
1710. El Nacional Web, [PNB Rocio gas pimiento a los abuelos en la avenida Libertador](http://www.el-nacional.com/noticias/oposicion/pnb-rocio-gas-pimienta-los-abuelos-avenida-libertador_181879), May 12, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1710)
1711. In that regard, Amnesty International has said that the militarization was clearly evident “in the states of Carabobo, Lara, Barinas and the border state of Táchira where more than 600 soldiers have been deployed to respond to peaceful demonstrations.”Amnesty International, [Venezuela: Authorities’ militarization of crisis escalates violence and promotes fear](https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/news/2017/06/venezuela-militarizacion-de-la-crisis-por-parte-de-autoridades-intensifica-violencia-y-promueve-miedo/), June 2, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1711)
1712. PROVEA, [Más de 70 ONG exigimos desactivación inmediata del Plan Zamora y el fin de la actuación de “Colectivos” armados contra manifestantes](https://www.derechos.org.ve/actualidad/78-ong-exigimos-desactivacion-inmediata-del-plan-zamora-y-el-fin-de-la-actuacion-de-colectivos-armados-contra-manifestantes), April 23, 2017; Youtube video, [Public hearings before the OAS regarding Venezuela](https://youtu.be/KRX0QaJPzRk), OAS, September 14, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1712)
1713. The IACHR notes that on May 9, the AN passed a "resolution repudiating the implementation of the so-called Zamora Plan and the unconstitutional practice of installing military tribunals that usurp the jurisdiction of the regular courts, violating human rights” [Al momento, [VENEZUELA: Parlamento rechaza tribunales militares procesen a civiles](http://almomento.net/venezuela-parlamento-rechaza-tribunales-militares-procesen-a-civiles/314532), May 9, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1713)
1714. IACHR, Press Release No. 093/17, [IACHR Condemns Serious Acts of Violence at National Assembly in Venezuela](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/093.asp), July 10, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1714)
1715. IACHR, Press Release No. 044/17, [IACHR Urges the Protection of the Right to Protest in Venezuela and Respect for Freedom of Expression](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/044.asp), April 11, 2017; UN, Press Release, [Venezuela must allow peaceful protests and investigate killing of demonstrators, say UN experts](http://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21553&LangID=S#sthash.KunphBbB.dpuf), April 28, 2017; Amnesty International, [Venezuela: Lethal violence, a state policy to strangle dissent](https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/news/2017/07/venezuela-violencia-letal-una-politica-de-estado-para-asfixiar-a-la-disidencia/), July 10, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-1715)
1716. IACHR, Press Release No. 048/17, [IACHR Urges Venezuela to Guarantee the Right to Protest and to Demilitarize Streets](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/048.asp), April 19, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1716)
1717. IACHR, Press Release No. 048/17, [IACHR Urges Venezuela to Guarantee the Right to Protest and to Demilitarize Streets](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/048.asp), April 19, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1717)
1718. IACHR, [2015 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2015/doc-es/InformeAnual2015-Cap4-Venezuela-ES.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela, para. 127 [↑](#footnote-ref-1718)
1719. IACHR, [*Democracy and Human Rights in Venezuela*](http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/Venezuela2009sp/VE09CAPIIISP.htm#III.A)*,* OEA/SER.L/V/II, Doc. 54, December 30, 2009, para. 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-1719)
1720. IACHR, Press Release No. 044/17, [IACHR Urges the Protection of the Right to Protest in Venezuela and Respect for Freedom of Expression](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/044.asp), April 11, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1720)
1721. IACHR, [*Democracy and Human Rights in Venezuela*](http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/Venezuela2009sp/VE09CAPIIISP.htm#III.A)*,* OEA/SER.L/V/II, Doc. 54, December 30, 2009, para. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-1721)
1722. IACHR, [*Democracy and Human Rights in Venezuela*](http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/Venezuela2009sp/VE09CAPIIISP.htm#III.A)*,* OEA/SER.L/V/II, Doc. 54, December 30, 2009, para. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-1722)
1723. IACHR, [2015 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2015/doc-es/InformeAnual2015-Cap4-Venezuela-ES.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela, para. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-1723)
1724. The former refers to the fact that, to be considered within international parameters, the degree of force exercised by state agents must not exceed what is “absolutely necessary,” while the latter assumes that force must be used with moderation and in proportion to the legitimate ends pursued, as well as attempting to reduce to a minimum personal injury and loss of human life. [IACHR, [*Democracy and Human Rights in Venezuela*](http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/Venezuela2009sp/VE09CAPIIISP.htm#III.A), OEA/SER.L/V/II, Doc. 54, December 30, 2009, para. 133]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1724)
1725. IACHR, [2015 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2015/doc-es/InformeAnual2015-Cap4-Venezuela-ES.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela, para. 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-1725)
1726. The IACHR has mentioned the following instances in which less lethal weapons may have such effects: rubber munitions shot from a short distance at the upper part of the body, teargas fired at persons’ bodies, irritant gases used against children and older persons, and pistols that fire an electric charge used against persons with a heart condition [IACHR, [2015 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2015/doc-es/InformeAnual2015-Cap4-Venezuela-ES.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela, para. 133]. The OHCHR has offered similar observations [OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 8]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1726)
1727. In the long-term, prolonged and repeated exposure to teargas can lead to the onset of chronic bronchitis, respiratory distress, and, in extreme cases, pulmonary fibrosis [El Universal, [Observatorio Venezolano de la Salud alerta sobre uso de gases lacrimógenos](http://www.eluniversal.com/noticias/estilo-vida/observatorio-venezolano-salud-alerta-sobre-uso-gases-lacrimogenos_650222), May 29, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1727)
1728. Youtube video, [Public hearings before the OAS regarding Venezuela](https://youtu.be/KRX0QaJPzRk), OAS, September 14, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1728)
1729. IACHR, Press Release No. 084/17, [IACHR Strongly Condemns Indiscriminately Repressive Military Operations in Venezuela](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/084.asp), June 27, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1729)
1730. IACHR, [2016 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2016/docs/InformeAnual2016cap4B.Venezuela-es.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela, para. 162; and [2015 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2015/doc-es/InformeAnual2015-Cap4-Venezuela-ES.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela, para. 123-128. [↑](#footnote-ref-1730)
1731. Article 1 of Resolution No. 008610, published in Official Gazette No. 40.589 of January 27, 2015. COFAVIC. *Ejecuciones extrajudiciales, 40 historias de 6385 vidas ignoradas 2012-2017.* 2017, p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-1731)
1732. IACHR, [Annual Report 2016](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2016/docs/InformeAnual2016cap4B.Venezuela-es.pdf), Chapter IV(B), Venezuela; and [2015 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2015/doc-es/InformeAnual2015-Cap4-Venezuela-ES.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela paras. 123-128. [↑](#footnote-ref-1732)
1733. Article 68 of the[Constitution of Venezuela](https://www.oas.org/juridico/mla/sp/ven/sp_ven-int-const.html) states that: “[…] The use of firearms and toxic substances for controlling peaceful demonstrations is prohibited. The law will apply to the actions taken by police and security agencies to control the public order." [↑](#footnote-ref-1733)
1734. The TSJ ruled: “What the Constitution prohibits is the use of firearms and toxic substances to control peaceful demonstrations, not those that are violent or that turn violent.” The TSJ also considered that even in non-peaceful demonstrations, the law "governs such situations by providing an array of special precautions to protect the lives and other human rights of demonstrators and, in general, of all the citizenry” [TSJ, Case No. 2015-0086, Judgment of July 27, 2016]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1734)
1735. IACHR, [2016 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2016/docs/InformeAnual2016cap4B.Venezuela-es.pdf), Chapter IV.B, para. 163; and [2015 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2015/doc-es/InformeAnual2015-Cap4-Venezuela-ES.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela, para. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-1735)
1736. IACHR, [2015 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2015/doc-es/InformeAnual2015-Cap4-Venezuela-ES.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela, para. 131; and UN, Human Rights Council, Joint report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on the proper management of assemblies, A/HRC/31/66, 4 February 2016, paras. 50-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-1736)
1737. IACHR, Press Release No. 084/17, [IACHR Strongly Condemns Indiscriminately Repressive Military Operations in Venezuela](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/084.asp), June 27, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1737)
1738. IACHR, [*Violence, Children and Organized Crime*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/violencianinez2016.pdf), OEA/Ser.L/V/II. 40/15, November 11, 2015, para. 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-1738)
1739. IACHR, Press Release No. 058/17, [IACHR Deplores Repressive Measures Taken by Venezuela against Protests and Condemns Resulting Deaths and Injuries](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/058.asp), May 9, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1739)
1740. NTN24, Diosdado Cabello acusa a la oposición de generar caos en el país a través del “terrorismo," April 11, 2017; VTV, Ministro Reverol: Actos terroristas ejecutados este lunes por la derecha causaron muerte de tres personas y varios heridos, April 25, 2017; Efecto Cocuyo, Ministro Reverol acusó a Julio Borges por muertes de manifestantes en protestas, May 10, 2017; Con el Mazo Dando, Cabello: La derecha necesita un muerto con periodicidad para mantener la violencia en la calle, May 12, 2017; and Con el Mazo Dando, “Responsable de los muertos y fracaso como político” Lo que piensan de Julio Borges, May 11, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1740)
1741. Noticiero Venevision, [Provea denuncia que CICPC intimida a manifestantes a través de Twitter](http://www.noticierovenevision.net/noticias/nacional/provea-denuncia-que-cicpc-intimida-a-manifestantes-a-traves-de-twitter), April 8, 2017; IPYS Vzla, [Se impone discurso de odio contra manifestantes y activistas de DDHH en redes sociales](http://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/se-impone-discurso-odio-manifestantes-activistas-ddhh-redes-sociales/), April 11, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1741)
1742. IACHR, Press Release No. 048/17, [IACHR Urges Venezuela to Guarantee the Right to Protest and to Demilitarize Streets](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/048.asp), April 19, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1742)
1743. IACHR, [*Criminalization of the Work of Human Rights Defenders*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/criminalizacion2016.pdf), OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 49/15, December 31, 2015, para. 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-1743)
1744. It was also reported that officials raided the home of human rights defender Ehisler Velásquez and accused him of causing damage at a prosecutor's office [Amnesty International, [Venezuela: Human Rights Defender Harassed: Ehisler Vásquez](https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr53/6252/2017/es/), May 16, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1744)
1745. On May 8, 2017, the home of human rights defenders Yonaide Sanchéz and Nelsón Freitez, faculty members of the Human Rights Program at Lisandro Alvarado University, was raided for the third time and their belongings ransacked by unidentified persons. According to the information received, the invaders left a pickaxe and two knives in the dining area, apparently as a form of intimidation [Front Line Defenders, Urgent Appeal, [Venezuela: Intimidation against human rights defenders Yonaide Sanchéz and Nelsón Freitez](https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/es/case/intimidation-against-human-rights-defender-yonaide-sanchez), May 11, 2017]. In spite of lodging the necessary complaints, they have received no response from the authorities and no investigations appear to be underway [Amnesty International, [Venezuela: Defenders home invaded, safety at risk](https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr53/6324/2017/es/), May 22, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1745)
1746. IACHR, [Resolution No. 1/17](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2017/1-17MC475-15-VE.pdf), Precautionary Measure No. 475-15, Members of the Voluntad Popular party regarding Venezuela. [↑](#footnote-ref-1746)
1747. IACHR, [*Second Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in the Americas*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/defensores/docs/pdf/defensores2011.pdf)*,* OEA/Ser.L/V/II., Doc. 66, December 31, 2011, para. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-1747)
1748. Communication from Adriana Flores Márquez, October 5, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1748)
1749. Amnesty International, [Silenced by force: Politically motivated arbitrary detentions in Venezuela](https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR5360142017SPANISH.PDF), April 26, 2017, p. 4; Espacio Público, [Foro por la Vida rechaza criminalización de PROVEA por promover la defensa de los derechos constitucionales](http://espaciopublico.ong/foro-la-vida-rechaza-criminalizacion-provea-promover-la-defensa-los-derechos-constitucionales/), July 19, 2017; Un Mundo Sin Mordaza, Defiende Venezuela, Llamamiento Urgente Víctima: Carlos Graffe, defensor de derechos humanos Estado: Venezuela, July 15, 2017. Civilis Derechos Humanos y otros, [Alertamos ante la creciente criminalización de las organizaciones sociales y sus actores fundamentales en Venezuela](http://www.civilisac.org/alerta/alertamos-ante-la-creciente-criminalizacion-las-organizaciones-sociales-actores-fundamentales-venezuela), August 20, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1749)
1750. IACHR, Press Release No. 048/17, [IACHR Urges Venezuela to Guarantee the Right to Protest and to Demilitarize Streets](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/048.asp), April 19, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1750)
1751. IACHR, Press Release No. 107/15, IACHR Voices Concern over Ruling against Leopoldo López in Venezuela, September 25, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-1751)
1752. IACHR, 2015 Annual Report, December 31, 2015, para. 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-1752)
1753. IACHR, Press Releases Nos. 058/17, [IACHR Deplores Repressive Measures Taken by Venezuela against Protests and Condemns Resulting Deaths and Injuries](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/058.asp), May 9, 2017; and 048/17, [IACHR Urges Venezuela to Guarantee the Right to Protest and to Demilitarize Streets](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/048.asp), April 19, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1753)
1754. FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión en Venezuela – October 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/11/09/reportederepresionoctubre-2017/), pg. 2. The FPV stated before the IACHR on October 24 2017, that as of that date, 11,989 people had been arbitrarily detained. This means that in one week, four more people were arbitrarily detained. At that time, the FPV also stated that 7,030 individuals had been granted conditional release [IACHR [Violence, citizen security, and freedom of expression in Venezuela](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rV0NW2PdBJs), October 24, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1754)
1755. FPV, [Presos políticos](https://foropenal.com/presos-politicos/), November 19, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1755)
1756. FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Julio de 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/08/11/julio-2017/), p. 6, note 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1756)
1757. FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Julio de 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/08/11/julio-2017/), p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-1757)
1758. FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Agosto 2017](https://foropenal.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/INFORME-REPRESION-AGOSTO-2017.pdf), p. 5. In that same regard, it should be noted that according to FPV figures, as of October 24, 2017, there were 391 political prisoners [IACHR, [Violence, citizen security, and freedom of expression in Venezuela](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rV0NW2PdBJs), October 24, 2017]. While as of October 31, the figure had dropped to 380 [FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión en Venezuela – Octubre de 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/11/09/reportederepresionoctubre-2017/), pg. 4]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1758)
1759. For example, the lawyer Abraham Cantillo, FPV Deputy Coordinator for the State of Lara, was robbed by armed civilians and threatened on July 20, 2017 outside the air force base where the Seventh Military Oversight Tribunal for the State of Lara is located. On July 27 he received death threats and was brutally beaten by men who referred to him as the “damned lawyer for the *guarimberos*” [FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Julio de 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/08/11/julio-2017/), p. 9]. In addition, as mentioned, the IACHR granted precautionary measures in favor of the human rights defender Theresly Malavé, who has been harassed for her work representing detained leaders [IACHR, [Resolution No. 1/17](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2017/1-17MC475-15-VE.pdf), Precautionary Measure No. 475-15, Members of the Voluntad Popular party regarding Venezuela]. The IACHR also requested Venezuela to provide protection to the FPV [FPV, [CIDH solicitó al Estado venezolano garantizar protección a Foro Penal y demás ONG de DDHH](https://foropenal.com/2017/03/23/cidh-solicito-al-estado-venezolano-garantizar-proteccion-a-foro-penal-y-demas-ong-de-ddhh/), March 23, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1759)
1760. IACHR, [Violence, Citizen Security, and Freedom of Expression in Venezuela](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rV0NW2PdBJs), October 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1760)
1761. FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Agosto 2017](https://foropenal.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/INFORME-REPRESION-AGOSTO-2017.pdf), p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-1761)
1762. FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Julio de 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/08/11/julio-2017/), p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-1762)
1763. FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Agosto 2017](https://foropenal.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/INFORME-REPRESION-AGOSTO-2017.pdf), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1763)
1764. IACHR, Press Release No. R109/17, [The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR Condemns Arbitrary Restrictions on Freedom of Expression and Assembly in Venezuela](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/showarticle.asp?artID=1071&lID=2), July 29, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1764)
1765. IACHR, [*Criminalization of the Work of Human Rights Defenders*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/criminalizacion2016.pdf), OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 49/15, December 31, 2015, para. 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-1765)
1766. FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Agosto 2017](https://foropenal.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/INFORME-REPRESION-AGOSTO-2017.pdf), p. 2. That problem was also mentioned by FPV during the hearings on September 14 at OAS headquarters. At those hearings, it was remarked that not all incarcerations were ordered by judges or requested by prosecutors, but that very often they stemmed from political decisions [Youtube video, [Public hearings before OAS regarding Venezuela](https://youtu.be/KRX0QaJPzRk), September 14, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1766)
1767. OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-1767)
1768. The OHCHR says that this information was obtained from interviews held by its office [OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 22]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1768)
1769. Amnesty International, [Silenced by force: Politically motivated arbitrary detentions in Venezuela](https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr53/6014/2017/en/), April 26, 2017, pp. 7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-1769)
1770. OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, pp. 22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-1770)
1771. OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-1771)
1772. The OHCHR reported that a man it interviewed was told by a SEBIN official: “You are kidnapped by the Government of Venezuela and no one will know anything about you.” It also documented the case of Ángel Zerpa, who was arrested by the SEBIN on July 22 and only allowed to have contact with his family on August 19. In that context, it also reported the possibility of cases of forced disappearance. One woman interviewed by the OHCHR said that the authorities initially denied having any information about her son. The authorities only allowed her to see him after 40 days in detention [OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 21]. Amnesty International also drew attention to this problem and pointed to the case of Yon Goicoechea, who was arrested on August 29, 2016, and held incommunicado until September 1, 2016 [Amnesty International, [Silenced by force: Politically motivated arbitrary detentions in Venezuela](https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr53/6014/2017/en/), April 26, 2017, pp. 14-15]. FPV has also alerted about the situation [FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Agosto 2017](https://foropenal.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/INFORME-REPRESION-AGOSTO-2017.pdf), p. 2]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1772)
1773. According to information received by the Commission, former defense minister Raúl Isaías Baduel, who has reportedly been in detention since January 2017, was irregularly transferred from Ramo Verde Military Prison by the General Directorate for Military Counterintelligence in the early hours. According to information provided to the IACHR, the director of that facility approved the transfer, despite the absence of a court order or any prior notice. As a result, for a time the relatives did not know Mr. Baduel’s whereabouts and the authorities allegedly refused to give them any information in that regard [IACHR, Request for precautionary measures presented on the half of Raúl Isaías Baduel, MC-629-17]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1773)
1774. FPV highlighted the case of 14 Chacaoo municipal police officials who, despite the existence of a release order since August 8, 2016, at the date of this report (July 2017) had yet to be released. Víctor Ugas, Yon Goicoechea, José Vicente García, Rafael Liendo, and Javier Elías Briceño Scott are reputedly in the same situation [FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Julio de 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/08/11/julio-2017/), p. 7]. The FPV also provided evidence of failure to set free people with a release order at the hearing at the OAS on September 14 [Youtube video, [Public hearings before OAS regarding Venezuela](https://youtu.be/KRX0QaJPzRk), OAS, September 14, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1774)
1775. OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 24. In that regard, the FPV said in its August 2017 report that at present, 30 percent of detainees were waiting for guarantors to be presented to secure their release [FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Agosto 2017](https://foropenal.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/INFORME-REPRESION-AGOSTO-2017.pdf), p. 3]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1775)
1776. [República Dominicana | Celebrada reunión de Diálogo de Paz entre Gobierno de Venezuela y oposición (Video) – VTV](http://vtv.gob.ve/republica-dominicana-inicio-reunion-de-dialogo-en-entre-gobierno-de-venezuela-y-oposicion/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1776)
1777. *Mundo*, [Maduro libera a 80 presos políticos pero mantiene a 227](https://www.elpais.com.uy/mundo/maduro-libera-presos-politicos-mantiene.html), December 26, 2017; *El País*, [Maduro libera a la primera treintena presos políticos en la víspera de Navidad](https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/12/24/actualidad/1514122748_606145.html), December 25, 2017; *El Nacional*, [Presos políticos que podrían ser liberados fueron trasladados a la ANC](http://www.el-nacional.com/noticias/presos-politicos/presos-politicos-que-podrian-ser-liberados-fueron-trasladados-anc_216637), December 23, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1777)
1778. IACHR, [*Criminalization of the Work of Human Rights Defenders*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/criminalizacion2016.pdf), OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 49/15, December 31, 2015, para. 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-1778)
1779. IACHR, Press Release No. 120A/15, [Report on the 156th Session of the IACHR](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2015/120A.asp), December 24, 2015; [2015 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2015/doc-es/informeanual2015-cap4-venezuela-es.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela, para. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-1779)
1780. HRW, [Venezuela: Dissidents Allege Torture, Coerced Confessions](https://www.hrw.org/es/news/2016/07/27/venezuela-disidentes-denuncian-torturas-y-confesiones-forzadas), July 27, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-1780)
1781. PROVEA, Situación de los Derechos Humanos en Venezuela: Informe Anual Enero/Diciembre 2016, [Derecho a la integridad personal](https://www.derechos.org.ve/web/wp-content/uploads/14IntegridadPersonal-3.pdf), pp. 3, 6-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-1781)
1782. PROVEA, Situación de los Derechos Humanos en Venezuela: Informe Anual Enero/Diciembre 2016, [Derecho a la integridad personal](https://www.derechos.org.ve/web/wp-content/uploads/14IntegridadPersonal-3.pdf), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1782)
1783. Information provided by CASLA [Youtube video, [Public hearings before OAS regarding Venezuela](https://youtu.be/KRX0QaJPzRk), OAS, September 14, 2017]. The same information was reported by the media [Infobae, [Victimas y defensores de DDHH denunciaron ante la OEA 289 casos de tortura en Venezuela](https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2017/09/14/victimas-y-defensores-de-ddhh-denunciaron-ante-la-oea-289-casos-de-tortura-en-venezuela/), September 14, 2017]. El Universal, [Presentaron en La Haya nuevas denuncias de torturas en Venezuela](http://www.eluniversal.com/noticias/politica/presentaron-haya-nuevas-denuncias-torturas-venezuela_657298), June 16, 2017; OAS Secretary General of the OAS, Third Report on the Continuing Crisis in Venezuela, OSG/ 285-17, July 19, 2017, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-1783)
1784. El Comercio, [“En Venezuela están abusando sexualmente de algunos detenidos”](http://elcomercio.pe/mundo/latinoamerica/venezuela-abusando-sexualmente-detenidos-442703), July 16, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1784)
1785. OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-1785)
1786. UVAL, Informe sobre la situación de los derechos humanos de las personas privadas de libertad en las sedes del SEBIN del Helicoide y Plaza Venezuela, p. 4. The IACHR has also granted precautionary measures for detainees at SEBIN facilities [IACHR, [Resolution 6/15](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2015/MC223-13-ES.pdf), Precautionary Measure No. 223-13, Lorent Saleh and Gerardo Carrero regarding Venezuela, March 2, 2015]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1786)
1787. The FPV documented the case of E.M.G., who was apprehended on June 12, 2017, by GNB personnel outside his school and taken to the command center known as “Ciudad Chávez,” where he was physically assaulted and threatened with a firearm, in addition to which two tear gas grenades were deployed [FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Junio de 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/08/11/junio-2017/), p. 7]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1787)
1788. Wuilly Arteaga, who is known for demonstrating peacefully by playing his violin, alleged that he was tortured while detained at GNB Command Center 433 in the urbanization known as El Paraíso in Caracas [FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Julio 2017](https://foropenal.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/INFORME-REPRESION-JULIO-2017.pdf), p. 5]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1788)
1789. Hely Huerta denounced that he was physically assaulted and psychologically mistreated when he was transferred to the GNB detention center known as La Ciega. Brandon Becerra denounced that he was physically assaulted and verbally abused by the GNB during his detention at La Ciega [CODHEZ and Aula Abierta, Informe preliminar sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en el estado Zulia en el marco de la protesta: Julio-Agosto 2017, September 2017, pp. 17-18]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1789)
1790. The case was recorded of 16 people detained by the GNB during a demonstration on May 5, 2017, who were held at the CICPC facility in Villa del Rosario, where they had a powder known as *piroca*, which has the same effect as teargas, thrown in their faces [FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Mayo de 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/08/11/mayo-2017/), p. 1]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1790)
1791. A group of 10 young people, detained on May 15, 2017, reported that they had been victims of torture and sexual violence at the PNB facility in Aragua State [BBC, ["Gritaba y lloraba… tenía tanto miedo que me oriné": detenidos en protestas opositoras en Venezuela denuncian violaciones, golpizas y torturas](http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-40301829), June 29, 2017]. CODHEZ and Aula Abierta reported complaints of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment being inflicted on people at military facilities, such as La Ciega and Desur in Maracaibo [CODHEZ y Aula Abierta, Informe preliminar sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en el estado Zulia en el marco de la protesta: Julio-Agosto 2017, September 2017, p. 16]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1791)
1792. The case was recorded of Orlando Moreno, who was detained during a protest on June 27, 2017, and taken to La Pica Prison, where he was suspended by handcuffs around his hands for 24 hours and beaten repeatedly to coerce him into accusing the political leader Maria Corina Machado [FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Junio de 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/08/11/junio-2017/), pág. 8]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1792)
1793. CODHEZ y Aula Abierta, Informe preliminar sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en el estado Zulia en el marco de la protesta: Julio-Agosto 2017, September 2017, pp. 11-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-1793)
1794. The opposition leaders Leopoldo López and Daniel Ceballos denounced that they were tortured at CENAPROMIL Military Prison (Ramo Verde) [PROVEA, [Amnistía Internacional | Venezuela: Preso de conciencia Leopoldo López denuncia tortura](https://www.derechos.org.ve/actualidad/amnistia-internaciona-venezuela-preso-de-conciencia-leopoldo-lopez-denuncia-tortura), June 28, 2017; IACHR, [Resolution 12/15](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2015/MC335-14-ES.pdf), Precautionary Measure No. 335-14, Leopoldo López and Daniel Ceballos regarding Venezuela, April 20, 2015]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1794)
1795. Alexander Tirado and Raúl Emilio Baduel denounced that they were victims of torture at Uribana Prison, in the State of Lara. Baduel and Tirado also said that they were held in inhuman conditions at 26 de julio Remand Center [IACHR, [Resolution No. 1/17](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2017/1-17MC475-15-VE.pdf), Precautionary Measure No. 475-15, Members of the Voluntad Popular party regarding Venezuela, January 14, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1795)
1796. CODHEZ y Aula Abierta, Informe preliminar sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en el estado Zulia en el marco de la protesta: Julio-Agosto 2017, September 2017, p. 15]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1796)
1797. CODHEZ y Aula Abierta, Informe preliminar sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en el estado Zulia en el marco de la protesta: Julio-Agosto 2017, September 2017, p. 10]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1797)
1798. UVAL provides a detailed description of the place [UVAL, Informe sobre la situación de los derechos humanos de las personas privadas de libertad en las sedes del SEBIN del Helicoide y Plaza Venezuela, pp. 27-29]. The Commission took note of the conditions at that detention center when it granted precautionary measures to Gerardo Carrero and Lorent Saleh in 2015 [CIDH, [Resolution No. 6/2015](https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2015/MC223-13-ES.pdf), Precautionary Measure No. 223-12, Lorent Saleh and Gerardo Carrero regarding Venezuela]. CASLA provided a detailed description during the hearings at the OAS on September 14, 2017 Youtube video, [Public hearings before OAS regarding Venezuela](https://youtu.be/KRX0QaJPzRk), OAS, September 14, 2017]. The descriptions made coincide with those given by Mariana Serano, wife of Gerardo Carrero; and Yamileh Saleh, mother of Lorent Saleh. Both men were detained at *La Tumba*. [Youtube video, Estar en “La Tumba” es una muerte lenta, February 11, 2015, [Yamileh Saleh: “La fiscal le dijo a mi hijo se iba a pudrir en la cárcel”,](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHeyFLvwqHw) RunrunEstudio, February 23, 2015]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1798)
1799. With respect to this form of torture, the FPV said that 36 people were detained on July 20. Of those, 16 were released. 2 of those detained said that they were beaten on the back with a cable (*guaya*) and the others all said that they were struck on different parts of the body. A prominent case was that of Willy Moisés Artega, a demonstrator who protested peacefully by playing his violin. He was arrested on July 27, 2017. According to his testimony, he was beaten so hard with CNB helmets that he lost the hearing in his right ear [FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Julio de 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/08/11/julio-2017/), pp. 4-5]. UVAL also provided information in that regard [UVAL, Informe sobre la situación de los derechos humanos de las personas privadas de libertad en las sedes del SEBIN del Helicoide y Plaza Venezuela, p. 20]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1799)
1800. It is worth mentioning the testimony of a former detainee interviewed by OHCHR, who said that he was given electric shocks while he was interrogated. He said, “I was completely naked. They drenched me in water. One guard kept saying, ‘Wet him well otherwise you are going to fry him’” [OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 20]. UVAL reported similar information [UVAL, Informe sobre la situación de los derechos humanos de las personas privadas de libertad en las sedes del SEBIN del Helicoide y Plaza Venezuela, p. 21]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1800)
1801. For Example, Deputy Wilmer Azuaje has denounced that sort of torture. He said: “[t]hey had me in handcuffs, unable to move, with my feet tied. So I am asking for an international response” [[El Carabobeño, Disputado Wilmer Azuaje denunció torturas físicas y psicológicas](https://www.el-carabobeno.com/diputado-wilmer-azuaje-victima-tortura/), August 24, 2017]. UVAL reported similar information [UVAL, Informe sobre la situación de los derechos humanos de las personas privadas de libertad en las sedes del SEBIN del Helicoide y Plaza Venezuela, p. 19]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1801)
1802. Amnesty International, [Silenced by force: Politically motivated arbitrary detentions in Venezuela](https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR5360142017SPANISH.PDF), April 26, 2017, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-1802)
1803. According to a report, when the minor E.M.G. was transferred from “Ciudad Chávez” to the CICPC, two teargas grenades were thrown into the vehicle as he was put in it and the doors were then closed, causing him to pass out [FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Junio de 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/08/11/junio-2017/), p. 7]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1803)
1804. CODHEZ and Aula Abierta, Informe preliminar sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en el estado Zulia en el marco de la protesta: Julio-Agosto 2017, September 2017, p. 14]. Another detainee is also recorded as saying "they sprayed me with pepper gas and put a hood over my head” [BBC, ["Gritaba y lloraba… tenía tanto miedo que me oriné": detenidos en protestas opositoras en Venezuela denuncian violaciones, golpizas y torturas](http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-40301829), 29 de junio de 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1804)
1805. UVAL, Informe sobre la situación de los derechos humanos de las personas privadas de libertad en las sedes del SEBIN del Helicoide y Plaza Venezuela, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-1805)
1806. In May 2017, the FPV recorded the case of 16 detainees who had a powder known as piroca thrown in their faces [FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Mayo de 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/08/11/mayo-2017/), p. 11]. According to CODHEZ and Aula Abierta, “[t]he people detained in Villa del Rosario in Zulia State […] reported that they were locked in a room and had a white powder (*piroca*) thrown at them which caused a powerful burning and stinging sensation, as well as making it hard for them to speak, and that they were later given water with the same powder that caused a much worse stinging sensation.” In addition, some detainees "said that they were taken to a toilet, where there trousers were pulled down and *piroca* (pepper gas) was sprayed on their anuses” [CODHEZ and Aula Abierta, Informe preliminar sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en el estado Zulia en el marco de la protesta: Julio-Agosto 2017, September 2017, p. 13]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1806)
1807. One person interviewed by the OHCHR reportedly said: “They threw chlorine and salt in my mouth, they beat me with sticks and they fired tear gas grenades close to my face. I lost consciousness." Another victim said: “The guards would regularly throw tear gas grenades inside the cell and blocked the doors’ bars with a mattress to prevent the gas from dispersing.” Two women recounted how guards put a hood on their head with tear gas powder for two hours [OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 20]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1807)
1808. UVAL, Informe sobre la situación de los derechos humanos de las personas privadas de libertad en las sedes del SEBIN del Helicoide y Plaza Venezuela, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-1808)
1809. Alexander Tirado and Raúl Emilio Baduel alleged that at 26 de Julio remand center there was a lack of water and the food was unfit for human consumption. Delson Guárate, who is detained at El Helicoide, says that there is a lack of water there and the food is not fit for human consumption. Yon Goicoechea, who was detained on August 29, 2016, said that he is given decomposing food [IACHR, [Resolution No. 1/17](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2017/1-17MC475-15-VE.pdf), Precautionary Measure No. 475-15, Members of the Voluntad Popular party regarding Venezuela, January 14, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1809)
1810. It is alleged that while Raúl Baduel Alexander Tirado were being held in Uribana prison they had hot food delivered straight into their hands so that they were forced to drop it on the floor alongside the raw sewage that seeped into their cell [Amnesty International, [Silenced by force: Politically motivated arbitrary detentions in Venezuela](https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR5360142017SPANISH.PDF), April 26, 2017, p. 11]. A former detainee at La Tumba said that “the food they provided their was sometimes spoiled and I had to eat it off the floor with my hands” [UVAL, Informe sobre la situación de los derechos humanos de las personas privadas de libertad en las sedes del SEBIN del Helicoide y Plaza Venezuela, p. 28]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1810)
1811. IACHR, [Resolution No. 1/17](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2017/1-17MC475-15-VE.pdf), Precautionary Measure No. 475-15, Members of the Voluntad Popular party regarding Venezuela. [↑](#footnote-ref-1811)
1812. IACHR, [Resolution No. 12/15](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2015/MC335-14-ES.pdf), Precautionary Measure No. 335-14, Leopoldo López and Daniel Ceballos regarding Venezuela. [↑](#footnote-ref-1812)
1813. IACHR, [Resolution No. 6/15](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2015/MC223-13-ES.pdf), Precautionary Measure No. 223-13, Asunto Lorent Saleh and Gerardo Carrero regarding Venezuela. [↑](#footnote-ref-1813)
1814. One of them was allegedly beaten on the knees until a fluid came out of them, while another had “motorcycles ridden over his body while he was being threatened and restrained with handcuffs.” IACHR, Request for precautionary measures submitted on behalf of detained students in El Limón, MC-428-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-1814)
1815. IACHR, [2014 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2014/docs-es/Anual2014-Intro.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela, para. 23; [Report No. 84/13](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/corte/12482FondoEs.pdf), Case 12.482, Merits, Valdemir Quispialaya Vilcapoma, Peru, para. 95; and[*Report on the Human Rights of Persons Deprived of Liberty in the Americas*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/PrisionPreventiva.pdf)*,* OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 64, December 31, 2011, para. 332. [↑](#footnote-ref-1815)
1816. That provision states: “The existence of circumstances such as a state of war, threat of war, state of siege or of emergency, domestic disturbance or strife, suspension of constitutional guarantees, domestic political instability, or other public emergencies or disasters shall not be invoked or admitted as justification for the crime of torture. Neither the dangerous character of the detainee or prisoner, nor the lack of security of the prison establishment or penitentiary shall justify torture.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1816)
1817. IACHR, [2014 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2014/docs-es/Anual2014-Intro.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela, para. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-1817)
1818. IACHR, [*Report on Measures Aimed at Reducing the Use of Pretrial Detention in the Americas*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/PrisionPreventiva.pdf), OEA/Ser.L/V/II.163, Doc. 105, July 3, 2017, para. 193; and[*Report on the Human Rights of Persons Deprived of Liberty in the Americas*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/PrisionPreventiva.pdf)*,* OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 64, December 31, 2011, para. 345. [↑](#footnote-ref-1818)
1819. IACHR, [*Report on Measures Aimed at Reducing the Use of Pretrial Detention in the Americas*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/PrisionPreventiva.pdf), OEA/Ser.L/V/II.163, Doc. 105, July 3, 2017, para. 193; and[*Report on the Human Rights of Persons Deprived of Liberty in the Americas*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/PrisionPreventiva.pdf)*,* OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 64, December 31, 2011, para. 347. [↑](#footnote-ref-1819)
1820. Indeed, in the context of the demonstrations and arrests that occurred between February and May 2014, COFAVIC recorded 54 complaints of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, 26 percent of which alleged the use of sexual torture, including rape, stripping naked, humiliation, and taunting at detention centers [Venezuela Awareness, [La violencia que calla a los detenidos](https://www.venezuelaawareness.com/2017/06/la-violencia-que-calla-a-los-detenidos/), June 25, 2017]. The Commission learned of the case of Érika Moncada, a Colombian citizen detained in August that year, who was allegedly suffocated with plastic bags to obtain “confessions;" she was also raped and tortured with a beating that dislodged a breast implant, causing her unbearable pain; and had electric shocks applied to her breasts [IACHR, [2016 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2016/docs/InformeAnual2016cap4B.Venezuela-es.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela, para. 38]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1820)
1821. CEPAZ, Asociación Civil Mujeres en Línea, FREYA and AVESA, Informe sobre situación de los derechos de las mujeres en Venezuela, September 2017, pp. 29-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-1821)
1822. AVESA, [Violencia sexual en el contexto de represión política – Algunos datos de la prensa nacional](https://avesawordpress.wordpress.com/2017/07/13/violencia-sexual-en-el-contexto-de-represion-politica-algunos-datos-de-la-prensa-nacional/), July 13, 2017; Corresponsales clave, [Violencia sexual en medio de la represión política en Venezuela](http://www.corresponsalesclave.org/2017/07/violencia-sexual-venzla.html), July 18, 2017; Runrunes, [100 ONGs rechazaron violencia sexual en marco de represión](http://runrun.es/nacional/319076/100-ongs-rechazaron-violencia-sexual-en-marco-de-represion.html), July 25, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1822)
1823. According to CASLA, 192 people alleged to have been victims of some type of sexual violence, while another 140 were allegedly threatened with it. According to the same source, seven people denounced attempted rape with pipes or other objects, while at least five people (four men and one woman) were reportedly raped. In addition, 77 people reputedly alleged to have been stripped naked while others said that they were partially stripped so as to force them to adopt stress positions.Youtube video, [Public hearings before OAS regarding Venezuela](https://youtu.be/KRX0QaJPzRk), OAS, September 14, 2017. BBC, ["Gritaba y lloraba… tenía tanto miedo que me oriné": detenidos en protestas opositoras en Venezuela denuncian violaciones, golpizas y torturas](http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-40301829), June 29, 2017. 2001.com.ve, [70% de denuncias en La Haya por torturas en Venezuela incluyen abusos sexuales](http://www.2001.com.ve/en-la-agenda/163484/la-tortura-como-patron-sistematico-de-conducta.html), July 1, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1823)
1824. CEPAZ, Asociación Civil Mujeres en Línea, FREYA and AVESA, Informe sobre situación de los derechos de las mujeres en Venezuela, September 2017, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-1824)
1825. IACHR, Request for a precautionary measures MC-486-17. Similarly, the FPV reported that they had "cylinders [inserted] in their genitals and anuses.” Youtube video, [Public hearings before OAS regarding Venezuela](https://youtu.be/KRX0QaJPzRk), OAS, September 14, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1825)
1826. IACHR, Request for precautionary measures submitted on behalf of detained students in El Limón, MC-428-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-1826)
1827. In particular, one woman was groped and made to sit with her legs spread apart, in spite of the fact that she was wearing a dress, while another woman was also groped and was the victim of a member of the GNB inserting his fingers in her mouth and shouting at her, “Suck, bitch!” [CODEHCIU, Informe sobre la situación de Venezuela, September 5, 2017, p. 9]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1827)
1828. According to Martín Ríos, a defense attorney for the victims, “[t]hey were made to line up and forced to touch each other's private parts and handle one another's members”; one of them “had his shorts pulled down and a pipe inserted in his rectum.” [BBC, ["Gritaba y lloraba… tenía tanto miedo que me oriné": detenidos en protestas opositoras en Venezuela denuncian violaciones, golpizas y torturas](http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-40301829), June 29, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1828)
1829. FPV, [Reporte sobre la represión del Estado en Venezuela - Junio de 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/08/11/junio-2017/), p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-1829)
1830. CODHEZ y Aula Abierta, Informe preliminar sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en el estado Zulia en el marco de la protesta: Julio-Agosto 2017, September 2017, p. 13]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1830)
1831. CODHEZ and Aula Abierta recorded their constant use against detainees in the State of Zulia, in particular, at the detention center known as “La Ciega”. [CODHEZ y Aula Abierta, Informe preliminar sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en el estado Zulia en el marco de la protesta: Julio-Agosto 2017, September 2017, p. 23]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1831)
1832. IACHR, [*Report on Measures Aimed at Reducing the Use of Pretrial Detention in the Americas*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/PrisionPreventiva.pdf), OEA/Ser.L/V/II.163, Doc. 105, July 3, 2017, para. 195; [*Access to Justice for Women Victims of Sexual Violence:* *Education and Health*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/mujeres/docs/pdf/VIOLENCIASEXUALEducySalud.pdf), OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 65, December 28, 2011, para. 31-39; [*Legal Standards related to Gender Equality and Women's Rights in the Inter-American Human Rights System:* *Development and Application*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/mujeres/docs/pdf/ESTANDARES%20JURIDICOS.pdf), OEA/Ser.L/V/II.143. Doc. 60, November 3, 2011, pars. 22-24, and [*Access to Justice for Women Victims of Sexual Violence in Mesoamerica*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/mujeres/docs/pdf/MESOAMERICA%202011%20ESP%20FINAL.pdf), OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 63, December 9, 2011, pars. 37-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-1832)
1833. IACHR, [*Report on Measures Aimed at Reducing the Use of Pretrial Detention in the Americas*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/PrisionPreventiva.pdf), OEA/Ser.L/V/II.163, Doc. 105, July 3, 2017, para. 195; [Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará)](https://www.oas.org/dil/esp/convencion_belem_do_para.pdf), adopted on June 9, 1994, Article 9; and I/A Court H.R., *Case of the Miguel Castro-Castro Prison v.* *Peru.* Merits, Reparations and Costs, Judgment of November 25, 2006. Series C No. 160, para. 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-1833)
1834. IACHR, [*Report on Measures Aimed at Reducing the Use of Pretrial Detention in the Americas*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/PrisionPreventiva.pdf), OEA/Ser.L/V/II.163, Doc. 105, July 3, 2017, para. 198; and I/A Court H.R., *Case of the Miguel Castro Castro Prison v.* *Peru*. Merits, Reparations and Costs, Judgment of November 25, 2006. Series C No. 160, para. 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-1834)
1835. Proiuris, [Exigimos que cese inmediatamente el procesamiento de civiles en la jurisdicción penal militar](http://proiuris.org/proiuris-exigimos-que-cese-inmediatamente-el-procesamiento-de-civiles-en-la-jurisdiccion-penal-militar/), May 7, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1835)
1836. FPV, [Report on Repression in Venezuela – October 2017](https://foropenal.com/2017/11/09/reportederepresionoctubre-2017/), pg. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1836)
1837. In similar fashion, the OHCHR said: “The number of civilians tried before the military courts has dramatically increased since the beginning of the protests, in what sources regard as an effort to bypass the Attorney-General’s constitutional role in criminal proceedings” [OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 25]. That information was echoed by Captain Igor Eduardo Nieto Buitrago during the hearings at the OAS on September 15, 2017 [Youtube video, [Public hearings before OAS regarding Venezuela](https://youtu.be/KRX0QaJPzRk), September 15, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1837)
1838. Al momento, [Venezuela: Parlamento rechaza tribunales militares procesen a civiles](http://almomento.net/venezuela-parlamento-rechaza-tribunales-militares-procesen-a-civiles/314532), May 9, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1838)
1839. She questioned the authority of the military criminal jurisdiction to request the regular criminal courts of the State of Zulia to transfer the case of 14 young people arrested for allegedly taking part in the toppling of a statue of former president Hugo Chávez in Villa del Rosario [Ministerio Público venezolano,Fiscal 41 del Zulia solicitó que 14 detenidos por hechos ocurridos en Villa del Rosario sean juzgados por tribunal civil y no militarFiscal 41 del Zulia solicitó que 14 detenidos por hechos ocurridos en Villa del Rosario sean juzgados por tribunal civil y no militar [Fiscal 41 del Zulia solicitó que 14 detenidos por hechos ocurridos en Villa del Rosario sean juzgados por tribunal civil y no militarFiscal 41 del Zulia solicitó que 14 detenidos por hechos ocurridos en Villa del Rosario sean juzgados por tribunal civil y no militar](https://twitter.com/MPvenezolano/status/862133669603012609), May 9, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1839)
1840. Organic Code of Military Justice, Special Official Gazette No. 5263 of September 17, 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-1840)
1841. IACHR, [Violence, Citizen Security, and Freedom of Expression in Venezuela](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rV0NW2PdBJs), October 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1841)
1842. Article 502 of the Organic Code of Military Justice provides: “Anyone who uses threatening or offensive language or gestures toward a guard shall be punished with six months to one year of arrest. If the deed is committed while on campaign, the punishment shall be one to two years of imprisonment” [Organic Code of Military Justice, Special Official Gazette No. 5263 of September 17, 1998]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1842)
1843. IACHR, Press Release No. 68/17, [IACHR Deeply Concerned about the Worsening Violence in Venezuela and the Use of Military Courts to Prosecute Civilians](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/068.asp), May 26, 2017; OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-1843)
1844. Article 49 (4) provides: “ Every person has the right to be judged by his or her natural judges of ordinary or special competence, with the guarantees established in this Constitution and by law. No person shall be put on trial without knowing the identity of the party judging him or her, nor be adjudged by exceptional courts or commissions created for such purpose” [Art. 49 (4) of the [Constitution of Venezuela](https://www.oas.org/juridico/mla/sp/ven/sp_ven-int-const.html)]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1844)
1845. Art. 261 of the [Constitution of Venezuela](https://www.oas.org/juridico/mla/sp/ven/sp_ven-int-const.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-1845)
1846. I/A Court H.R., *Case of Usón Ramírez v.* *Venezuela,* Preliminary Objection, Merits, Reparations, and Costs, Judgment of November 20, 2009, Series C No. 207, para. 199.8. [↑](#footnote-ref-1846)
1847. IACHR, Press Release No. 68/17, [IACHR Deeply Concerned about the Worsening Violence in Venezuela and the Use of Military Courts to Prosecute Civilians](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/068.asp), May 26, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1847)
1848. IACHR, [Report No. 84/13](https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/decisions/court/12482FondoEn.doc)*,* Case 12.428, Merits, Valdemir Quispealaya Vilcampoma, Peru, para. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-1848)
1849. OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-1849)
1850. OHCHR, [Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_SP.pdf), 31 August 2017, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-1850)
1851. IACHR, [Violence, Citizen Security, and Freedom of Expression in Venezuela](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rV0NW2PdBJs), October 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1851)
1852. IACHR, Press Release No. 084/17, [IACHR Strongly Condemns Indiscriminately Repressive Military Operations in Venezuela](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/084.asp), June 27, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1852)
1853. Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Ministry of the People’s Power for Foreign Relations, Note AGEV/2017-000300, comments on the draft country report December 21, 2017, para. 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-1853)
1854. Those allegations were made by CASLA during the hearings at the OAS on September 14 [Youtube video, [Public hearings before OAS regarding Venezuela](https://youtu.be/KRX0QaJPzRk), OAS, September 14, 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1854)
1855. El Nacional, [Defensor del pueblo, renuncie](http://www.el-nacional.com/noticias/columnista/defensor-del-pueblo-renuncie_89305), April 7, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1855)
1856. OVV, [Impunidad alcanza a 98% de crímenes contra DDHH en Venezuela, según Cofavic](http://observatoriodeviolencia.org.ve/impunidad-alcanza-a-98-de-crimenes-contra-los-ddhh-en-venezuela-segun-cofavic/), October 28, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-1856)
1857. Arts. 253 and 285 of the [Constitution of Venezuela](https://www.oas.org/juridico/mla/sp/ven/sp_ven-int-const.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-1857)
1858. IACHR, [2016 Annual Report](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/docs/anual/2016/docs/InformeAnual2016cap4B.Venezuela-es.pdf), Chapter IV.B, Venezuela, para. 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-1858)
1859. IACHR, Press Release No. 111/17, [IACHR Condemns the Deaths and Acts of Violence on Election Day in Venezuela](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/111.asp), August 1, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1859)
1860. IACHR, [“The Right to Truth and Report of Venezuela’s Commission for Justice and Truth](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21rb0Ggx7fI),” 161st Period of Sessions, March 22, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1860)
1861. Alba Ciudad, [Miembros de la Comisión por la Justicia y la Verdad 1958-1998 rechazan posiciones de la Fiscal General](http://albaciudad.org/2017/06/miembros-de-la-comision-por-la-justicia-y-la-verdad-1958-1998-rechazan-posiciones-de-la-fiscal-general/), June 9, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1861)
1862. Telesur, [Instalan Comisión por la Verdad y Justicia en Venezuela](https://www.telesurtv.net/news/Maduro-llama-a-incrementar-la-busqueda-de-la-Verdad-y-Justicia-20160412-0040.html), April 12, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-1862)
1863. IACHR, [*The Right to the Truth in the Americas*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/Derecho-Verdad-es.pdf), OEA/Ser.L/V.II.152, Doc.2, August 13, 2014, pars. 34 and 133-135. [↑](#footnote-ref-1863)
1864. IACHR, [Violence, Citizen Security, and Freedom of Expression in Venezuela](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rV0NW2PdBJs), October 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1864)
1865. IACHR, [Report No. 136/99](http://www.cidh.org/annualrep/99span/de%20fondo/el%20salvador10.488.htm), Case 10.488, Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J.; Segundo Montes, S.J.; Armando López, S.J.; Ignacio Martín Baró, S.J.; Joaquín López y López, S.J.; Juan Ramón Moreno, S.J.; Julia Elba Ramos; and Celina Mariceth Ramos, El Salvador, December 22, 1999, para. 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-1865)
1866. IACHR, [*Second Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in the Americas*](http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/defensores/docs/pdf/defensores2011.pdf)*,* OEA/Ser.L/V/II., Doc. 66, December 31, 2011, para. 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-1866)
1867. IACHR. *Compulsory membership in an association prescribed by law for the practice of journalism (Arts. 13 and 29, American Convention on Human Rights).* Advisory Opinion OC-5/85 of November 13, 1985. Series A, No. 5, para. 70; *Case of Claude Reyes et al. vs. Chile*. Merit, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of September 19, 2006. Series C, No. 151, para. 85; *Case of Herrera Ulloa vs. Costa Rica*. Preliminary Objections, Merit, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of July 2, 2004. Series C, No. 107, para. 116; *Case of Ricardo Canese vs. Paraguay*. Merit, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of August 31, 2004. Series C, No. 111, para. 86; IACHR, [Report No. 20/99](http://www.cidh.oas.org/annualrep/98eng/Merits/Peru%2010317.htm), Merit, Case 11,317, Rodolfo Robles Espinoza and Sons, Peru, para. 148; [Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression](http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/expression/showarticle.asp?artID=26), 2000; IACHR, Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, [The Inter-American Legal Framework Regarding the Right to Freedom of Expression](http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/expression/docs/publications/INTER-AMERICAN%20LEGAL%20FRAMEWORK%20OF%20THE%20RIGHT%20TO%20FREEDOM%20OF%20EXPRESSION%20FINAL%20PORTADA.pdf), 2009, para. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-1867)
1868. UN, Human Rights Committee, [Communications 422/1990, 423/1990 and 424/1990](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/SDecisionsVol6en.pdf), Aduayom et al. vs. Togo, Decision of July 12, 1996, para. 7.4, and [General Comment No. 34](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/gc34.pdf), Article 19: Freedoms of Opinion and Expression, CCPR/C/GC/34, September 12, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-1868)
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