

Guatemalan covenant-of-the-corrupt crackdown on media

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/guatemalan-covenant-of-the-corrupt-crackdown-on-media>

Below, an El Faro news article about legal persecution against journalists reporting on the situation of el Periodico publisher José Rubén Zamora, a political prisoner [in jail since July 2022](#) on trumped up criminal charges (money laundering and obstruction of justice).



Jose Ruben Zamora, political prisoner and publisher of el Periodico news outlet

Repression against the media is to be understood in conjunction with the regime's corruption and co-optation of all institutions of State and society, including the administration of justice (filing of criminal charges against and jailings of judges, prosecutors, lawyers) and the democratic process (complete corruption of the electoral process), that are linked to never-ending repression against indigenous and campesino land, human rights and mother earth defenders.

Covenant-of-the-corrupt “international community”

Enabling all this, the U.S., Canada, E.U., the IMF and World Bank, and numerous global banks and companies maintain full economic and military relations with the “democratic allie” government of Guatemala.

Even op-ed writers under fire in Guatemala

by Roman Gressier and Nelson Rauda, El Faro News, March 6, 2023

<https://mailchi.mp/elfaro.net/nine-guatemalan-columnists-journalists-6215848?e=2943d15c91>

A judge has ordered investigations into three columnists and six journalists who have written about publisher José Rubén Zamora's prosecution or worked for his newspaper elPeriódico. [...]

“Coercing the court”

On February 28, reporter Alex Valdéz was covering a hearing for Guatemalan publisher José Rubén Zamora, [in jail since July](#) on charges of money laundering and obstruction of justice, when lead prosecutor Cinthia Monterroso accused him, five more journalists, and three columnists, of trying to “coerce the court” with their writing on the Zamora story.

Gerson Ortiz, a former elPeriódico editor also named, noted: "When press organizations met with the Attorney General on Wednesday [March 1], she responded that they have no lines of investigation into journalists, but that they can't ignore a judge's order. That's what makes me think it's a systemic persecution," Ortiz said.

He also mentioned that Guatemalan netcenters, or alleged troll farms, attacked the journalists mentioned in the hearing in the preceding days.

Ortiz considered it a hint of things to come, as the accounts usually leak information related to targets of the Public Prosecutor's Office.

In the last two years, those same netcenters threatened several anti-corruption prosecutors and judges just days before arrest warrants were issued.

"I don't think there's any national institution left for us to turn to," Ortiz said, referring to the co-optation of the Guatemalan justice system by corrupt actors in recent years.

The newly accused include op-ed writers Édgar Gutiérrez, a former foreign minister; Manfredo Marroquín, head of the local chapter of Transparency International; and Gonzalo Marroquín, an ex-president of the Inter-American Press Association.

They have been annexed to the case against Zamora, who has even been forced to [change counsel](#) under the threat of arrest of his attorneys in a process plagued with irregularities that has drawn sweeping international condemnations.

The judge who ordered the probes, Jimi Bremer, is the same who annulled the arrest warrant in December for a [formerly fugitive](#) Constitutional Court magistrate sanctioned by the U.S. State Department for his implication in a [prolific 2020 court-stacking case](#).

Guilt by (little to no) association

The U.N. Human Rights Office voiced “[concern](#)” over the order and Guatemalan journalists [filed a report](#) with the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights. Press advocates including the Committee to Protect Journalists also issued expected [condemnations](#).

But who most rankled Guatemalan authorities was the U.S. State Department, which [wrote](#): “We urge the Guatemalan justice system to reject the criminalization of independent journalists and support independent journalism.” Assistant Secretary of State Brian Nichols [added](#), “Democracies defend freedom, including that of expression.”

The Foreign Ministry [called](#) Nichols’ statement an “attack on sovereignty”; the human rights ombudsman [wrote](#) that “every judicial process is carried out with respect for fundamental rights”; the Public Prosecutor’s Office [bristled](#): “Issuing loose opinions without knowledge is irresponsible. [...] There is no criminalization of journalism or free thinking here.”

Prosecutor Monterroso’s words, though, leave little room for doubt: “There could exist, thinking in the abstract, other outlets who call themselves independent and receive the same financing,” she said. [...]

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