

URGENT ACTION

THREATS AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Menchi Barriocanal and Oscar Acosta, Paraguayan journalists and married couple, were threatened with imprisonment by president Horacio Cartes on 23 June during his participation in a rally in Ciudad del Este, where he falsely accused them of inciting violence during demonstrations that took place in March.

Menchi Barriocanal and Oscar Acosta are Paraguayan journalists who in March 2017 actively exposed a bi-partisan manoeuvre supported by the president of Paraguay to amend the Constitution to allow re-elections. The exposed proposal resulted in popular outrage with scores of people demonstrating against it on the streets. Police responded with use of tear gas and rubber bullets. The Paraguayan Congress was set on fire and the first day of protests ended with one death, dozens of people injured, and more than 200 people detained. When protests erupted, representatives from the ruling party (Partido Colorado) immediately publicly accused Menchi Barriocanal and Oscar Acosta of igniting the protests and inciting violent incidents, although the journalists had simply reported on the attempted Congressional amendment.

On the evening of 23 June, while addressing the public in an open rally, President Horacio Cartes continued the accusations against Menchi and Oscar, stating: "*There is a married couple out there that, if justice is served, should be together with Stiben Patrón*", referring to an opposition political party activist who was sent to prison three weeks ago on charges related to incidents during the protests. In addition, other acts of harassment have been reported since March against media workers who have criticized the Government's actions during the protests. The three main national journalist unions have called on the Attorney General to investigate these attacks, but to date there are no indications that any investigations have been opened.

On 27 June, President Cartes again mentioned Menchi and Oscar by name during a public rally, implying that they were publishing misleading stories about the political situation in Paraguay. Amnesty International is concerned that these acts of intimidation and accusations against the journalists indicate a pattern of harassment which endangers journalists, media workers and other human rights defenders, and that infringes on their right to freedom of expression and assembly without discrimination, persecution or fear of reprisals.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to end the intimidation against Menchi Barriocanal and Oscar Acosta and commit to the full respect of the right of all journalists and media workers to exercise their right to freely communicate and express their ideas free from intimidation or reprisals;
- Calling on them to investigate any attacks and acts of harassment against journalists, media workers and other human rights defenders;
- Calling on them to provide an adequate system for the protection of all journalists, media and other human rights defenders for them to be able to carry out their work without fear of reprisals.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 08 AUGUST 2017 TO:

Presidencia del Paraguay

Sr. Horacio Cartes
Palacio de Gobierno
El Paraguayo
Independiente,
Asunción, Paraguay
horaciocartesjara@gmail.com;
presidenciaparaguay@gmail.com
Salutation: Dear President / Estimado Señor Presidente

Fiscalía General

Dr. Javier Díaz Verón
Chile c/ Ygatimí
Asunción, Paraguay
Teléfono / Fax: +595 21 415 6152
fdiaz@ministeriopublico.gov.py
Salutation: Dear General Attorney / Estimado Fiscal General

Defensoría del Pueblo (Ombudsman)

Miguel Godoy Servín
Avda. Ygatimi esq. Juan E. O'Leary
Asunción, Paraguay
Fax: +595 21 452 6000
defensoria@defensoriadelpueblo.gov.py
Salutation: Dear Ombudsman / Estimado Señor Defensor del Pueblo

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXELLENCY MR MIGUEL ANGEL SOLANO LOPEZ
CASCO , Embassy of the Republic of Paraguay, 3rd Floor 344 Kensington High Street, London, W14 8NS, 020 7610 4180 Fax 020 7371 4297
email: embaparuk2@paraguayembassy.co.uk or embaparuk@paraguayembassy.co.uk www.paraguayembassy.co.uk

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Article 229 of the Paraguayan Constitution establishes that neither the President nor the Vice-President can be re-elected, a condition which prevents current President Horacio Cartes from remaining in office beyond 2018.

Following the exposure by journalists of a secret meeting of 25 senators to approve a bill to amend the Constitution and allow presidential re-election on 31 March, protesters took to the streets setting fire to the Congress building, battering down entrances and shattering windows. In this context, Amnesty International documented human rights violations including the death of opposition activist Rodrigo Quintana, who was killed by a rubber bullet fired by a police officer when they stormed the offices of opposition parliamentarians. Dozens of people were also injured, more than 200 people detained, and allegations of people having been tortured and ill-treated were received by local organizations. In addition, the Union of Journalists of Paraguay (SPP), the Forum of Journalists of Paraguay (FOPEP) and the Association of Graphic Reporters, have denounced that more than 23 reporters were injured while reporting during the protests and several others have been harassed for their coverage of the attempted Constitutional amendment and the government's response to the protests.

Restrictions on freedom of expression and failure to protect human rights defenders in Paraguay has been repeatedly denounced by international human rights institutions. Paraguay has failed to investigate the deaths of 17 journalists since 1991, and a draft bill presented before Congress in late 2016 seeking to establish a protection mechanism for journalists, media workers and human rights defenders has not yet even been discussed by Congress members.

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