



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SENTENCED:
CENSORSHIP IN
CUBA, GUATEMALA,
AND HONDURAS.

INTRODUCTION

violence against the press and authoritarianism as communicating vessels in latin america.

The reality of freedom of expression in Cuba, Guatemala and Honduras gives a sense of urgency to the creation of solidarity networks that allow us to combat censorship at all times and in all places in Latin America, haunted by the ghost of repression and impunity in which corrupt political systems operate. The latter, with levels exceeding 80% of registered cases, is an incentive for greater violence against those who practice journalism.

Cuba: the exception that became the rule

Cuba went from the epic of the 1959 Revolution to the tragedy of repression and censorship. A State that even controls the narrative on culture, society, climate and daily life; a State that punishes any insignificant variation from the official version about the country, through a wide range of weapons and legal and extra-judicial mechanisms to silence and isolate those who seek to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, access to information, public participation and association. State control of the media, which conditions plurality and freedom of information; compulsory membership of a journalism association, which enables the government to choose who can and cannot carry out the task of informing; and criminal laws of contempt or supposed protection of honor, are the basis for restricting any robust and uninhibited exercise of freedom of expression, while the population's access to the Internet is limited, as well as being slow and expensive, and has become a space for State surveillance and intimidation.

Guatemala and Honduras: institutionalized crime

In Honduras and Guatemala, officially democratic and multi-party regimes, various censorship mechanisms are applied against journalists and media. There are similarities in the repressive methods used: laws that inhibit the exercise of journalism and access to public information; abuse of states of emergency, *de facto* or legal; a wide range of progressively sophisticated aggressions, from assassinations to smear campaigns on social networks, including digital espionage; criminalization and judicial persecution, as well as forced displacement; state offensives for the control of the internet, through the removal of content and limited access to technology; disproportionate use of force in public demonstrations and meetings; dif-

ferentiated violence against women journalists, inside and outside of work spaces, and the inefficient response of the state in terms of prevention, protection, access to justice and reparation of the damage derived from the aggressions committed against journalists and their families.

Other elements common to both Central American countries are also present in this report, such as the blurring of borders between political, military and economic elites – local and national – and organized crime groups, which diminishes the real possibility of protecting and avoiding aggressions against journalists and activists. On the other hand, the health emergency resulting from covid-19 has been the perfect pretext to make use of emergency regimes, with disproportionate measures, to the detriment of the rights of association, assembly and freedom of expression. In addition, attempts to control the flow of information in order to prevent government inability to control the epidemic have only increased.

In this report, we explore the adversity and frustration of exercising freedom of expression in these countries, but also understand realities that, although they may seem disjointed in their complexity, provide communication vessels in the struggle for a free press and more informed societies.

CUBA

When oxygen is lacking

To talk about freedom of expression and information in Cuba, the first thing to take into account is that almost all forms of violence against the press derive, in principle, from an authoritarian system that gives rise to a regulatory framework that enables repression and makes state agents the greatest threat to journalism.

The lack of guarantees within the Constitution for these rights and the legal reservations that it contains, reinforced by a network of laws and decrees that have been approved, give rise to a number of ambiguous interpretations and arbitrariness, which subsequently translate into reduced mobility, deprivation of liberty, damage to property, intimidation, death or social asphyxiation of journalists, therefore, inducing self-censorship and silence.

Iliana Hernández: a maze without exit

Independent journalist, director of the online audiovisual program *Lente Cubano* and reporter for the alternative media outlet *CiberCuba Noticia*, Iliana Hernández Cardosa has been arrested 13 times in the last three years by agents of the State Security Department. By doing so, they seek to intimidate her and send her a message to silence her. The reason: to prevent coverage of events by independent civil society that operates without registration on the island and that reports on human rights violations committed by the Cuban State. Her only purpose is for her country to change, and to change, she says, “we have to get the information to the people, whatever it takes”.¹

Iliana is registered by the Cuban State as a “CR”, a term used by government agents to designate those they consider counter-revolutionaries. During the detention processes, they have destroyed her cellphones, confiscated her work tools or other personal property. She has been subjected to body searches, in addition to being forced to undress and suffer inappropriate touching by police officers. There was even a moment when she was forced to take an odor sample from her genitals.

1 ARTICLE 19, interview with Iliana Hernández, June 26, 2020.

Some journalists, such as Iliana, have been prosecuted for “pre-criminal dangerousness”² in Cuba – a provision that criminalizes people who are allegedly prone to committing crimes because of their behavior that is contrary to the norms of socialist morality.

She was officially summoned to appear before the authorities 11 times in three years, after opening a file on her dangerousness. To this day and for the last two years, Iliana has been “regulated” by the State.³

The Constitution and the law: an arsenal for silence

In Cuba, independent expression faces an institutional framework created specifically to undermine it. Iliana Hernández’s case is one of many that show the complexity of the violence and the great legal arsenal that the Cuban State has at its disposal to repress and criminalize anyone who decides to practice journalism freely and without restrictions to its editorial line.

The media environment in Cuba is characterized by the concentration of media in the hands of the State, the lack of recognition of journalism from a functional perspective, the nonexistence of plurality of contents and the legal restrictions that limit any type of democratization of the journalistic environment. While it is true that the 2019 Constitution recognizes the right to information, the gaps resulting from legal reservations regarding freedom of expression are continually used to nullify this recognition. Furthermore, the prevalence of socialist values over human rights within the Constitution itself makes democracy and the characteristics that make it possible (participation, association, expression, transparency and accountability) only part of the institutional rhetoric.

Many different types of criminal law are used on a regular basis to persecute journalists and human rights defenders and to protect the interests of the Cuban State. To justify their existence, abstract concepts are used, such as “economic warfare,” “disrupting the internal order,” or “undermining the socialist state and the independence of Cuba,” as well as sanctioning behavior that endangers the “prestige” or “credit” of the State, strictly speaking. Thus, crimes

2 Article 72 and subsequent articles of the Cuban Criminal Code punish people who are especially prone to committing crimes based on behavior that contradicts the norms of socialist morality. The declaration of pre-criminal dangerousness of antisocial behavior is also given through summary proceedings that do not have the minimum legal guarantees, and may result in the arbitrary deprivation of liberty. See Decree-Law 128 of June 18, 1991, in Articles 415 and following, <https://www.gacetaoficial.gob.cu>; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH), “Situación de derechos humanos en Cuba”, OEA/Ser.L/V/II., February 3, 2020, par. 190.

3 “Regulation” is a restriction on the right to mobility. It involves oral travel bans, without written documents or a specific response.

typified in the Criminal Code as “enemy propaganda,”⁴ “the dissemination of false news against international peace,”⁵ and any other conduct classified as subversive, especially when it is deemed to be in keeping with the purpose of favoring the application of the Helms-Burton Act, are subject to prosecution.

In addition to the above, and despite the recommendations of international organizations, particularly the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (RELE by its acronym in Spanish) of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH by its acronym in Spanish), in July 2019 Decree-Law 370 on the Computerization of Cuban Society was approved, which, according to the government, aims to consolidate cyber-security, technological sovereignty, security and national defense.

This decree subjects the development of information and communication technologies (ICT) to the needs of the state and imposes restrictions on the exercise of fundamental rights involved in their use, such as political participation, freedom of expression, privacy and free association. It sanctions the dissemination of information in social networks contrary to “social interest”, “morality” and “good customs”; it authorizes the prosecution and punishment of computer security researchers who publish and warn about the existence of vulnerabilities in computer systems, and prevents the hosting of websites located on foreign servers that are not replicas of national servers, declaring personal blogs and independent media illegal, which are denied access to the domain extension “.cu”.⁶

Roberto Quiñones: the consequences of covering and expressing difference

The political hostility towards independent criticism in Cuba creates a complex reality for journalists. The case of Roberto Quiñones, an independent journalist at the digital media outlet *Cubanet*, shows the vulnerability of the press in a state that only seeks to suffocate and provoke silence. Unlike what happens in other countries in the region, this shows how in Cuba

4 1. Shall be punished by imprisonment from one to eight years, any person who: a) incites against the social order, international solidarity or the socialist state, by means of oral or written propaganda or in any other form; b) makes, distributes or possesses propaganda of the character mentioned in the preceding paragraph. 2. Anyone who disseminates false news or malicious predictions intended to cause alarm or discontent in the population, or public disorder, shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for one to four years. 3. If, in order to carry out the acts provided for in the preceding paragraphs, mass media are used, the penalty is imprisonment for seven to fifteen years. Whoever allows the use of mass media referred to in the previous paragraph, shall be imprisonment from one to four years”. Penal Code [Cuba], art. 103.

5 “Anyone who disseminates false news with the purpose of disturbing international peace, or endangering the prestige or credit of the Cuban State or its good relations with another State, incurs the penalty of imprisonment from one to four years,” Penal Code [Cuba], art. 121.

6 ARTICLE 19, , “Cuba: El Decreto Ley 370 debe ser declarado inconstitucional pues atenta contra la libertad de expresión y de prensa”, ARTICLE 19, June 15, 2020, <https://articulo19.org/cuba-organizaciones-y-medios-de-comunicacion-respaldamos-la-peticion-para-declarar-inconstitucional-el-decreto-ley-370-en-cuba/>

non-official coverage of daily life, art, culture or any topic is subject to various forms of violence.

Since his arrest, the following actions have been repeatedly violated: due process, right to defense, procedural equality, and to be judged by an independent court. Quiñones was detained at his home by three agents of the National Revolutionary Police (PNR by its acronym in Spanish). He was later transferred to the provincial prison in Guantánamo to serve his sentence. While writing this report, Roberto Quiñones was still in prison and suffering poor health.

The siege against the press

While it is true that any kind of coverage can be risky for the Cuban independent press, reporting on dissidence —understood as everything outside of the official discourse— in any of its expressions is met with aggression. Communicators who want to practice their profession in the state-owned media (which, as already mentioned, are the only legitimate ones) must join the Union of Cuban Journalists (UPEC by its acronym in Spanish).⁷ Compulsory membership⁸ becomes a form of political control by the state over the exercise of freedom of expression, since only those who follow the constitutional parameters, in terms of their editorial line, can be accredited as part of the Union and, therefore, have access to government information.

Thus, in addition to the traditional tools used to subject independent journalism, forms of repression would be added, such as the threat of beginning processes against those who practice journalism in non-official media with the charge of “usurpation of functions and usurpation of legal capacity”⁹ and, more recently, the imposition of aptitude tests to access a journalism degree at the State University.¹⁰

According to journalist Ana León, for Cuban journalism there are three options: “it is silence, or exile, or exhaustion [...], the rebellion does not simply appear [...], the option left is exile [...] for the time being, we will have to do our part until there is a change that hopefully will be peaceful.”¹¹ For some journalists, such as Iliana Hernández and Roberto Quiñones, who have decided to stay, the only hope is to make citizens aware of what is happening in their country and to gradually generate a change towards a true democratic system.

7 UPEC is an autonomous movement, but in its bylaws it recognizes the Cuban Communist Party “as the superior leading force of our society and of the State” and agrees to comply with article 53 of the Constitution.

8 In this context, it is important to consider that article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes that “[n]o one may be compelled to belong to an association”...

9 “Anyone who exhibits a professional or academic degree that does not possess incurs the penalty of imprisonment for five to sixty days or a fine of up to sixty quotas or both. 2. If the offender performs acts proper to a profession for which he is not duly qualified, the sanction is imprisonment from three to nine months or a fine of one hundred to two hundred and seventy quotas or both”. Penal Code [Cuba] art. 167.

10 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, (CIDH), Audiencia sobre criminalización de activistas sociales y periodistas en Cuba”, 169th session, October 1, 2018.

11 ARTICLE 19, interview with Ana León, May 11, 2019.

With the arrival of the Internet and ICT in Cuba, digital journalism has proliferated, although it is considered illegal.¹² However, high costs and limited connectivity are a major factor in keeping audiences on the island away from independent content. Therefore, most of the content finds resonance with Cuban exile communities or with foreign audiences.¹³ In other cases, Cuban journalism has had to innovate to provide information to the people other than the official information and thus bring its voice closer to the megaphone, which is what journalism entails.¹⁴

The forms and intensity of violence

In a six-month period, between October 7, 2019 and April 5th, 2020, ARTICLE 19 documented 93 attacks against journalists from 25 media outlets. These are mostly digital, however there are also those who, in addition to communication, advocate for human rights and divide their content between print and digital publications.

The most common forms of aggression against journalists are: raids on homes and workplaces; attacks on property; interrogations during which they are threatened with legal action if they do not reveal information about other journalists, projects or activities of human rights organizations; and house arrests to prevent journalists from going out to report, investigate or prevent them from traveling abroad to participate in any civil society event or foreign media.

The State strikes by cutting off the flow of information, restricting searches, preventing journalists from leaving their homes to do any type of coverage; hindering the reception of or obtaining information through interrogations that put sources at risk or through direct threats; and banning access to official sources or the government network, and obstructing any publication through the blocking of Internet pages or threatening subsequent legal action, among other things.

There is also the aforementioned “regulation,” which is the restriction of persons linked to the defense of human rights or journalists from leaving the country; the “citation,” a procedure prior to interrogations that constitutes another common form of intimidation provided in criminal law; and “fines and interrogations,” as a form of punishment.

With these procedures, the authorities show their power by revealing to the journalist how they have been monitored in their activities and personal relationships, among other things. The objective is to pressure them in order to obtain the information they want and to warn them. If they continue to do their journalistic work, they will be legally prosecuted. In some cases, they make insinuations about what could happen to them personally, or to a family member or a friend, if they continue their work. Women journalists, for example, have testi-

12 The printing of publications and their distribution is not only not viable due to global trends in communication, but also due to the existence of a restrictive legal framework for freedom of expression that sees the exercise of journalism as an alternative to traditional channels as a malicious vehicle for political destabilization, propaganda and order disturbance.

13 ARTICLE 19, interview with Ana León, op. cit.

14 ARTICLE 19, interview with José Jasán, May 2019.

fied to comments made by police or State Security officials saying that they may be neglecting their children or that they risk losing custody of their children to the State because of their journalistic work.

The systemic nature of aggression

Any independent communicator in Cuba is subject to the multiple aggressions mentioned above. During the documentation, it was observed that each journalist has been a victim of at least one aggression, but there are cases in which the same person has been the victim of up to five types of attacks. Journalists reported to ARTICLE 19 an average of 3.3 aggressions per victim, which highlights the intensity of the violence suffered, especially considering that due to time constraints, episodes of aggressions could not be registered over a longer period of time, so this figure may constitute an under-recording.

The greatest threat to the press

In Cuba, the greatest threat to the press is concentrated in State security institutions or parastatal structures that are involved in a series of violence, both direct and indirect, against journalism and the defense of human rights. The documentation gathered by ARTICLE 19, considers that in the majority of the attacks on journalists there is a connection between the PNR and the State Security Department.

In 100% of the cases of attacks documented by ARTICLE 19, there are clear indications of the alleged participation of Cuban State agents from different orders (security, police, secret services, etc.) as perpetrators.¹⁵

The consequences of asphyxiation and support networks

Cuba is not a State of freedoms, since the government decides how each of its citizens develops, lives, and evolves. For independent journalists, this means a form of asphyxiation and torture, turning them into rebels within the island. Unfortunately, year after year, dozens of communicators decide to go into exile due to the impossibility of facing the systematic harassment at the hands of the security forces.

In case they decide to stay and resist, the distrust generated by constant intimidation leads them to ostracism. Stigmatizing narratives and smear campaigns eventually lead to isolation and alienation from their audiences. Finally, one of the serious effects of violence against the press is that it alienates journalism from its audience and by silencing their message they deprive society of information.

¹⁵ This contrasts with the proliferation of non-state perpetrators in other contexts of ARTICLE 19 research in the region, where they are more prominent, for example, in Mexico.

However, even if the panorama seems less than encouraging, it is also true that the arrival of the Internet has allowed a break in the hegemonic narrative from the interior of Cuba and this has been an important factor in making journalists from other regions and diplomatic corps increasingly concerned about what is happening there. In addition, support networks among communicators, as well as other groups in the local and international society, have been an important element in reversing violence in the physical and psychosocial spheres.

GUATEMALA

The historic battle for freedom

High rates of inequality, institutional weakening and marginalization have generated high levels of insecurity and violence in Guatemala. Thus, discouraging the exercise of the rights to free thought and free expression, due to a series of aggressions that occur both in the physical and digital spheres, whose objective is to silence journalism. The CIDH, in its 2017 *in loco* visit, witnessed the violent environment that journalists live in, characterized by threats, murders and a stigmatizing discourse against media and communicators who dedicate their work to combat abuse of power and corruption.¹⁶

To date, the situation has not changed. In addition to the inherent risks in a context marked by the dispute for power between drug trafficking, organized crime and companies, journalists have to deal with restrictive legal frameworks. All this in addition to attacks by officials linked to acts of corruption or related to organized crime.

The legal framework is restrictive or subject to the interpreter's will

In Guatemala, there is a robust constitutional framework that, in theory, guarantees the effective exercise of freedom of expression, information and association. However, secondary legal provisions, mainly those on the criminalization of crimes against honor, restrict these rights in a disproportionate and unnecessary manner, representing a significant threat to the exercise of freedoms in the civic space and to open and pluralistic public debate.

¹⁶ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, (CIDH), Situation of human rights in Guatemala, Guatemala, OAS, 2017, chapter 5.

This is the case with the Law on Public Order,¹⁷ which limits the exercise of the rights of assembly, association and freedom of expression in an emergency or crisis situation and allows for the existence of states of exception that are implemented without respect for the principles of proportionality¹⁸ and necessity.¹⁹ These become a very powerful weapon, since the determination to implement them is a discretionary power of the president, and although the Law on Access to Public Information reproduces international human rights standards, it is not effectively applied by the authorities at different levels of government.

Thus, the normative framework of the rights to freedom of expression and information combines content which is restrictive and contravenes human rights with other types of content protecting human rights, but in the end it depends on the discretion of those who apply and interpret them. The implementation of states of emergency, added to the cessation of guarantees, has given rise to activities such as espionage, criminalization, silencing, repression of demonstrations and protests, and harassment threatening freedom of expression, which perverts the purpose of such measures, while neglecting the root problems, such as the scarcity of resources or economic inequality.

The press subject to violence

Between 2015 and 2018, the Guatemalan Human Rights Ombudsman reported 17 murders of journalists,²⁰ while from 2016 to 2019, the Public Prosecutor received almost 400 complaints of attacks on the union. Although there are no studies to prove it, it is perceived that currently the rates of impunity for crimes against journalists are very high and, unfortunately, so far there are no signs that the situation will change. On the contrary, this impunity will continue and will have an inhibiting effect on the exercise of freedom of expression. In the area of prevention, no progress has been made in the construction of a mechanism for the prevention

17 The President of Guatemala is entitled to declare the reasons for the cessation of rights, their spatiality and their period of validity “by means of a decree issued by the Council of Ministers and the provisions of the Law on Public Order shall be applied. In the state of prevention, this formality will not be necessary”. The approval is subject to the ratification of the Congress (which has a term of three days). The effects of the state of emergency cannot exceed 15 days or, in some cases, 30 days; after its expiration, the full enjoyment of rights is automatically restored, although this condition has not always been respected and its extension is a common practice. Saenz J., Luis Felipe, “La regulación de los estados de excepción en Guatemala y la necesidad de reforma de la Ley de Orden Público que los contienen, para su congruencia con la normativa de la Constitución Política de República”, *Anuario de Derecho Constitucional Latinoamericano*, t. 1 (2006), pp. 203-227, <https://revistas-colaboracion.juridicas.unam.mx/index.php/anuario-derecho-constitucional/article/view/30300/27350>.

18 The principle of proportionality implies that measures adopted in a state of emergency must be strictly limited to the requirement of the condition and should not go further than what is required to deal with the specific situation.

19 The principle of necessity implies that exceptional measures are justified only when there is no other alternative to maintain the effectiveness of a democratic society.

20 “Asesinados 17 periodistas desde 2015 en Guatemala dice la Procuraduría de DDHH”, EFE, November 2, 2018, <https://www.efe.com/efe/america/portada/asesinados-17-periodistas-desde-2015-en-guatemala-dice-la-procuraduria-de-ddhh/20000064-3801321>

and protection of journalists and human rights defenders, to which the Guatemalan State committed itself in 2012.

Jimmy Morales: the intolerance that led to the persecution and discredit of journalism

Since 2018, the penultimate year of Jimmy Morales' government and when the State decided not to renew the mandate of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), the institutional crisis has worsened, and there have been complaints from communicators that they have been victims of harassment, threats and intimidation for reporting on the events that led to the decision to cancel the operation of this commission.

The use of the state structure to attack journalists became a form of constant intimidation and had an inhibiting effect on their work. During the Morales administration, 14 journalists were murdered, probably for reasons related to their professional work, according to data from the Association of Journalists of Guatemala (APG for its acronym in Spanish), 2019 being the year with the highest number of attacks against the press.²¹

Political threats: smear campaigns that turn the messenger into the message

Increased smear campaigns and the dissemination of false narratives, or the use of simulated accounts on social networks, to discredit the work of journalists and intimidate them, even in the period leading up to the elections,²² are part of the government's intolerance towards the press in Guatemala.

The Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression warned in its 2019 annual report that Guatemalan media and journalists faced a hostile scenario during that year, characterized by the persistence of stigmatization campaigns against the press by high authorities, especially against communicators who investigate cases of corruption and abuse of power by followers of sectors that opposed the permanence of CICIG. This panorama deepened during the electoral process and unleashed different types of attacks against the press and political candidates that were connected through social networks by means of account intervention, defamation and hate speech, as well as discriminatory or sexist speech.²³

21 Association of Journalists of Guatemala (APG), "Estado de situación de la libertad de expresión en Guatemala 2019: Cuatro años de retrocesos, un asedio constante a la prensa", 2019, pp. 63 and 64.

22 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OACNUDH), "Informe de la alta comisionada de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en Guatemala", A/HRC/43/3/Add.1, OACNUDH Guatemala, 2019, p. 11, <https://www.oacnudh.org.gt/index.php/informes/informe-anual>

23 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, (CIDH), "II Informe anual de la Relatoría Especial para la Libertad de Expresión", (CIDH), February 2020, par. 700

Technological threats: their inhibiting effect and a direct attack on privacy

As in other countries in the region, violence also became more sophisticated and was reinforced using ICTs. Journalists told ARTICLE 19 that technological resources to smear critical journalists or those who report on the progress of investigations in corruption cases, as was the case with the CICIG, are implemented on a recurring basis depending on the context, the claims or the material disseminated. In addition, according to investigations by *Nuestro Diario*, in 2018 the Guatemalan State acquired *software* and technical equipment with the capacity to intercept cellphones, as well as social network accounts.²⁴

Legal threats: the never-ending persecution

According to interviews conducted by ARTICLE 19, the criminalization and judicial persecution of journalists in Guatemala seems to be an inheritance transmitted from administration to administration and has had an inhibiting effect that has transcended generations of journalists and media outlets to this day. Legal threats seek to intimidate and silence dissenting or critical voices, so that the high cost of a legal defense leads them to abandon their position. The goal is not to win the lawsuit, but to intimidate the defendant and have an inhibiting effect on the journalistic guild: to send a message of silencing.

Aggressions in the framework of the 2019 general elections in Guatemala

In 2019, presidential, legislative, and municipal elections were held. According to data from the APG, the number of attacks linked to the electoral process increased compared to previous elections (23 cases in 2015, compared to 41 cases in 2019). Most of the incidents were related to the prohibition or attempt to prohibit coverage of the voting centers on Election Day, and of the vote count, during the first round.²⁵ Among the aggressions registered by the APG at this juncture were: “intimidation, defamation, censorship, cyber-attack, verbal aggression; and those responsible were identified as politicians, residents, political parties, security forces, authorities and unknown persons”.²⁶

24 “Espionaje ilegal del gobierno: aquí está la investigación de *Nuestro Diario* (part I),” *Nómada*, August 6, 2018, <https://nomada.gt/pais/la-corrupcion-no-es-normal/espionaje-ilegal-del-gobierno-aqui-esta-la-investigacion-de-nuestro-diario-parte-i/>

25 Association of Journalists of Guatemala, 2019. “Estado de situación”, op. cit, p. 64

26 “Agresiones a la prensa en las elecciones de Guatemala aumentaron en un 78%”, *UDGTV*, September 11, 2019, <http://udgtv.com/noticias/agresiones-prensa-elecciones-guatemala-aumentaron/>

The impact of the aggressions on women communicators

According to the media outlet *Sala de Redacción*, from *Centro Civitas*,²⁷ in the Public Prosecutor's Office Unit for Crimes against Journalists, in 2015 only 24 reports were registered of aggressions against women journalists - all of them related to the exercise of their profession - mainly of a sexual nature, by their partners and by information sources.²⁸ Similarly, it was pointed out that these attacks were due to the fact that "sexist patterns persist placing them in stereotyped roles and just being a journalist is interpreted as breaking the mold and therefore must be punished".²⁹ Discriminatory practices and prejudices against women affect the exercise of freedom of expression in such a way that they run a double risk: because of their gender and because of their journalistic work.

Community journalism: the "other communication"

The work of social communicators is risky because they become pillars of the defense of human rights at community level, where information plays a very important role in the organization and defense of land and territory. Community journalists fight every day to ensure that information reaches people, especially when their towns and communities are subject to the exploitation of natural resources without any social benefit. There is a clear difference between the risks in the urban environment and the rural one. In the latter, communicators face the possibility of being criminalized and stigmatized. Moreover, the precariousness in which they live, and their remoteness are elements that accentuate the level of vulnerability they suffer.

Community radio: the hope of communication, between discrimination and violence

The undervaluation of community radio in Guatemala has different causes, including discrimination and racism against indigenous peoples, which are the focus of most, but not all, of such projects. In addition, for years indigenous peoples have faced the unequal distribution of the radioelectric frequency and the failure of the State to legally recognize them. Thus, criminalizing and prosecuting communicators and operators of the radio stations, by carrying out operations to dismantle and confiscate their equipment. In addition, there are criminal strategies against members of community radio stations that, being regular mechanisms of repression, end up silencing their entire community, especially when their journalistic investigations affect private interests.

The persistent problems in the distribution of Guatemala's radioelectric frequency cause a diminished diversification of the stations. According to data from the radio frequency inventory of the Superintendency of Telecommunications (SIT), updated to June 12th, 2017 Guatemalan radio and television are dominated by five large media groups: Albavisión, Emisoras Unidas,

27 Organization that works in favor of freedom of expression and press in Guatemala.

28 Flores, Ligia, "El riesgo de ser periodista en Guatemala", *Sala de Redacción*, November 4, 2015.

29 ARTICLE 19, interview with Norma Sancir, February 18, 2020

Radio Grupo Alius, Radio Corporación Nacional (rcn) and Nuevo Mundo. Together they hold 39.77% of the modulated frequency (FM) spectrum. These are family businesses that have monopolized the spectrum through client relationships with the authorities.³⁰ Albavisión Group alone enjoys 46.6% of the frequencies granted for television, without counting the licenses to use the channel frequencies, which was extended from 15 to 20 years, when they had to be renewed and handed over to other users after the reform in this matter in 2012.³¹

Alejandro Giammattei: the apparent continuity

In January 2020, he took office as president. Although he took charge of a country with historical debts in terms of human rights, six months into the presidency of Guatemala have not been enough to show his government's democratic vocation to the press. The country's authoritarian political tradition, as well as the deep social, political and economic crisis it faces, which is exacerbated by the health contingency generated by COVID-19, coupled with his public statements criminalizing several journalists, have not revealed conclusively whether he is willing to break with this authoritarian inertia or whether his government will continue with the previous ones.

In addition, in the first months of 2020, ARTICLE 19 documented the murder of 23-year-old journalist Bryan Leonel Guerra, who was shot on February 27 and died on March 3. Guerra was a news anchor at the telecommunications company TLcom and vice president of the Social Communicators Network in Chiquimula. The Public Prosecutor's Office reported that its Unit for Crimes against Journalists was investigating the murder. There was also news on the murder of journalist Irma del Carmen Chinchilla, on the night of February 6, in the municipality of Salamá, Baja Verapaz, in the north of the country.³²

Censorship during the COVID-19 pandemic

In the midst of the COVID-19 health emergency, President Giammattei decreed a "state of public calamity" for thirty days - still in effect today - restricting the rights to freedom of action, freedom of movement, of assembly and demonstration, as well as the right to strike. In addition, the restriction to leave on weekends was decreed the last week of May and the first week of June.

Although the decree does not contain an express restriction on freedom of the press and the right to information as part of the provisions to prevent the spread of the pandemic, the government of Guatemala has legitimized a series of acts against those who, through the exercise of freedom of expression, have questioned its actions against COVID-19, including the recurrent use of the state of calamity as a pretext for abuse of authority and violations of freedom of the press and the rights to information, association and protest. Similarly, the

30 Radio y tv en Guatemala: pocas manos concentran muchas frecuencias", *Plaza Pública*, July 30, 2018.

31 *Idem*.

32 Association of Journalists of Guatemala, "Informe sobre la libertad de expresión en Guatemala", 2020, p. 7.

State has shown a lack of transparency in the actual use of official resources to address the crisis, with an attitude that ranges from intimidation and disqualification of media and journalists to open censorship.³³

What about the right to protest?

Human rights defenders in Guatemala have shared with ARTICLE 19 that, in general, the perception of a climate of violence has increased. Not only because of the excessive use of force in detentions, the disqualification of people who question the policy to contain the pandemic, the lack of or poor responses from the government to citizens' demands, the attacks on journalists who demand information and accountability, and the increased violence on social networks, but also because physical attacks and murders against human rights defenders continue.

33 "Guatemala: periodistas denuncian acoso y censura de gobierno", *Debate*, April 13, 2020, <https://www.debate.com.mx/mundo/Guatemala-Periodistas-denuncian-acoso-y-censura-de-gobierno-20200413-0393.html>

HONDURAS

A History of Violence against the Press

Since the coup in 2009, the degradation of the Honduran political landscape has made it increasingly difficult for journalists to do their work in a suitable environment. With different levels of risk and types of aggressors, journalists face violence from police and military security forces when covering protests; threats from officials and organized crime when they reveal corruption or negligence, as well as sabotage and the constant threat to close community radio stations. All this in addition to having to deal with the differentiated violence that women journalists face on a daily basis, victims not only of adverse conditions for carrying out their work, but also of working environments that serve as spaces for the suppression of their rights. This situation, added to the still weak differentiated perspective in the instances in charge of protecting their informative exercise, makes urgent the need for profound transformations.

According to CIDH figures, from January 2015 to August 2019, 15 journalists and media workers have been murdered. On the other hand, the Committee for the Freedom of Expression (C-Libre) reports 79 homicides linked to communicators, between 2003 and 2019.³⁴ In the same vein, this organization points out that 90% of these cases remain in impunity, since there are no investigations by the Special Prosecutor's Office for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators and Operators of Justice to find those responsible. From the perspective of ARTICLE 19, the impunity that strengthens the action of public servants and individuals who seek to silence the press is a constant in 93% of the documented cases.³⁵ In Honduras, almost 50 journalists have joined the National System for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators and Operators of Justice, which they are distrustful of.³⁶

34 Rodríguez, Elin Josué, "79 asesinatos de periodistas en la última década registra C-Libre", *Presencia Universitaria*, February 11, 2020, <https://presencia.unah.edu.hn/noticias/79-asesinatos-de-periodistas-en-la-ultima-decada-registra-c-libre/>

35 "Condenan asesinato de periodista y camarógrafo en Honduras", *TeleSur*, July 2, 2020, <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/condenan-asesinato-periodista-camarografo-honduras-20200702-0013.html>

36 "Al menos medio centenar de periodistas bajo mecanismo de protección", *Proceso Digital*, February 24, 2020, <https://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/al-menos-medio-centenar-de-periodistas-bajo-mecanismo-de-proteccion.html>

Juan Orlando Hernández (2018–2021): repression of protest and violence against the press

The November 2017 presidential elections, in which Juan Orlando Hernández was reelected, led to a series of protests that the state responded to with repression and the co-opting of effective information flows. Due to the climate of discontent in the streets, the Presidency of the Republic ordered a suspension of guarantees and allowed police officers to attend demonstrations with weapons and even to act against those attending, as long as they were not lethal, in addition to preventing the press from reporting on these events.³⁷

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported that because of the use of force by the authorities to control the protests, 23 people lost their lives, 16 of them from gunshot wounds.³⁸ In addition, the office learned that throughout the same election year, cases of intimidation against journalists due to their work were registered. For its part, the National Protection System issued precautionary measures in favor of 24 communicators.³⁹ Likewise, the OHCHR stated that attacks on journalists and other communication workers by the security forces, as well as the sabotage of media facilities and transmissions critical of government actions, affected the right to freedom of opinion and expression.⁴⁰

Information control and capture of the media

Since his re-election, journalists and media outlets have been pressured to provide coverage that is favorable to Hernández and to suppress images of police committing abuses, in exchange for agreements to receive official publicity. This demonstrates a mechanism of indirect censorship that is enhanced by the lack of regulatory frameworks that establish clear, objective, and transparent criteria for the allocation of this publicity, which allows abuses to occur in its distribution.⁴¹

The Platform for the Defense of Health and Public Education

On April 24th, 2019, the National Congress approved the laws for the Restructuring and Budgetary Transformation of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education. These laws, from the perspective of the teaching and medical unions, facilitated massive layoffs and the

37 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, (CIDH), “CIDH concluye su visita a Honduras y presenta sus observaciones preliminares”, press release, (CIDH), August 3, 2018.

38 United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, (OACNUDH), *Las violaciones a los derechos humanos en el contexto de las elecciones de 2017 en Honduras*, May 3, 2018, par. 47, n. 32, <https://issuu.com/denisrosales6/docs/eleccioneshonduras2017-informeviol>

39 United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Human rights violations in the context of the 2017 elections in Honduras”, 2017, par. 28, p. 11.

40 United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, (OACNUDH), *Las violaciones...*, *op.cit.*

41 Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, (CIDH) “Principios sobre regulación de la publicidad oficial en el sistema interamericano de protección de los derechos humanos”, CIDH/RELE/INF. 6/12, March 7, 2011, par. 25, p. 9.

deepening of the privatization of the institutions of each systems.⁴² Although it was reversed by Congress in a session on April 30th, the Platform for the Defense of Health and Public Education was born in that context.⁴³

Those who covered these events faced the action of members of the National Police, the Military Police of Public Order, and the Intelligence Troops and Special Security Response Groups (TIGRES), who during the protests⁴⁴ arrived with firearms, used tear gas -sometimes shooting the cans at the bodies of protesters and journalists-, threw pressurized water jets, carried out arbitrary arrests, stole equipment and physically assaulted, all of this as an instrument of control.⁴⁵

COVID-19 and crisis management

The measures taken by the government of Juan Orlando Hernández to deal with the covid-19 pandemic revealed authoritarian attitudes that encouraged abuse by the police and military forces, and raised barriers in the flow of information, making the work of local communicators difficult⁴⁶ and also affecting the right to carry out journalistic work in the streets, to organize social gatherings and to request public information.⁴⁷

C-Libre has recorded, from March 16th to June 11th, 2020, 41 aggressions linked to the exercise of freedom of expression.⁴⁸ For its part, the CIDH and its Special Rapporteur expressed concern about the lack of compliance with the obligation of active transparency and the restric-

42 Sosa, Eugenio, et. al., "Honduras resiste en las calles", *Nueva Sociedad*, May, 2019, <https://nuso.org/articulo/honduras-juan-orlando-hernandez-protestas-derecha-salud-educacion/>

43 Sosa, Eugenio, et. al., "La lucha contra la privatización de la salud y la educación: una nueva ola de protestas que aumenta la crisis en Honduras", *Centro de Estudio para la Democracia*, May 31, 2019, <https://cespad.org.hn/2019/05/31/la-lucha-contr-la-privatizacion-de-la-salud-y-la-educacion-una-nueva-ola-de-protestas-que-aumenta-la-crisis-en-honduras/>

44 "Periodistas continúan siendo víctimas de agresión policial en manifestaciones", alert 067-2019, *C-Libre*, June 16, 2019, <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/alertas/agresiones-normativas/1024-periodistas-continuan-siendo-victimas-de-agresiones-policiales-en-choluteca>

45 *Idem*.

46 Executive Decree 021-2020, <https://www.presidencia.gob.hn/index.php/sala-de-prensa/7016-decreto-ejecutivo-numero-pcm-021-2020>

47 "El gobierno hondureño declara estado de emergencia y suspende el derecho a la libertad de expresión", *Committee to Protect Journalists*, March 20, 2020, <https://cpj.org/es/2020/03/el-gobierno-hondureno-declara-el-estado-de-emergen>

48 "covid-19: escenario fértil para las violaciones y agresiones contra la prensa de Honduras", *Criterio.hn*, June 23, 2020, <https://criterio.hn/covid-19-escenario-fertil-para-las-violaciones-y-agresiones-contr-la-prensa-de-honduras/>

tions on journalists' access to press conferences by officials and to ask questions about the pandemic.⁴⁹

The latent threat of organized crime

The main perpetrators of reported aggressions against human rights defenders and journalists in Honduras are state agents, the police and the army, linked to non-state actors, for example organized crime. During the CIDH's 2018 visit to the country, the government reported that out of 66 cases of homicides against journalists since 2013, only 24 have been prosecuted and only eight have resulted in convictions. In 2019, this situation did not change, while threats and murders against community leaders and journalists have continued as a persistent practice, joined by mining companies, as in the case of the murder of community leaders Gerson Leiva and Lucas Bonilla, in La Ceibita, department of Colon, on February 7th.

One of the historical problems in the country which has led to numerous attacks against the press by various actors, mainly by organized crime groups is the conflict of Bajo Aguán, where journalist Nahúm Palacios was murdered in 2010, a crime that remains unpunished. At the same time, it is within the framework of this conflict that the impunity of aggressions against the press and other community actors has also generated self-censorship and managed to propagate the silence provoked by fear. Cases such as Palacios show the collaboration between authorities, perpetrators, and individuals to keep the attack unpunished and dissuade other members of the journalistic profession from addressing similar issues.

Another case is that of Santa Rosa de Copán, a territory on the border with Guatemala, where journalists prefer silence over saying something that compromises them and forces them to leave the region and safeguard their lives or integrity. In this "silenced zone", various factors limit free expression and produce a chilling effect, detonating self-censorship and reinforcing the tendency to carry out journalism that avoids reporting on issues of security, corruption or influence peddling, aligned with the government or power groups. This silencing also encompasses criticism of public affairs, so that public servants, security forces or private actors could be involved in reprisals against armed individuals who are criminals.

Corruption: a risk for journalism

In Honduras, corruption is not only found at the highest levels of government, but permeates all institutions and powers, and its investigation or coverage leads to various forms of violence against the press. There are testimonies from Honduran journalists that illustrate this situation, in which the interests of public officials and individuals are mixed to obtain political and/or economic benefits with the pressure to avoid publicity for these issues.

49 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH), "CIDH y su RELE expresan preocupación por las restricciones a la libertad de expresión y el acceso a la información en la respuesta de Estados a la pandemia de COVID-19", press release R78/20, April 18, 2020, <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/showarticle.asp?artid=1173&lid=>

The Mission of Support against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH by its acronym in Spanish)⁵⁰ managed to prosecute 14 cases of high impact corruption and accused 133 people as part of these cases.⁵¹ Its work resulted in the creation of a National Anti-Corruption System and showed how businessmen, politicians, religious leaders and the military used the state to benefit themselves economically. However, the agreement between the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Hernández government that made this possible was not renewed and disintegrated in January 2020. Although the MACCIH was limited by the lack of government support, it increased the population's interest in the fight against corruption and has strengthened the social demand to bring Juan Antonio Hernández, the president's brother, to justice for his alleged links since 2004 with drug trafficking figures in Mexico, Honduras and Colombia,⁵² making corruption one of the most recurrent themes in ARTICLE 19's interviews with the local press.

Male violence against female journalists

As in other countries in the region where macho violence and patriarchal narratives are prevalent, women journalists in Honduras experience a range of violence differentiated from that of their male colleagues, and the state does not have adequate mechanisms to address the problem from a gender and intersectional perspective. Unfortunately, it is not only the authorities, companies or organized crime that represent a threat to their work; there are also professional colleagues who – through labor inequality, misogynist comments and sexual violence – seek to silence them.

Moreover, public officials and government officials often adopt approaches that seek to blame them or stigmatize their behavior. They underestimate the seriousness of the attacks against them, while at the same time revictimizing them. There is no information or disaggregated data that permits the identification of motives and the differentiated impacts of the aggressions they experience, nor the effects on their rights to inform, seek, receive and disseminate information. However, violence expressed in traditional media and spaces is also present in the digital realm.

The experience of community radio stations

The current role of community radio in Honduras is mainly concentrated in the defense of natural resources. There are 870 conventional radio stations, between FM and AM, at a national

50 Coalition for the Renewal of the Conventions of MACCIH, “Por qué nació la MACCIH y por qué debe continuar”, 2019, p. 5, https://issuu.com/brisconte/docs/maqueta_maccih

51 Organization of American States (OEA), “Comunicado de la Secretaría General de la OEA sobre finalización de la MACCIH”, press release, OEA, January 17, 2020, https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=C-003/20

52 Santana, María, “Fiscales de Nueva York afirman que el Chapo Guzmán entregó un millón de dólares para campaña del presidente de Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernández”, CNN, October 2, 2019, <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2019/10/02/alerta-fiscales-en-ny-afirman-que-el-chapo-guzman-entrego-un-millon-de-dolares-para-campana-del-presidente-del-honduras-juan-orlando-hernandez/>

level, while community radio stations have only been assigned thirty frequencies, a very low number.⁵³ Since they are located in regions where the interests of corporations and public officials are at stake in the exploitation and development of mega-projects, these become spaces where the different actors of violence against the press (authorities, organized crime and companies) converge and where journalists carry out high-risk coverage.

The testimonies gathered by ARTICLE 19 regarding the violence faced by community media workers clearly show that the main aggressors are state agents, such as the police and the army, as well as non-state agents linked to criminality, which, in collusion with public officials, hinders and puts at risk those who carry out this type of journalistic exercise.

Examples of the importance of community radio are La Voz de Zacate Grande and Radio Cholula Triunfeña. These communication projects often serve as the only source of information in the regions where they operate. Their role becomes indispensable when the communities for which they work face situations related to the defense of their natural resources and territory. But, since they are the means by which communities publicize their struggles, they also tend to share the risks faced by those who oppose extractivism.

The National System for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators and Justice Workers

The existence of a degraded environment, in which public officials, business groups, and even criminal groups attack freedom of the press and access to information, led to the need to promote the creation of a Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators and Justice Workers and the Special Prosecutor's Office for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators and Justice Workers. This framework entered into force on May 15th, 2015, creating the National System for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators and Justice Workers.

Since its creation, the official figures of the Honduran government report a progressive growth in the number of requests for protection as well as a 30% increase in the allocated budget, in addition to an increase in the items destined to implement the necessary safeguard measures. Until February 2020, this protection mechanism was responsible for the cases of at least 67 journalists.

53 Morales, Tomy, "Radios comunitarias entre el acoso y la defensa del derecho a la libertad de expresión", *Pasos de Animal Grande*, July 21, 2016, <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/de/amenazas-a-la-libertad-de-expresion/item/1445-radios-comunitarias-entre-el-acoso-y-la-defensa-del-derecho-a-la-libertad-de-expresion/1445-radios-comunitarias-entre-el-acoso-y-la-defensa-del-derecho-a-la-libertad-de-expresion>

Restrictive or absent legal frameworks for freedom of expression and access to information

There is currently concern in Honduras due to the entry into force on June 30, 2020 of a new Criminal Code that hinders the exercise of freedom of the press. However, this is not the only legislation that obstructs the ability to investigate and disseminate information. There are a number of laws that have been used to limit the flow of information to society, such as the National Law on Cybersecurity and Protection Measures against Acts of Hate and Discrimination on the Internet and Social Networks, which is in its second debate. In addition, there is a lack of rules preventing the discretionary and disproportionate use of force and disproportionate restrictions on the right to protest.

This discretionary and disproportionate use of force is a constant in the testimonies of those who have covered the street protests from the 2009 coup years to date. Despite indications from civil society organizations and the standards promoted by the CIDH's Special Rapporteur on the importance of effective protest management by state institutions⁵⁴, there are no progressive initiatives to modify the protocol on the use of force in the context of demonstrations for all forces involved in controlling and containing them. The OHCHR has advised the adoption of international principles for managing social protest, as well as the avoidance of legislation that restricts civic space, although its calls have not been widely echoed by government and security forces.

The existence of frameworks that restrict freedom of expression and access to information such as those referred to above not only demonstrate the tools that the state has at its disposal and that it intends to use to inhibit critical voices, but also an intention to adapt to modern times and their modes of communication in order to control these new spaces and prevent them from being zones free of restrictions for dissent and the exposure of failures in their obligations.

Honduras: a history of resistance

Although the Honduran journalistic guild currently has defense mechanisms such as the National System for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators and Justice Workers, and of the Attorney General's Office for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators and Justice Workers, it has had to face violence and impunity from the police forces in the coverage of protests and in the communication of various environmental struggles, as well as pressure from officials colluding with extractive companies and organized crime groups, in addition to the conditioning of official advertising contracts, factors that create an adverse context for journalistic work. This hostile situation is compounded by the uncertainty of those who are incorporated into the National Protection System, since they consider that the safeguards provided have been insufficient and their implementation has been hindered by excessive bureaucratic processes.

54 Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, (CIDH), "Protesta y derechos humanos", OEA/Ser.L/V/II CIDH/RELE/INF.22/19, September, 2019, par. 100, p. 41, <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/publicaciones/ProtestayDerechosHumanos.pdf>

In addition, restrictive legal frameworks that seek to limit free expression—such as the Law for the Classification of Public Documents Related to National Security and Defense, and the Law on Cybersecurity, in addition to the lack of strong regulation of the use of force, and especially a reform of the Criminal Code that continues to criminalize journalistic work and closes channels for its free development – raise the need for the government of Honduras to refrain from continuing to send contradictory messages and to take decisive action to protect the press in accordance with the highest human rights standards.

CONCLUSIONS

Cuba, Guatemala and Honduras have been subject to a history of repression derived from very diverse causes that are hardly comparable. However, the effect of authoritarianism in its various forms on freedom of expression is fatal, not only because of the human losses that occur in countries such as Guatemala and Honduras when a journalist is murdered or because of the self-censorship produced by systematic arrests and surveillance in Cuba, but also because of the repercussions of the lack of information on the exercise of rights. Unfortunately, in these countries, the generalization of silence caused by governments through various forms of pressure on the press has a very high cost that citizens end up paying with disinformation.

In Cuba, constitutional recognition of democracy means little when freedoms are subject to obedience and compliance with the formal and informal guidelines of the socialist state and its representatives. In that country, the situation of freedom of expression is particularly serious, since although there are no reports of murders or disappearances of journalists, as in the other two other nations analyzed in this report, the terrain in which journalism is practiced makes its development almost impossible. Any communicator who does not adapt to the official rules and does not belong to the guild recognized by the State is subject to imprisonment, intimidation, threats and systematic surveillance, which often leads to social death. The capture of the media through the state monopoly, the obligatory membership and the lack of recognition of independent journalism are elements that, without a doubt, truncate any possibility of access to diverse and plural information in Cuba and, therefore, of democratic development. Nevertheless, the potential of the Internet has managed to connect Cubans with each other and with other realities.

Guatemala, for its part, has experienced a long process of institutional weakening and marginalization that has generated high levels of insecurity and violence. CICIG's attempts at institutional rebuilding were not as far-reaching as desired in the fight against impunity, and its work was cut short by the non-renewal of its mandate. Smear campaigns and the use of surveillance technologies to attack journalists is a common way to impose silence, mainly when communicators are attacked. In addition, community radio projects face particularly serious challenges arising from the State's failure to recognize their need and importance for the dissemination of public interest information in the most remote and vulnerable communities. The arrival of Alejandro Giammattei to power in 2020 seems to represent the continuity of the repression that has been experienced in recent years against the press and human rights defenders.

In Honduras, the problems faced by the press result from the projection of decades of societal struggles and the failed responses of the state to address them. With different levels of risk and types of aggressors, journalists face both violence from police and military security forces when covering protests, as well as threats from officials and organized crime when they reveal corruption or negligence, as well as the sabotage of community radio stations and the constant threat of their closure. In addition, there is the differentiated violence suffered

daily by women journalists, who are not only victims of adverse conditions for carrying out their work, but also of working environments that serve as spaces for the suppression of their rights.

Fear of imprisonment, disappearance and death are sufficient elements for silencing, especially when they are carried out with total impunity. Aggressions against the press in Cuba, Guatemala and Honduras guarantee the concealment of the message and the silencing of the messenger, thus limiting society's possibility of participating in civic space and exercising its rights. Therefore, we can say that without a press that can work freely we are only witnessing a simulation of democracy.

