

via fax: 011 57 1 283 9876 Sr. Juan Fernando Cristo Minister of the Interior of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 570 2000 Sr. Eduardo Montealegre Attorney General of Colombia
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November 26, 2014

Dear Sirs:

We are outraged at the attack on journalist **Oscar Castaño Valencia**, director of the program "Oriéntese" on the TV station *Cosmovisión*, on November 12.

For the past three months he has been investigating child sexual exploitation activities by the criminal groups known as "combos" in the town of Bello in Antioquia Department. He was on his way to meet a source when he was attacked by three armed and masked men. He was tied up, threatened, beaten, and forced to sign a "confession" that he had gone there with the intention of raping an under-age girl. The attackers made a recording of the forced confession, then let him go, telling him his life was at stake.

The combos are extremely violent and well known to the elite GAULA police units that specialize in cases of abduction and extortion. A GAULA unit carried out a raid in the area where Castaño was attacked a few days later.

After the attack, Castaño lodged a complaint with the state prosecutor's office in Medellín, the capital of Antioquia, and asked the government for protection. He had previously been threatened when he was head of the trade union of the Colombian National University and was forced into exile for nine years in 1987. In 2011, he was threatened again after he made a documentary about disputes over mining activities.

Since the beginning of this year, there has been an increase in threats against journalists in Colombia. The Office of the Defender of the Colombian People, a national body created to promote human rights, reports that it has recorded twice as many reports of threats against journalists this year as compared with 2013.

Because we believe the lives of Oscar Castaño Valencia and his family are in danger, we **strongly urge** that you

- immediately provide effective protection to him and his family, in accordance with his wishes
- ensure that attacks on journalists do not go unpunished.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

copies: Luis Carlos Villegas, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
 Kevin Whitaker, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011.571.275.4600
 Eric Falls, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.2628
 José de Jesús Orozco Hernández, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 Rosa María Ortiz, Rapporteur on the Rights of the Child, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3650
 Edison Lanza, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3650
 US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email
 US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

RWB_11/17/14_Colombia

The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: