

Paraguay UPR Pre session
Presentation by Fabián Werner, IFEX-ALC
March 2021

Good morning, my name is Fabián Werner. I am a journalist and human rights defender, and I am representing the Coordinating Committee of IFEX alliance in Latin America and the Caribbean.

During the previous UPR cycle, we submitted a joint report with the *Sindicato de Periodistas de Paraguay* (Paraguayan Journalists Union, SPP) in which we presented nine freedom of expression recommendations directed toward the Paraguayan government.

All of them were adopted by the examining countries and the Paraguayan State responded favourably regarding its intentions to comply with the recommendations.

Eight of the recommendations addressed the need to adopt effective measures for investigating attacks on journalists, as well as putting an end to impunity, maintaining a safe environment for practicing journalism and protecting freedom of expression in general.

Unfortunately, at this time we must say that freedom of expression continues to be threatened in Paraguay. Since 2016 two journalists have been killed – one in March 2016 and the other in February 2020.

The perpetrators of these crimes have not been brought to justice. And the same can be said with respect to 17 other journalist assassinations that have taken place since 1991. Since that year, only two cases of journalist assassinations have been resolved.

Cases involving threats, online harassment, stigmatisation, judicial harassment and even sexual violence also add to the climate of impunity.

Many of these cases include a clear gender component, demonstrating that work-related difficulties are much more pronounced for women journalists.

In addition, there are cases of judicial harassment, cases where communications have been intercepted in order to determine the identity of sources of information. And a rise of organised crime elements, this situation results in increased insecurity for journalists who cover politics and policing, particularly in the areas bordering Brazil.

Taking into consideration these circumstances, the IFEX alliance for Latin America and the Caribbean and the *Sindicato de Periodistas de Paraguay*, see a need to present the following recommendations:

Firstly, strengthen the Roundtable for Journalist Safety, providing it with a budget and an adequate institutional framework.

Accelerate parliamentary consideration and approval of the Law for Protection of Journalists and Human Rights Defenders, with guarantees for broad participation by all the sectors involved in protecting journalists and defending freedom of expression.

We also insist on the urgent need to grant the Human Rights Unit of the Public Prosecutor's Office the authority to investigate crimes against journalists until such time as a specialised prosecutorial office or unit is created, in accordance with the recommendation from the previous UPR cycle.

These measures are essential in order to end impunity for crimes against journalists and discourage the commission of these crimes in the future.

Finally, we would like to reiterate the recommendation to create a Truth Commission to investigate all cases of journalist assassinations in Paraguay since 1991. The Commission must be independent and its activities should complement the work conducted in the criminal investigations.

Rapid, thorough and effective investigations must be conducted into the 17 journalist assassination cases that have not been resolved, while reparation measures and guarantees of non-repetition must be established.

In summary, the very existence of the right to freedom of expression, and consequently the democratic health of Paraguay, depends on a firm and ongoing State commitment to ending impunity for crimes against journalists. Guarantees must also be provided for a secure environment for journalists to carry out their legitimate work, free from threats, violence or risk of assassination.

Thank you very much.