10-22-2014

Social-Media Activist Killed for Reporting on Activities of Criminal Organizations in Tamaulipas

Carlos Navarro

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex

Recommended Citation


This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
Social-Media Activist Killed for Reporting on Activities of Criminal Organizations in Tamaulipas

by Carlos Navarro
Category/Department: Mexico
Published: 2014-10-22

The campaign by social-media activists to shine the spotlight on the activities of organized crime and on police and official corruption in Tamaulipas took a tragic turn when one of the leaders of the Twitter-based community Valor por Tamaulipas was kidnapped and murdered. María del Rosario Fuentes Rubio, whose was known publicly only through her Twitter name of @Miut3, was apparently kidnapped on the morning of Oct. 15, and her body was discovered in Reynosa the next day.

In a message on its Facebook site, Valor por Tamaulipas confirmed that the body belonged to Fuentes Rubio, who was a physician. "With great regret and deep pain, I confirm that our companion @Miut3 was deprived of her liberty yesterday morning, and with horror we noticed today that her account was used [by unknown individuals] to post photos and messages [of her death]," said the author of a post on the Valor por Tamaulipas Facebook site. "She was an angel who gave up her future, her safety, and her sense of peace to work for the well-being of our state."

Fuentes Rubio used the hashtag #Reynosafollow through Valor por Tamaulipas and the Responsabilidad por Tamaulipas sites to report and send alerts on the activities of organized crime. The tweets from the two organizations became a valuable source of information for many citizens, since criminal organizations had succeeding in shutting down this type of coverage in the traditional media. Because of threats, many newspapers and broadcast outlets in areas dominated by organized crime have practiced self-censorship (SourceMex, May 18, 2011). This practice continues despite protections approved by the Senate in 2012 to protect journalists and communicators (SourceMex, March 21, 2012).

Communicators on social media have also reported receiving threats, particularly in Tamaulipas (SourceMex, Feb. 20, 2013), but many have been able to operate underground because of the anonymity provided by some platforms like Twitter.

Still, criminal organizations such as the Zetas had threatened to find and harm social-media communicators, a concern that journalist organizations like the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters without Borders (RSF) have frequently raised to Mexican authorities.

A series of threats forced the owners of the Twitter account that posted under the hashtag #VigilantesM to shut down their operation, which provided information about public safety in Tamaulipas.

RSF said corrupt officials and police might be helping the criminal organizations identify the people involved with Valor por Tamaulipas and Responsabilidad por Tamaulipas. "A blogger who is one of the leading users of #Reynosafollow, a Twitter network where a great deal of information about organized crime is posted, reported on July 21 that he has become the target of threats and smears on social networks," RSF said in a report published in August.
The blogger—who tweets as @MrCruzStar and uses the blog name of "Chuy News" to protect his identify—claims he was falsely accused by anonymous social-network users of being a leader of the halcones or hawks—individuals who report police activity to the drug traffickers. The users also charged the blogger of putting together meetings for criminal organizations in Reynosa.

One user also posted @MrCruzStar’s alleged photo online in July, risking the anonymity he had enjoyed until then. The blogger said the false accusations and the threats are the result of his criticism of the anti-drug-trafficking operations of the Tamaulipas and federal authorities.

Members of the traditional news outlets who have used social media are also targets in Tamaulipas. Journalist Julia Leduc, who has worked as a reporter for W Radio Tamaulipas and the daily newspapers El Mañanero and La Jornada, has tweeted frequently about the activities of criminal organizations in Tamaulipas. She has also been the subject of intense harassment and threats on her life.

"We condemn this intimidation," said Camille Soulier, who heads RSF’s Americas desk. "The free flow of independently reported information is the first step in combating corruption. It is essential that the Mexican government should take measures to protect those who circulate such information."

@Miut3’s final message

The perpetrators of Fuentes Rubio’s murder sent a message in her name to her colleagues or forced her to write a message before killing her. Pictures of the deceased doctor accompanied the message. "Friends and family, my real name is María del Rosario Fuentes Rubio, and I am a doctor," said @Miut3. "Today, as my life is coming to an end, I have no other choice than to warn you not to commit the same mistake as I did, because there is nothing to gain. On the contrary, today I have learned that I met my death in exchange for nothing."

The message then issued a warning to @Bandolera7, @Civilarmado_mx, and @ValorTamaulipas, pointing out that "they are closer to us than you’d think. Please shut down your accounts, don’t risk your lives like I did. I ask your forgiveness."

Members of Valor por Tamaulipas confirmed that the pictures of the body belong to their comrade. However, they also issued a defiant response. "Today, @Miut3 stopped reporting. What the criminals do not know is that @Miut3 is in our souls and she won’t allow us to surrender to organized crime."

Attacks on traditional media continue unabated in Mexico

Despite the increased attention on the plight of journalists in Mexico, members of the news media remain in peril, particularly in areas controlled by criminal organizations. At least nine journalists were killed in Mexico in 2013 (SourceMex, Feb. 5, 2014), and a similar number might have been murdered this year. The international journalists’ rights organizations RSF and the CPJ both include reporter Gregorio Jiménez de la Cruz of the daily Liberal del Sur in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz state, on their global lists of journalists killed this year. The CPJ also listed the murder of Jorge Torres Palacios, who was affiliated with the publications Dictamen and Libertad Guerrero Noticias in Guerrero state.

Other reports this year also pointed to the murders and/or disappearances of several other print and broadcast journalists. The victims include Benjamín Galván Gómez and Adrián Gaona Belmonte in
Tamaulipas; Octavio Atlalco Román Tirado, Julián Bacasegua Castro, and Jesús Antonio Gamboa Urías in Sinaloa; Nolberto Herrera Rodríguez in Zacatecas; Marlén Valdez García in Nuevo León; and Octavio Rojas Hernández in Oaxaca.

In addition to the murders, journalists have been subject to extreme acts of intimidation. In September of this year, unknown assailants brutally attacked reporter Karla Janeth Silva, 24, of the daily newspaper El Heraldo de León in Guanajuato state. The attackers invaded the newspaper office at a time when only Silva and a secretary were working. The perpetrators beat her in the face and head while warning her to tone down her coverage, which Mayor Enrique Benjamín Solís Arzola of the nearby community of Silao found objectionable.

Solís Arzola had on several occasions warned Silva to write articles that were less critical of his administration and also refused to give her interviews. Silva, who had written several articles about crime and insecurity in Silao and the lack of transparency in the management of local government funds, filed a complaint with police.

Solís Arzola, a member of the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), denied that he had anything to do with the attacks on Silva, even though the attackers clearly battered Silva on behalf of the mayor. "I would like to put myself at the disposal of authorities who are coordinating this investigation so we can clarify this incident, which I consider very serious," said Solís Arzola.

Several organizations condemned the attack on Silva, including the Mexican affiliate of the British-based journalists’ rights organization Article 19, the Inter-American Press Association (IAPA), and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). "Mexican authorities [must] take urgent action to establish the motive of the attack, activate all the legal instruments available to punish the perpetrators behind this crime, and take necessary measures to protect the journalist," said a statement from the IACHR’s Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression.

Article 19 said the attack on Silva was not an isolated case, as 87 separate complaints of harassment of journalists by public officials were recorded in just the three-month period between April and June of this year.

Other organizations, including the Red Internacional de Periodistas con Visión de Género (RIPVG), the Red Nacional de Periodistas (RNP), and Comunicación e Información de la Mujer (CIMAC), have demanded immediate action from Guanajuato Gov. Miguel Márquez, urging him to "protect a life and defend the right of journalists to freely exercise their profession."

Gov. Márquez, a member of the center-right Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), promised to conduct a thorough investigation and impose sanctions on the responsible parties.

RSF reported other instances where journalists have been threatened, including the case of Gustavo Sánchez Cabrera, director general the online news site La Policiaca del Istmo, based in Salina Cruz, Oaxaca. An RSF report said Sánchez Cabrera has received a series of death threats over a period of several months, and authorities have done nothing to address the issue even though the journalist presented the case to the special prosecutor’s office in charge of protecting journalists (Fiscalía Especial de Atención a los Delitos contra la Libertad de Expresión, FEADLE).

In a second example, RSF said Marta Durán de Huerta, a Mexico correspondent for Radio Nederland and a writer for the news magazine Proceso, has also received death threats, likely related to her coverage of organized crime in Mexico. Durán lodged a complaint with Mexico City’s
semi-independent human rights commission (Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal, CDHDF).

-- End --