



November 13, 2008

Juarez reporter killed, while his daughter sits next to him

by Sito Negron

Armando Rodriguez, who covered crime and the Juarez cartels for El Diario de Juarez, was killed in his car in front of his home as he prepared to take his daughter to school.

The killing, even in a year of extreme violence, shocked observers on both sides of the border.

"Armando had been working the police beat in Juarez for many years, and despite the fact that he worked in an environment that makes it very difficult to keep your integrity; he was an honest reporter who would never compromise his professionalism in exchange for money or safety for his family," said Elhiu Dominguez, a former reporter who now is the spokesman for the El Paso County Attorney's office. "It's easy to assume that someone who gets killed in a very violent way was somehow involved with the drug cartels. Armando was not. I can only guess that he was killed because he knew too much about what is going on in Juarez."

What is going on in Juarez is a drug war that has killed more than 1,000 people since the beginning of the year. While the city has undergone spasms of violence before -- in the 1990s, for example, with the infamous 1997 Max-Fim massacre [link](#) and other killings, when Juarez Cartel leader Amado Carrillo Fuentes died and a power struggle ensued -- the scale of killings this year is beyond anything Juarez residents have seen.

In addition to the cartel wars, the violence has destabilized the community, leading to more street crime in general.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, although his killing had the earmarks of a cartel hit -- the approach by a gunman, who shot him in the white Nissan given him by Diario, then fled to a waiting car. In addition, there were reports that Rodriguez had been threatened for his work.

El Diario de Juarez is the leading newspaper in Juarez, the fifth-largest city in Mexico. Diario issued the following statement, attributed to Pedro Torres, deputy editorial director of Diario: "This is not an attack against Diario; it is an attack against freedom of speech. We are going through a very sad moment with the death of Armando Rodriguez." It was not clear from his recent stories what he might have been working on that would have made him a target.

Among his stories recently was coverage of the headless body strung from a Juarez overpass, one of the signs of out-of-control violence. The head of the body was left on the statue of a newsboy in the Plaza del Periodista -- the Plaza of the Journalist. People, young and old, men and women, have been gunned down en masse in public places, and -- a la Iraq -- the cartels have taken to beheadings.

While Mexico is considered one of the most dangerous places in the world for reporters to work, Juarez had not seen such a high-profile murder (although police officials, usually working for or against the cartels, have been killed).

But, said Dominguez, who said he last spoke to Rodriguez a year ago, "The drug cartels in Juarez have been intimidating reporters as a way to control the flow of information put out by the media. I know many Juarez reporters who are afraid for their safety and are thinking about changing careers. Armando's murder will send a chilling message to all of them."

Part of the reason is a word that is becoming a fixed part of the vocabulary whenever anyone speaks of Juarez -- impunity.

"I don't have the slightest hope that the assassins will be caught, or that Armando's murder will be solved. To authorities, this will be just another murder, another number to add to the deadly statistics," Dominguez said.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, an international organization that tracks reporter safety throughout the world, issued a statement shortly after Rodriguez's death.

"We mourn the death of veteran crime reporter Armando Rodríguez and present our deepest condolences to friends and family," said Carlos Lauría, CPJ's senior program coordinator for the Americas. "The unprecedented wave of violence against the Mexican press must be halted immediately. We urge state and federal authorities to promptly investigate Rodríguez' slaying and bring those responsible to justice. Mexico needs to break the cycle of impunity in crimes against journalists."

The center [logged four killings of journalists](#) in Mexico prior to Rodriguez's death this morning:

-- Teresa Bautista Merino, La Voz que Rompe el Silencio, and Felicitas Martínez Sánchez, La Voz que Rompe el Silencio, April 7, 2008, Putla de Guerrero.

-- Alejandro Zenón Fonseca Estrada, EXA FM, Sept. 24, 2008, Villahermosa.

-- Miguel Angel Villagómez Valle, La Noticia de Michoacán, Oct. 10, 2008, between Lázaro Cárdenas and Zihuatanejo.

Zoltan Csanyi, news director for the Spanish-language KINT Channel 26, the only El Paso television newsroom with a full-time Juarez reporter, said that his station will continue to have a presence in the city.

"First of all, our prayers go out to the family of Armando Rodriguez, and our thoughts are with our colleagues at the Diario and with all the journalists across the border," Csanyi said. "We have told our Juarez reporter, who has covered news for Channel 26 for about 15 years, to use extreme caution while doing his job.

"Unfortunately, we have to cover the violence that's happening and have done so on a daily basis, but our coverage has been and remains just reporting the facts of the story," he said. "We also cover other news that's happening in Juarez, there are lot of positive stories, not just the violence."

Rodriguez was married and had three children, according to stories on the Diario Web site. He was born in 1968 in Camargo, Chihuahua, and moved to Juarez in 1986. He graduated from Universidad Autonoma de Chihuahua, Campus Cd. Juarez, with a degree in communications.

Rodriguez, an amateur cyclist known as "El Choco" among his friends and co-workers, worked for Canal 44, Canal 56, and Norte before hiring on at Diario in 1993.

He was very well known, and dozens of fellow journalists left comments on the Diario Web site about the killing. [\[link\]](#)

-- From Edgar Román, de Canal 44: "Considero que (la muerte de Armando Rodríguez) es un ataque al gremio periodístico. 'Choco' tenía muchos años en el medio periodístico y tenía muchos años de tratarlo. Es lamentable para su familia y para los medios." (*"I consider the death of Armando Rodriguez an attack on the news and media community. Choco (Armando's nickname) had been in the media business for many many years and I personally got to know him. It is a very sad moment for his family and also for the news and media."*)

-- From reporter Amado Meneses: "Descanse en paz un hombre bueno, esposo de una gran mujer y padre de niños bien educados y buenos como sus progenitores. Estos desgraciados ya le pegaron a las autoridades, a las escuelas, a las iglesias y ahora a la prensa ... no habrá qui los pare? Qué lameantable que estemos viviendo esta pesadilla." (*"Rest in peace a great man, a great husband married to a great woman and the father of very*

well-educated and well-behaved children, just like their parents. These inhumane individuals have already hit authorities, schools, churches and now the press will anybody be able to stop them? It is a shame that we all are living this nightmare.")