

World's Press welcomes Ecuador pardon, but...

PARIS, FRANCE / DARMSTADT, GERMANY: The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum have welcomed Ecuador President Rafael Correa's decision to pardon the executives and former opinion editor of the *El Universo* newspaper, but said the charges and conviction should never have occurred in the first place.



"We are delighted that President Correa has decided to issue a pardon, but the charges should never have been issued and the Ecuadorean courts should never have levied jail sentences and a US\$40 million fine," the global organisations said in a statement.

"We are also pleased that the president has decided to withdraw a separate suit against Juan Carlos Calderón and Christian Zurita, two journalists who were ordered to pay US\$2 million," the statement said. "Jail sentences and excessive fines have a chilling effect on the press and violate all standards of freedom of expression. We call on the president to ensure that Ecuador reforms its libel laws to conform to international standards."

Ecuador's National Court of Justice earlier this month upheld a libel judgment, a US\$40 million fine and 3-year prison sentences against *El Universo* and its directors Carlos, César and Nicolas Pérez. Two of them fled the country, while a third took refuge in the Panamanian Embassy in Quito.

In exile following article

The origin of the claim was an article critical of the President entitled "Stop the lies" of 6 February 2011 written by the newspaper's former opinion editor, Emilio Palacio, who is currently exiled in the United States following his sentence of three years in prison in December 2011.

In the separate case, a regional civil court sentenced journalists Juan Carlos Calderón and Christian Zurita on 6 February 2012 to pay 1 million dollars each in moral damages to the President, following the publication of an article on cases of official corruption and alleged knowledge of it by the president.

"We hope this decision will put an end to the climate of hostility and polarization between the government and the media, and usher an era of renewed dialogue between all parties," the statement said.

WAN-IFRA conducted a five-day mission to Ecuador in November and found "an increasing polarization and climate of hostility amongst media professionals and society as a whole". A report on the mission issued in January said the government was carrying out "a sophisticated strategy of marginalizing all voices independent of state power."

The full report can be found [here](#).

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