

THE
CARTER CENTER



FINAL REPORT

First Meeting
of Media Professionals
from Colombia and Venezuela

**Caracas, Venezuela
November 23, 2010**

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I. Introduction

To analyze and discuss characteristics of coverage of issues related to bilateral relations between Venezuela and Colombia by the media in both countries – and thus contribute to efforts to improve diplomatic relations between the two nations – the Andean-U.S. Dialogue Forum’s Media Working Group, in conjunction with the Program to Strengthen Journalism in Venezuela, organized three meetings of professionals from key media outlets in both countries.

The meetings targeted high-level members of those media outlets, particularly directors, managers and editors and journalists. Based on the format designed for the meetings, academics specializing in the study of bilateral relations between the two countries were also invited.

This report summarizes the issues discussed in the first meeting, held in Caracas in late November 2010, including the key achievements and agreements.

II. Summary of the First Meeting

The first meeting to encourage dialogue among high-level media representatives from Colombia and Venezuela was held in Caracas on November 23, 2010. Venezuelan editors and managers representing both government-aligned and opposition media, as well as Colombian professionals from a wide range of media outlets in Colombia, participated in the dialogue (see Annex B).

The agenda for the event focused on analysis and discussion of two main issues: the nature of bilateral relations between Colombia and Venezuela and characteristics of media coverage of those relations (see Annex A).

II.1. Context

Since 1830, when Venezuela separated from what was then called Gran Colombia, relations between the two countries have been marked by periods of closeness and distancing.

With the inauguration of Presidents Hugo Chávez Frías in Venezuela and Alvaro Uribe in Colombia between 1999 and 2002, that historical cycle of rapprochement and disengagement reached new levels. Led by two highly popular, charismatic, media-savvy presidents with a marked tendency to take personal charge of foreign policy, the two countries broke off diplomatic relations in mid-2010 after a long and bitter dispute that included the exchange of insults, accusations and threats.¹

¹ The disengagement was triggered by the Colombian armed forces’ bombing of a camp used by one FARC leader Raúl Reyes in Ecuador in early March 2008. The day after the attack on the guerrilla leader’s camp was made public, President Chávez ordered the deployment of 10 armored battalions to the Colombian-Venezuelan border.

But after the 2010 election campaign in Colombia, in which Juan Manuel Santos won the runoff, relations took a sharp turn. Although Santos' statements during the campaign gave reason to assume that the conflict would continue, the two presidents agreed to a surprising shift in the two countries' foreign policy. Meeting in Santa Marta, Colombia, in August 2010, they took an unexpected step toward reestablishing bilateral relations, with what would later become known as the policy of "the two new good friends." Not unexpectedly, concerns related to the countries' shared 2,050-kilometer border played a key role in the new turn in Colombian-Venezuelan relations.

This first of three "bilateral" meetings of Colombian and Venezuelan journalists was held against this backdrop of renewed cooperation between the two countries. The specific objective was to contribute to mutual understanding, as well as analysis of the media during this cycle of rapprochement and disengagement between the two countries.

II.2. Bilateral relations

At the opening session of the event, Pavel Rondón, former Venezuelan ambassador to Colombia (2005-2006), gave a keynote address on the characteristics of relations between Venezuela and Colombia in the past ten years. The address was followed by a period of discussion coordinated by Ana María Sanjuán (Venezuela) and Socorro Ramírez (Colombia), and a general discussion among the participants moderated by Venezuelan journalist Vladimir Villegas.



Commentators Ana María Sanjuán and Socorro Ramírez, speaker Pavel Rondón and Jennifer McCoy (Carter Center)

During the discussion, participants agreed that Colombian-Venezuelan relations could be considered "fragile," "unstable" and "vulnerable." As one participant noted, although those relations were at a high point when the meeting was held, no one could be certain that they would continue at that level in the future (although at least one participant expressed optimism that, since the meeting of the two presidents in Santa Marta, when, in his view, the underlying reasons for the distancing were removed, "lasting relations" could be expected in the future).

There was a marked tendency to attribute the "fragility," "instability" or "vulnerability" to highly "personalized" relations. In other words, the tendency was attributed to the fact that, in recent years, the direction or development of those relations depended largely on the personalities, or the interplay of the personalities, of Presidents Hugo Chávez and Alvaro Uribe. However, one participant noted that the historical record shows that such fragility could be considered a historical tendency, especially because of the influence of security considerations on those relations.

Regardless of the reasons for the fragility (of which there are various), all participants agreed that the great challenge today for binational relations between Colombia and Venezuela is the institutionalization, or reinstitutionalization, of those relations, if one can consider that there was a greater degree of institutionalization in the past.

II.3. Coverage of bilateral relations



Héctor Vanolli (Carter Center), Javier Dario Restrepo (moderator) and Jennifer McCoy (Carter Center).

The afternoon session focused on discussion of media coverage of the bilateral agenda between Colombia and Venezuela. Considering the predominance of personal relationships over legal and institutional elements in bilateral relations, the discussion on media coverage of bilateral issues focused on what journalists could do within that framework. Although there was general agreement that journalism should play a positive and constructive role in the strengthening and institutionalization of relations, there was a rich discussion about the way in which journalism could or should contribute to that task.

In the view of some participants, it is not the role of journalists, to “help strengthen relations,” “contribute to integration,” “support the strengthening of those relations” or “support integration.” The role of journalism, in the opinion of some of the participants, is only to perform its role as watchdog well.

The general conclusion was that the contribution that journalists could make to improving or strengthening relations is simply to do good journalism. The moderator even suggested a direct correlation between poor-quality journalism and poor relations. The best way to contribute to good relations, therefore, is to engage in high-quality journalism (the deterioration or success of relations between the two countries is partly tied to the whether media coverage is high quality or mediocre).

There was a great diversity of views about the quality of coverage, depending on whether the participants were Colombian or Venezuelan. Participants from Venezuela agreed that because Venezuela is a “country with two faces,” in which there are two completely different views of what the country is, or what it should be. Venezuelan journalism is necessarily “binary,” daily and systematically representing two “completely opposite and contradictory” realities. Coverage of binational relations is not exempt from this. The participants agreed that during the past, confrontation between Presidents Chávez and Uribe, the type of coverage depended, to a certain extent, on “which side of the road” the media were on. Media outlets that identified with the opposition generally tended to highlight – more or less automatically – the positions of the Colombian president, discrediting or giving less weight to the positions of Venezuela’s president, while those that identified with the government tended – also automatically – to acritically accept and

disseminate the official Venezuelan position. In both cases, the reasonableness or sustainability of the opposing position was denied.

The Colombian participants also emphasized the problems faced by Colombian journalists in covering a process that was markedly influenced by the personalities of Presidents Chávez and Uribe – problems that were often difficult, if not impossible, to surmount. As one participant put it, coverage by the Colombian media was simply “dragged along” by the strength of that “personalism.”

Those reflections led to discussion of the problems journalists face in covering highly personalized processes. The questions raised included: What tools do journalists have for addressing this phenomenon? What effect do “media-savvy” presidents have on the regular coverage of issues that concern the people of both countries?

The discussion raised a long list of issues, including:

- a) The combination of information and propaganda.
- b) The predominance in journalistic coverage of partisan interests or those of other interest groups over the public interest.
- c) Coverage of processes characterized by constant strident statements (what to do with those statements, how to cover them, how to avoid being manipulated, how to avoid becoming mere “repeaters” of those statements).
- d) How should journalists handle figures that have a strong media attraction, so as not to be manipulated by that attraction?
- e) Instantaneous journalism – as Javier Darío Restrepo pointed out – merely limits itself to telling facts, forgetting Pulitzer’s great recommendation: being a journalist is not merely a matter of recounting the news.
- f) The increasingly corporate nature of journalism (the technological revolution and the economic crisis have made the media more dependent than before on advertisers, and even on public enterprises or governments, which also tend to manipulate them).
- g) Private enterprise and the role of journalism (the role of private enterprise in the quality of coverage).
- h) Journalism as a business, a source of revenue and a means of expanding other enterprises within a business group (the desire to sell, rather than inform; editorial positions dictated by commercial interests).
- i) Problems with access to information.
- j) How do Colombian and Venezuelan journalists talk about what is happening?

- k) What sources are technically valid for journalists when covering Colombian or Venezuelan affairs?
- l) Can journalists from one side or the other be considered valid sources?

III. Achievements and agreements



Participants and organizers of the first meeting of journalists.

The meeting brought together high-profile managers and editors from the public and private sectors in Colombia and Venezuela to discuss the quality of media coverage of bilateral issues by some of the major media outlets in the two countries. The meeting facilitated both an exchange of views about critical issues related to journalism and mutual understanding of problems and difficulties facing the media in both countries.

Because of the deep polarization in Venezuela, it is very difficult to organize meetings in which both sectors participate. Political and ideological differences between the two groups tend to be seen as irreconcilable, because there is no common ground that can serve as a basis for discussing opposing viewpoints. Professionals who identify with the “Bolivarian” process tend not to meet with professionals who question or oppose that process, and vice versa. The first meeting between Colombian and Venezuelan journalists therefore allowed the exchange of views not only between Colombian and Venezuelan editors and managers, but also between Venezuelan editors and managers of public (government-aligned) and private (closer to the opposition) media, which should be considered an important added benefit, given the high degree of polarization in Venezuela (see Annexes B and C).

The key agreements of the first meeting included:

- a) Preparation of an analysis of the news content of media in both countries during a period to be determined, so discussions in the next meeting can be based on concrete studies.
- b) The next meeting will be held in Bogotá, Colombia, on February 15, 2011.
- c) A third meeting will be held in a city on the border between the two countries (Cúcuta or Maracaibo) to discuss issues related to coverage of border issues and how coverage of binational issues affects residents in those areas.

ANNEXES

Annex A: Meeting agenda

First Meeting of Journalists
from Venezuela and Colombia
Caracas, Venezuela, November 23, 2010

PROGRAM		
Morning session	8:30am	Participant registration
	9:00am	Opening Jennifer McCoy Director of the Americas Program, Carter Center
		Introduction of participants Héctor Vanolli Coordinator of the Program to Strengthen Journalism, Carter Center
	9:20am	Overview of Colombian-Venezuelan bilateral relations
		Presentation Pavel Rondón Former Venezuelan ambassador to Colombia
		Comments Socorro Ramírez (Colombia) Ana María Sanjuán (Venezuela)
	10:10am	Discussion among participants Moderator: Vladimir Villegas (Venezuela)
Afternoon session	12:30pm	Lunch
	2:00pm	Role of the media in Colombian-Venezuelan relations Discussion among participants Impact / contribution of the media to bilateral relations Lessons, experiences, examples, challenges, Recommendations, Conclusions
	5:30pm	Moderator: Javier Darío Restrepo (Colombia) Cocktail

PLACE: RIO RUPUNUMI ROOM, LEVEL L1, SOL MELIÁ HOTEL, CARACAS

Annex B: Participant list

NAME	POSITION	MEDIA OUTLET	COUNTRY
Aram Aharonian	Independent		arachin@gmail.com
Silvia Alegrett	President	Colegio Nacional de Periodistas (CNP)	salegrettcnp2@gmail.com
Vladimir Villegas	Journalist	Unión Radio	hvil46@hotmail.com
Maria Ines Delgado	Assistant managing editor	Panorama (Zulia)	mdelgado@panodi.com
Omar Lugo	Director	El Mundo Economía y Negocios	olugo@cadena-capriles.com
Elsy Barroeta	Information chief	Globovisión	ebarroeta@globovision.com
Ernesto Villegas	Director	Ciudad Caracas CCS	villegascorreo@gmail.com
Elides Rojas	Managing editor	El Universal	erojas@eluniversal.com
Eleazar Díaz Rangel	Director	Ultimas Noticias	diazrangel33@gmail.com
Maryclen Stelling	Academic	Observatorio Global de Medios	maryclens@yahoo.com;
Ana María Sanjuán	Academic	Corporación Andina de Fomento (CAF)	anamaría.sanjuán@gmail.com
Javier Darío Restrepo	Teacher	Fundación Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano	jrestrep1@gmail.com
Ricardo Avila	Director	Portafolio	ravila@cambio.net.co
Carlos Cortés	Editor	La Silla Vacía	ccortes@lasillavacia.com
Catalina Lobo-Guerrero	Independent		catalg@gmail.com
Sergio Ocampo	Independent		ocamposer@yahoo.com
Francisco Miranda	Political editor	El Tiempo	framir@eltiempo.com.co
Luz María Sierra	General editor	Semana.com	LSierra@semana.com
Miguel André Garrido	Coordinator/Editor	ColPrensa	miguelandreg@gmail.com
Socorro Ramírez	Academic		socorroramirezv@yahoo.es
Jennifer McCoy	Director	Americas Program, Carter Center	poljlm@langate.gsu.edu
Héctor Vanolli	General Coordinator	Program to Strengthen Journalism, CC	havanolli@yahoo.com
Cesar Bátiz	Rapporteur		cesarbatiz2@gmail.com

Annex C: Participant biographies

Participants from Venezuela:

Eleazar Díaz Rangel. Former president of the Venezuelan Association of Journalists, director of the National Union of Media Workers (*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Prensa*) and founding president of the Latin American Federation of Journalists (*Federación Latinoamericana de Periodistas*, FELAP). He has also served as director of the daily *Punto* and the magazine *Tribuna*, and director of the School of Social Communication of the Central University of Venezuela (*Universidad Central de Venezuela*, UCV). Currently director of the daily *Ultimas Noticias*, Venezuela's largest-circulation daily.

Elides Rojas. Lawyer and journalist, he has been managing editor of the daily *El Universal* since 1996. Before that, he served as managing editor of the daily *El Nacional* (1979-1990) and managing editor and news and information director of the daily *Economía Hoy* (1972-1978). He has received various awards for his journalistic work in recent years, including the National Journalism Award in the Opinion category in 1999; the National Scientific Journalism Award in 1985; the Society of Newspaper Design's Excellence Award in 1991; and the Inter-American Press Association's International Award in the Opinion category in 2005.

Aram Aharonian. A native of Uruguay, he has worked as a journalist in his native country, as well as in Argentina, Colombia and Venezuela. He has worked as a correspondent for the agencies PL and IPS, and as editor for the agency UPI and the dailies *El Espectador* (Bogotá), *Proceso* (Mexico) and *Brecha* (Uruguay). In Venezuela, he served as president of the Foreign Press Association (*Asociación de la Prensa Extranjera*, APEX). He is known for having played a key role in the creation of Telesur, where he served as the first director general. He currently teaches graduate-level communications courses in academic institutions in Argentina and Venezuela, edits the Question Digital and Surysur portals, and directs the Latin American Observatory on Communication and Democracy at the Latin American and Caribbean University (*Universidad Latinoamericana y del Caribe*).

Omar Lugo. He began working in economic journalism in 1988 at the dailies *El Nacional* and *El Universal* and the magazine *Número*. From 2002 to 2009, he was correspondent for the Spanish agency EFE in Rio de Janeiro, where he also worked for CNN, Radio El Espectador, the Xinhua Agency and the magazine *América Economía*. Earlier, he spent seven years as international correspondent for Reuters in Venezuela. He currently serves as director of the daily *El Mundo Economía y Negocios*.

Vladimir Villegas. Among other positions, he served as president of the state-run channel VTV between 2004 and 2005. In the public sphere, he served as a deputy in the national Congress (1993 and 1998), deputy in the National Constituent Assembly (1999), Venezuelan ambassador to Brazil (2002-2004) and Mexico, and vice minister of foreign relations for Asia, the Middle East and Oceania (2007-2008). He currently directs political current affairs programs on Circuito Unión Radio and writes a weekly column for *El Nacional*.

Silvia Allegrett. Currently president of the Colegio Nacional de Periodistas de Venezuela (CNP), the country's professional association of journalists, she formerly served for six years as general coordinator of the NGO Expresión Libre. She has also worked in the Film Office of the former Development Ministry and the Audiovisual Media Office of the National Institute for Education Cooperation (*Instituto Nacional de Cooperación Educativa*, INCE). She subsequently served for six years as head of the Information and Public Relations Office of the Foundation for Educational

Buildings and Equipment (*Fundación de Edificaciones y Dotaciones Educativas*, FEDE). Before becoming president of the CNP, she served as secretary general of its national board of directors (2008-2010). She currently directs the newspaper, *Entre Vecinos*.

Ernesto Villegas. He has hosted weekly interview programs on the state-run channel, Venezolana de Televisión (VTV), and Circuito Radial Triple F. Has also worked as a journalist for various print outlets, including the dailies *El Nuevo País*, *Economía HOY*, *El Universal* and *Últimas Noticias*, and the weekly *Quinto Día*. He has received various awards for his work, including the El Universal Annual Writing Award and the National Journalism Award. He is currently director of the daily *Ciudad Caracas*.

Elsy Barroeta. From 2005 to the present, she has worked as information director for Globovisión, one of the TV channels with the largest audience in metropolitan Caracas. She has more than 30 years of experience in journalism, including 15 at Globovisión. A licentiate in Social Communication from the Central University of Venezuela (*Universidad Central de Venezuela*, UCV), she specializes in the production of news for the television industry. She participated actively in the conception, design, planning, organization, implementation, evaluation and modernization of the Globovisión news unit.

María Inés Delgado. Currently assistant director of the print edition of the daily *Panorama*, in the state of Zulia, which has the largest readership and second-highest circulation in Venezuela. She has worked in journalism for 17 years, 14 of them at the daily *Panorama*, where she started in 1990 as an intern, later working as a feature writer and writer in the Culture section and editor of the Politics and Economy section. She is a licentiate in social communication from the University of Zulia (1993), and completed a Master's degree in Communication Sciences with a concentration in the socio-semiotics of communication in 1998.

Ana María Sanjuán (professor). A social psychologist, she has served as professor at the Central University of Venezuela (*Universidad Central de Venezuela*) and director of the university's Social Studies Center. She was also founder of the university's Colombia, Latin America and Caribbean chair and a member of the Binational Colombia-Venezuela Academic Group and the American Studies Center. She is a consultant on issues related to governance, security and international relations for international bodies such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Organization of American States (OAS), Inter-American Institute of Human Rights and Carter Center. She is currently an adviser to the office of the president of the Corporación Andina de Fomento.

Maryclen Stelling. A sociologist specializing in media studies, she is currently a sociology professor at the Andres Bello Catholic University (*Universidad Católica Andrés Bello*, UCAB) and the Social Management School Foundation (*Fundación Escuela de Gerencia Social*). Since 2009, she has also served as executive director of the Rómulo Gallegos Center for Latin American Studies (*Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos Rómulo Gallegos*, CELARG). In the area of media, she is general coordinator of the Venezuela Chapter of the Global Observatory on the Media (*Observatorio Global de Medios*, OGM). She also hosts the program Primera Mano on Radio Nacional de Venezuela (RNV).

Participants from Colombia:

Ricardo Avila. Journalist specializing in political current events, economics and finance. He currently serves as director of the business and economics daily *Portafolio*, in Bogotá, and assistant editor of the opinion section of the daily *El Tiempo*, also in Bogotá. In the public sphere, he served as cabinet chief for the secretary general of the Organization of American States (OAS) during the administration of former President César Gaviria. He studied economics at the Javeriana University and holds a Master's degree in economics from the University of Pittsburgh.

Javier Darío Restrepo. He has had a long career in print and audiovisual media in Colombia, but his name is associated with discussion of journalistic ethics. He was a founding members of various journalism ethics commissions, including those of the Circle of Journalists of Bogotá (*Círculo de Periodistas de Bogotá*) and the Institute of Studies of Communication and Culture (*Instituto de Estudios sobre Comunicación y Cultura*), and is the author of various well-known books on this topic. Since 1995, he has been a professor for the Ibero-American New Journalism Foundation (*Fundación Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano*). He also worked for many years as ombudsman for the dailies *El Colombiano* (Medellín) and *El Tiempo* (Bogotá).

Carlos Cortés. A lawyer specializing in journalism, he graduated from the University of the Andes (*Universidad de Los Andes*) in Colombia. From 2005 to 2009, he directed the Foundation for Freedom of the Press (*Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa*, FLIP). From 2003 to 2005, he worked in the Ombudsman's Office and also wrote for the magazine *Semana*. He is currently editor of *La Silla Vacía*, where he is also adviser for special projects and issues related to international cooperation. He is a professor of politics and media law in the Journalism and Public Opinion Program at the University of Rosario.

Miguel André Garrido. Currently works as coordinator and legal editor for the Colprensa agency, which consists of print media in the interior of Colombia. For 13 years, he has covered Colombia's high courts (Supreme Court of Justice, Council of State and Constitutional Court) and Attorney General's Office for that agency. At Colprensa, he is also responsible for planning, coordinating and directing coverage of special legal issues that could have national or international repercussions. He graduated from the Central University of Bogotá (*Universidad Central de Bogotá*) with a degree in social communication.

Sergio Ocampo Madrid. Writer and journalist. Born in Medellín, he worked as general editor of the daily *El Heraldo* (Barranquilla) until last year; he had held the same position at *El Colombiano* in Medellín. He was also political editor and national editor of *El Tiempo* (Bogotá). He studied psychology and social communication, with specialized studies in armed conflict at the University of the Andes (*Universidad de los Andes*). He is a professor at the Javeriana and Externado universities in Colombia, and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in literature at the Javeriana University. He is a columnist for the daily *El Comercio* in Lima. He won the Simón Bolívar Award in 1998 and 2005, the Semana-Petrobrás Award in 2008, and the CPB Award in 1996. He recently published his first book of short stories with the Norma publishing house.

Francisco Miranda Hamburguer. A political analyst specializing in social economics, currently serving as editor of the opinion section of the daily *El Tiempo* in Bogotá. He is also a professor at the University of Rosario and the Business School of the College of Higher Studies in Administration (*Colegio de Estudios Superiores de Administración*, CESA), both in Bogotá. He has a Master's degree in public administration with a concentration in economic development and urban policy from Columbia University in New York. He was a Fulbright fellow in 2005.

Luz María Sierra. A journalist specializing in political science, she is currently general editor of the well-known magazine, *Semana*. She formerly served, among other positions, as managing editor, international editor and editor of the legal section of the Bogotá daily *El Tiempo*. In the public sphere, she worked as cabinet chief in her country's Foreign Ministry. She was a member of the Colombia-Ecuador Binational Dialogue Group, a bilateral dialogue initiative promoted by the Carter Center between 2007 and 2009.

Catalina Lobo-Guerrero. An anthropologist and journalist, she has worked as a reporter for the portals Semana.com (Bogotá) and Clarin.com (Buenos Aires), and for the Noticias Uno television news program. In recent years, she has worked as a stringer for various international media, and served as editor of the election coverage portal, Votebien.com. She currently works as a freelance journalist and researcher for a documentary series, *Women, War & Peace*, produced by PBS, the U.S. public television network.

Socorro Ramírez (professor). Her studies and degrees include a post-doctorate at the Institut des Hautes Etudes de L'Amérique Latina (HEAL) at the Sorbonne University, a diploma in Advanced Studies in International Relations (Sorbonne University) and a Master's degree in Analysis of Political-Economic and International Problems from the Institute for Advanced Development Studies (*Instituto de Altos Estudios para el Desarrollo*). She is currently coordinator of the Regional Integration Group and the Latin America Group of the Project on Insertion of Colombia into the International System. She is also a member of the Andean-U.S. Dialogue Forum, sponsored by International IDEA and the Carter Center.