

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/syria-colleagues-call-for-release-of-12-12-2013,45608.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Syria

Solidarity

Colleagues call for release of journalists abducted in Syria

12 December 2013

"Ricardo García Vilanova, Javier Espinosa and Marc Marginedas are not activists; they are journalists who believe in something that is becoming less common in the media business: being at the front line, in the place where the worst things happen in war."

This is the message of a joint appeal by the colleagues of three Spanish journalists who have been abducted in Syria.

Reporters Without Borders supports this appeal, signed by many Spanish and international journalists, for the release of all kidnapped media personnel in Syria including Marginedas, Espinosa and García.

IN SUPPORT OF THE JOURNALISTS KIDNAPPED IN SYRIA

We ask for peace and the right to speak

*Syria is the most dangerous country in the world for journalists. Since the beginning of the war, more than 55 journalists have been killed and about 40 kidnapped or detained. Ever since ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) – an Al Qaeda-linked group – appeared on the scene around six months ago, reporting on the ground has become virtually impossible. Journalists are not welcome, as ISIS has announced through various social networks and media. **Ricardo García Vilanova, Javier Espinosa and Marc Marginedas** were aware of the dangers and accepted them. It did not stop them from traveling to Syria to continue reporting. When the world did not know what was happening inside Syria, they ventured where no Westerner was going, despite knowing they were putting their own lives at risk.*

When they first went, the Assad regime was hounding anyone trying to report what was happening. They kept reporting when threats later began to come from the rebels – who are now fragmented into many factions, some of them linked to Al Qaeda. They are not activists; they are journalists who believe in something that is becoming less common in the media business: being at the front line, in the place where the worst things happen in war. All three of these journalists represent commitment, honesty and rigour – values that have declined in our profession.

Today, the shoe is on the other foot. Today it is our turn to turn them into the main characters, so that those who think they are spies may realize their mistake, may understand that they are just three journalists. Or to explain to those who have deprived them of their freedom that kidnappings only serve to obscure what is happening on the ground. To explain that, after their abduction, no one will go there to understand what is happening.

They all have a reporter's instincts. They all have journalism running through their veins, a drive to do more than just be a staff reporter - Marc for El Periodico and Javier for El Mundo - or just make a living as a freelancer. Ricardo, despite having no support and having to deal with the over-protective tendencies of media that give him assignments, continued to do his duty without waiting for media to ask him. As far as he was concerned, reporting the news meant being where it was happening, up close and glued to his wide-angle lens, and far from corporate or political interests.

On one of his first trips to Syria, Ricardo was given an assignment by an elderly woman in Sermen. Her 15-year-old grandson had just been killed by a shell from a government tank. As she tearfully buried him, she took Ricardo's hands, kissed them and said: "Tell the world how they are killing us." Ever since that day, each time he pressed his camera's shutter button, he did it to return a piece of life to those living surrounded by death.

Those of us who are Ricardo's friends know he will not like all this fuss. He is a very discrete

person. He never protests, criticizes or says more than he needs to say. He just acts. And he does so with photography, producing such subjective and exceptional shots that no one can just turn the page. He forces you to stop, observe and think. They say that artists feed on applause. Ricardo is an artisan. A painter of stories. In his photographs, shaped with unusual sensitivity, you hear the cries and the bombs, you smell the blood and your soul shudders. Ricardo is a man of few words, modest about his courage and not interested in recognition. The antithesis of modernity.

Placid Garcia Planas, a colleague who has shared many a coffee with Ricardo in Barcelona's sidewalk cafés, told us: "Ricardo is such a good person that he does not seem like a journalist." Maybe that is why he ended up being such good friends with Javier and they began to travel together. Javier is another example of those who, with their discretion and simplicity, give journalism and life lessons with a smile and make all the rest of us seem like kids and apprentices. None of them are kamikazes or suicidal. They were not looking for danger. They were not seeking an adrenaline rush. They took no avoidable risk. They only took risks that were strictly necessary to tell the story, which had to be told from the right place. They knew exactly where they went and were aware of what they were doing, how they were doing it and what could happen to them. Because they knew, because they have experienced similar situations in the past and never gave up, today we have to offer them even more honest respect.

Marc understands journalism as an act of absolute freedom. As an exercise in ignoring convention and telling personal stories, stories set in the street that result in a lot of dust on your shoes. He is stubborn. Nothing ever stopped him. Neither the frontiers that men draw to imprison what makes us human, nor the squeamishness of the censors, nor the mediocrity of the media bosses who regard international reporting as an expensive product that does not cover its costs. He has been fighting all of this for years, committed and convinced that there are thousands of stories to tell and that, if no one tells them, it will be as if they had never happened.

The kidnappings of Marc and of Ricardo and Javier – like the kidnappings of James Foley, Austin Tice, Didier Françoise, Edouard Elias, Pierre Torres, Nicolas Henin, Bashar Kadumi, Samir Kassab, Ishak Mokhtar, Magnus Falkehed, Niclas Hammarström and all the other journalists who were covering the Syrian war until someone decided to silence them – affects not only them but also the ability of the world's population to know what is going on in Syria. It is all about freedom of the press and ultimately democracy.

It is important that rules should still be observed so that the world can know what is happening in wars. We are issuing this statement in part for this reason, but above all because families and friends are waiting for these journalists to return.

Signed by the following Spanish and international journalists:

Alberto Arce, Gervasio Sánchez, Rafael Sánchez Fabrés, JM López, Diego Ibarra Sánchez, Ethel Bonet, Cesare Quinto, Omar Havana, Fabio Bucciarelli, Antonio Pampliega, José Miguel Calatayud, Álvaro Ybarra Zabala, Laura Jiménez Varo, Philip Poupin, Sergi Cabeza, Walter Astrada, Diego Represa, Gabriel Pecot, Andoni Lubaki, Maysun, André Liohn, Sylvain Cherkaoui, Javier Martin, Andrea Bernardi, Alberto Pradilla, Alfonso Bauluz, Samuel Rodríguez, Marc Javierre, Salvador Campillo, Plácid García Planas, Félix Flores, Manu Brabo, Mónica Bernabé, Rodrigo Abd, Javier Manzano, Iván M. García, Narciso Contreras, Mikel Ayestarán, Mayte Carrasco, Luis de Vega, Giulio Piscitelli, Lola Banon, Daniel Iriarte, Ramón Lobo, Ana Galán, Rubén García, Maria-Alba Gilabert, David Rengel, Elisa Arroyo Calvo, Joaquín Gómez Sastre, Marta Ballesta, Silvia Barradas Pinto, Alfred Hackensberger, Mar San Juan, Pablo Tosco, Sabrina Pindo, Lola Hierro.
