

---

Ecuador: Government Confirms Death of Kidnapped Journalists

13/04/2018



Journalist Javier Ortega, photographer Paul Rivas and driver Efrain Segarra were kidnapped in Ecuador's northern border in Esmeraldas.

Ecuador's President **Lenin Moreno** has confirmed the death of the three Ecuadorean journalists kidnapped on the border with Colombia last month. "We haven't received proof of life," Moreno said in a televised statement. "And regrettably we have information that confirms the murder of the journalists."

**RELATED:** [Photos Show Bodies of Kidnapped Ecuador Journalists](#)

Speaking during a press conference with national and international media Friday, **Moreno** added the state's security operations will resume in the north border and announces the **Colombian Defense Minister** is in the country to coordinate actions in the northern border.

"We have restarted the military operations which were suspended in the area of the border strip, and I have immediately arranged the deployment of elite armed forces units and the national police to that territory. We are mourning but we will not let ourselves be intimidated, today more than ever I ask the country for unity for peace," **Moreno said.**

Late Thursday, Ecuador's free speech advocacy group **Fundamedios** posted on Twitter that it had "received photographs from a Colombian media outlet related to the situation of the

kidnapped journalistic team. We have made the authorities and the families aware, and we are waiting for any official confirmation."

**Moreno** returned to Ecuador's capital, Quito, late Thursday, after making an early departure from the Summit of the Americas in Lima, Peru to deal with the situation.

Journalist **Javier Ortega**, photographer **Paul Rivas**, and driver **Efrain Segarra** were kidnapped on March 26 in Ecuador's northern border in **Esmeraldas** while reporting on a series of violent attacks against Ecuadorean security forces.

On Wednesday, a statement purportedly by **Frente Olive Sinisterra** ('Oliver Sinisterra Front') said the three El Comercio staff kidnapped by the group last month had been killed, blaming the governments of Ecuador and Colombia for their deaths.

"The Ecuadorean government and Colombian minister did not want to save the lives of the three detained; they did it with the military landing in various points near the place where the men were detained, which resulted in the death of the two journalists and the driver," the statement read.

Frente Olive Sinisterra, the organization, believed to be responsible for the kidnappings, is described by the Colombian government as a splinter, dissident group from the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

The group has no connection with the democratic political party the Revolutionary Alternative Forces of the Commons, also known as FARC, which was formed after the group's demobilization.

The **Oliver Sinisterra Front** is led by '**El Guacho**,' real name: Walter Patricio Artizala Vernaza. Colombia and Ecuador have disputed his nationality: Ecuadorean authorities claim he is Colombian, while Colombian authorities claim he is Ecuadorean.

The Ecuadorean government said on Tuesday that it was not negotiating with the kidnapers, but was analyzing "every possibility" to secure their release. Details were not forthcoming.

Ecuador's Interior Minister **Cesar Navas** had previously said there was "dialogue" and a "technical police operation." On April 5, President Lenin Moreno said the government was in talks with "intermediaries" to determine the state of the hostages.

The journalists were investigating the rise in violence in the Esmeraldas border region following a series of deadly bombings targeting Ecuadorean security forces. Some observers say '**El Guacho**' has been attempting to control the drug trade in the region.