

25th ISOJ Honoring journalists Gustavo Gorriti and José Rubén Zamora

- **Romina Mella**, managing editor and investigative journalist, **IDL-Reporteros (Peru)**
 - **José Zamora**, chief communications and impact officer, **EXILE**
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Kathy [00:00:05] Thank you, Summer, for that introduction. I'm just going to tell our guests to come. I am really honored that my colleague, my Knight colleague. We are both Knight chairs, Rosental who moves furniture in addition to running the program. Asked me to, really it's an honor, to close this program out. This wonderful conference with two people who I think really remind us why we're here. This is a panel that is both sobering and inspiring, because these are two people here, colleagues, to tell you about problems that our colleagues in Latin America are facing. José Zamora is the son of the publisher of Guatemala's most well respected newspaper. And his father has been in jail for more than a year. Yes? Romina Mella is from Peru, and she is here on behalf of IDL Reporteros. And that organization was started by Gustavo Goretti, one of the best known investigative journalists in the region. And he, too, is being threatened with jail. And I think the through line here is that this is a situation where the investigators have become the investigated. And I think it's really important for us to show our support. There's some paperwork out on the tables. Look for it where you can, find out a way that you can sign a letter on behalf of Gustavo Goretti. But I really want to turn it over to José and Romina to tell us a little bit about the situation that they're facing. And Romina herself has been doxed and targeted because of the investigative work that IDL Reporteros is doing. So I don't know who wants to go first, but, go ahead.

José Zamora [00:02:17] Thank you very much. Thank you very much, everyone. Thank you, Rosental, for the invitation. I prepared these, I try to be brief remarks. 624 days of solitary confinement for practicing journalism. That is the case of my father Guatemalan journalist, José Ruben Zamora. 624 days. Being arbitrarily detained for denouncing corruption at the highest levels. Of the Guatemalan government under the administration of former President Alejandro Giammattei. This is not the first attack against my father and his team during his career in journalism, but it has been the most challenging one. Even beyond the defamation campaigns, the fiscal terrorism, death threats, drive by shootings, kidnappings and an assassination attempt. The manipulation of criminal law to silence journalists has become a favored tactic of repressive regimes. In Guatemala, it led to the closure of the newspaper El Periodico and forced many journalists into exile. In the meantime, my father continues to be under pretrial detention. It would be more accurate to say he has been held hostage by Guatemala's corrupt actors, or what is now widely known as the part of the corrupt. Pretrial detention cannot last longer than 90 days. He has been held in pretrial detention for 624 days. He has been held in a solitary confinement cell, in which not even the most dangerous and violent criminals can be detained for more than 30 days. In conditions that are considered torture by international standards. Something the Guatemalan government has already recognized. Still, my father views his imprisonment as an extension of his journalistic duty to expose the abuse of power. It also continues to reveal how the judiciary and the office of the Attorney General are still being run by corrupt forces. I said it here before. The best defense for journalism is more journalism. My father, his team and his family thank all the Guatemalan journalists that continue to do their job

despite the fear, repression and risks involved. We thank all the journalists around the world who continue to cover what is happening, what they. And in the case of my father, please continue to do so, not only for my father, but also in Peru, for Gustavo Gorriti and his team and all journalists around the world who are being persecuted, using criminal law to silence their voices. These 624 days have revealed both the worst and the best of humanity, the cruelty of oppression and the strength of solidarity. We're deeply grateful for all this support, love and friendship we have received. We hope to repay for kindness to journalists, press freedom organizations, and the people of Guatemala. Gracias totales or infinite gratitude.

Kathy [00:06:24] And now, Romina, I think, what is, really, eerie about this is how similar these two situations are and this is really a page out of The Dictator's Handbook. And I think, Romina, if you can tell us about what you're facing as well in Peru.

Romina Mella [00:06:47] Well, I will like to say two things. Thank you for the opportunity to be here at ISOJ, especially Rosental and Cathy. Investigative journalist, is under attack in my country, in Peru. Over the last year. IDL Reporteros, the independent investigative journalist outlet. I am a part of has been the victim of aggressive disinformation. Campaigns promoted by a coalition of organizations, political parties, and the protagonists of some of the most serious corruption cases in Peru's recent history. The attacks have especially targeted Gustavo Gorrito, our director. These disinformation campaigns were focused on presenting Gustavo as a kind of political operator who has supposedly managed and controlled the attorney General's office from the shadows. Then the investigators say Gustavo is a leader of acknowledged criminal organization inside the office, and that from that position he controlled the investigations of the Car Wash case, the corruption case that infested almost the entire Peruvian political class. It sounds absurd. It's absurd. Gustavo Gorriti is even accused of instigating the suicide of former president Alan Garcia, who took his own life at the precise moment when he was going to be arrested in 2019 for his involvement in Operation Car Wash. The idea that investigations published by IRL Reporteros. The former president. A character who government the country twice and evaded various corruption accusations until Operation Car Wash case expose the most flagrant evidence to commit suicide is simply baseless. These lies spread by disinformation, media and social networks unleash waves of hatred by the far right. There is no platform for this strategy is television channel, which has been the subject of several investigations published by IRL Reporteros and whose owner is also under investigation for money laundering. There are not media outlets, but operators would spread lies with impunity. Are they numbing that it's that that is then instrumentalized by others from the parties most exposed by independent journalists? It is an attack created by corruption circles against a journalist investigating them. These attempts to repeat on a larger scale what their peers did in Guatemala. The objective is clear, then researchers into research subjects. And politicians investigate for serious acts of corruption into politically persecuting individuals. These disinformation campaigns have been deployed alongside the systematic harassment of violence. Far right groups that go to our newsroom to harass us with action, that including everything from insults and information to physical assaults such as throwing garbage, excrement and even firecrackers inside our office. They have been going to Gustavo's house for they harassment operations. And they have also published my home address on their social

media networks with the aim of inciting violence. These harassment groups have been attacking us for six years. All in the face of the police inaction. At IRL Reporteros, we have this monthly disinformation campaigns. I have also identified their methods and operators. In the most serious episode of this political operation. A little over two weeks ago, a prosecutor begun a criminal investigation against Gustavo. The prosecutor not only requests the phone numbers use Gustavus investigations between 2016 and 2021, but he also announced that he will be requesting the removal of secrecy in his communications. This measure threatens the right to source's protection and the professional secrecy of journalists. You might wonder what alleged basis of the prosecutor who ordered this measure is. Surprise the prosecutor, this document supports action that violent press freedom under the spread by political parties and operators in the misinformation strategy. And explain at the beginning. It's important to mention that while IDL Reporteros has decisively dismantle it one by one, all the campaigns mounted in that operation that people mention in our reports have not even able to refute or deny a single one of our articles, not even one. Faced with a security threat, several national and international organizations in defense of freedom of expression and journalists have expressed their concern and condemned the actions of Peruvian Attorney General Office. What we are going through now represents a serious threat to journalism and freedom in general. Attacking investigative journalist means attacking the citizen's right of inform. We will vigorously defend the basic principles of professional secrecy. Ensured by our Constitution, international treaties and by essential aspects that guide and define every democratic nation. No matter what happens, we will not hand over information in trust to us by sources, no matter what the cost. Fortunately, we have received the support of national or international organization in defense journalism. But given the seriousness of the facts, it's not enough. This is why I now, as a youth, was to speak out about this common threat. And spotlight it because an attack against one is an attack against all. From our newsroom in Lima, we will continue fighting. Thank you very much.

Kathy [00:14:09] Thank you Romina. Thank you. José. I would just like to reiterate that the antidote to this, as José said, is more journalism and an attack against one, as Romina said, as an attack against all. I think if we can take any lesson from the last two days, it's that there is a pandemic of authoritarianism that is global and no country, not even the home of the free and the brave and the First Amendment, is immune. So it's really important for all of us as journalists to stand in solidarity with those who are under the most threat, because today it's Romina and Gustavo and José's father. Tomorrow it could be one of us. So please use your megaphone as journalists. Use your power as journalists to call out the wrongs that are being done here and to support the colleagues who need our help. And with that, I will. I know Rosental wants to close this out, but I would like to close this particular panel out with a round of applause for Romina.

Rosental Alves [00:15:42] Thank you. Thank you very much. I just want to, thank you all. You know, you are the best. You are the ones who stayed here until the end, and I really appreciate it. And I think this was a beautiful way of ending it with honoring those two great journalists who are both my friends for decades. And that, in this problem that, Kathy, nobody could say better than she, she said today they are in this situation tomorrow, and the journalists can be. So, I want to thank everybody for being here. I want to thank the Knight center staff who did great

work today. Summer here, Maria, Kathy, everybody. It's not easy to put together this conference, so I hope to see you all next year for the 26 ISOJ. Bye bye. Thank you. Thank you.