

CÉSAR RICAURTE

**Journalist | Human Rights Defender | Freedom of Expression Advocate |
Institution Builder**

Protecting freedom of expression, journalist safety and democratic accountability across the Americas.

Quito, Ecuador | cesar@fundamedios.org | www.fundamedios.org

June 12, 2026

Honorable
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
Organization of American States

Re: Application for the Position of Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression

I am honored to submit my application for the position of Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. I come to this application as a journalist, a human rights defender and an institution builder — but, most importantly, as someone whose own lived experience as a journalist-at-risk, and as a petitioner who has sought the protection of the IACHR, has given me unparalleled insight into, and deep sensitivity to, the contemporary challenges facing the journalistic community in the Americas. I have personally seen how freedom of expression is attacked from government offices, courts, digital platforms, criminal networks and public campaigns of stigmatization.

I have also seen how journalists, victims, local media, human rights defenders and democratic institutions can resist when they are not left alone. The daughters of Fernando Villavicencio, the assassinated journalist and presidential candidate, have put it this way: “When our father, Fernando Villavicencio, suffered political persecution, raids and was forced into exile, César Ricaurte and Fundamedios stood by his side, accompanying him through some of the most difficult moments of his life. We have witnessed his courage, his independence, his professional integrity and his deep democratic conviction.” (translated from Spanish). That conviction has guided my work for more than two decades, and it is the conviction I would bring to the mandate at one of the most complex moments since its creation.

I am deeply committed to the work of the Office, which must remain a rigorous legal voice and a strategic democratic actor whose authority depends on independence, technical excellence, consistency and courage. I am particularly drawn to the Office's work on the safety of journalists, on the protection of civic space, and on democratic responses to disinformation that reject censorship — three areas where my daily practice, through Fundamedios, Ecuador Chequea and Voces del Sur, has run in close parallel to the Office's standards and priorities.

My background meets the requirements of the position. I hold a Licenciatura in Social Communication (journalism) from the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja, complemented

by graduate studies in communication at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, and I am currently completing an M.A. in Human Rights at the Universidad Internacional de La Rioja (UNIR, Spain; expected November 2026, current GPA 9.4/10), which has equipped me with a rigorous grounding in the international and regional human rights framework, including the legal architecture governing freedom of expression. I bring **more than 37 years of professional experience in journalism and more than 20 years defending freedom of expression** at the national and international level, in sustained interaction with senior government officials, intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations within the Inter-American system. My work has been recognized with the **Chapultepec Grand Prize for Press Freedom (IAPA, 2012)** and the **Franco-German Prize for Human Rights and the Rule of Law (2017)**, **Horacio Aguirre Award** for Interamerican Institute for Democracy, 2017 and **Premio a la Libertad de Expresión Internacional** for Editorial Perfil, Argentina, 2012, among other awards. I am a native Spanish speaker with professional working proficiency in English.

Since 2007, as founder and Executive Director of Fundamedios, I have led one of Latin America's most active civil society organizations dedicated to monitoring, documenting and responding to attacks against journalists, media outlets and freedom of expression. Under my leadership, Fundamedios has built long-term systems of alerts, reports, legal and psychosocial support, journalist protection, public advocacy, training, access-to-information initiatives and regional coordination. This work has required not only technical knowledge, but institutional resilience, diplomatic judgment, financial management, team leadership and the ability to act under pressure without losing independence or credibility.

High moral character and independence. My independence has been tested, publicly and at real cost. In 2015, the Ecuadorian government opened a dissolution proceeding against Fundamedios for daring to document attacks on the press; we responded with law, evidence and transparency, and the proceeding was archived. I have faced reprisals after testifying before the IACHR, and I have continued monitoring violations under every subsequent government, of every political orientation — which is precisely why Fundamedios has never been credibly cast as a partisan actor. I have never accepted funding, instruction or alliance that would compromise the integrity of our documentation, and I have publicly criticized governments of all tendencies when the evidence required it. I would bring that same independent eye, and the same resistance to undue influence, to the mandate.

Freedom of expression in the Americas is no longer challenged only by direct censorship or open hostility from public authorities. Those threats persist, but they coexist with a more sophisticated landscape: authoritarian practices wrapped in legal formality, judicial harassment, organized crime silencing local journalism, surveillance and digital attacks, disinformation operations and shrinking civic space. The task of the Office is not only to defend existing standards, but to keep them effective against this new architecture of pressure and fear.

Knowledge of the Inter-American system, its procedures and jurisprudence. I have engaged the Inter-American Human Rights System in a sustained and direct way. As a journalist-at-risk, I have petitioned the Inter-American Commission in my own right, seeking protection; IACHR precautionary-measures follow-up proceedings from 2018 expressly name me. That experience — being on the petitioner's side of the table — has deepened my practical command of the Commission's procedures, precedents and the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court. I have participated in thematic hearings and working meetings before the IACHR in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2023 and 2024. I have played a key role in the precautionary measures granted by the Commission in high-profile cases such as the kidnapping and murder of the Diario El Comercio news team and the murder of journalist and presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio. I also played a key role in supporting the work of the Special Investigation Team that the IACHR established to monitor the investigations in the same case involving the Diario El Comercio news team.

Two interactions of which I am particularly proud: in November 2023, I led the civil society delegation, alongside journalist victims, at the IACHR hearing on the grave situation of journalism in Ecuador amid organized-crime violence.

I have also supported advocacy efforts by civil society groups in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, and have advised organizations in Paraguay and Chile on the submission of reports for various cycles of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review since 2012, including the submission of the coalition report for Ecuador in 2012, 2017, and 2022, as well as my role as spokesperson in Geneva.

These experiences have given me a practical understanding not only of legal procedures and precedents, but of how international standards must be translated into protection, accountability, institutional reform and public legitimacy.

Proven competence in freedom of expression and human rights in the Americas. I bring deep subject-matter expertise and a record of building regional and innovative responses to emerging threats. I founded Ecuador Chequea (2016), Ecuador's first fact-checking platform, and co-founded Voces del Sur, a regional network that documents attacks against the press and strengthens common monitoring methodologies across Latin America. That regional commitment reaches well beyond Ecuador and the Andean subregion: in 2019, amid the crackdown on Nicaragua's press, I led the team of specialists that trained and consolidated FLED's network of 17 Press Freedom Promoter Journalists, providing strategic advice grounded in IACHR indicators that shaped the documentation methodology the organization still relies on today. Through Fundamedios, I have led programs on journalist safety, electoral information integrity, media literacy, police-journalist relations, ethical journalism, investigative reporting, access to information and the protection of journalists at risk — and, most recently, Liberties 360, a civic technology that enables preventive detection of narratives fueling violence against journalists. These initiatives, developed with international donors,

multilateral partners, media organizations, universities and civil society networks, demonstrate my ability to move from diagnosis to implementation, and from principles to sustainable institutional action.

Staff management. I have built and led multidisciplinary, multicultural teams — journalists, lawyers, researchers, trainers, communicators, finance and administrative staff — working in person and remotely across Ecuador and the United States (Fundamedios USA), and currently lead a team of 8 staff at Fundamedios working across monitoring, protection, legal defense, communications and advocacy, and project management. Like the broader sector, Fundamedios has had to reduce the size of its team in recent years while sustaining the impact of its work — perhaps the strongest testament to disciplined management. My management style is built on trust, clarity and care: I set a clear strategic direction, delegate with accountability, protect my team's security and wellbeing in high-risk contexts, and create an environment where everyone feels valued, heard and motivated to do their best work. Leading an organization under political pressure has taught me that staff who feel protected and respected are the foundation of institutional resilience.

Excellent written and oral communication skills. Throughout my career I have honed my written and oral communication in Spanish (mother tongue) and English, and I am comfortable and at ease making public presentations to senior government officials, experts, diplomats and the public — on television, at public events and in high-level meetings. I have presented before the IACHR on multiple occasions, most recently in November 2024; I delivered the closing intervention of the II Amazon Journalism and Climate Change Summit before more than 800 participants; and as a television ombudsman I hosted the weekly program Televidencia. As a journalist with more than 3,000 published articles, columns and essays, I am able to communicate complex information succinctly and in a balanced manner, adapting language, tone and style to different audiences.

Fundraising and project supervision. As a civil society leader, I have been responsible for the financial governance of Fundamedios and have built a strong suite of skills in philanthropic fundraising, donor engagement and financial oversight. I am fully conversant with the rules and reporting regulations governing grants from international donors — including **UNESCO, German Development Cooperation, USAID, NED, the European Union, the Poynter Institute, the U.S. Department of State and Meta** — and take those obligations very seriously, having managed project portfolios in the range of **US\$200,000 to US\$1,000,000 per year**. I am comfortable supervising complex, multi-stakeholder projects: most recently, I oversaw the police-journalist relations project with DCAF (2023–2025), which and the design of the management and financial model for Ecuador's Journalist Protection Mechanism. This work has required strategic planning, promotion of innovation and sound judgment in decision-making under uncertainty.

If selected, I would seek to strengthen four lines of work, in alignment with the IACHR Strategic Plan 2023–2027. First, the protection of journalists and media workers facing violence, exile, criminal threats, judicial harassment or digital attacks — advancing the Plan's priority on timely, victim-centered protection. Second, the defense of civic space and freedom of expression against legal, administrative and regulatory restrictions that weaken independent media and civil society. Third, the development of democratic responses to disinformation and information manipulation that never become excuses for censorship or state control. Fourth, the reinforcement of the Office's regional presence, partnerships and financial sustainability — so that its standards are not only cited in reports, but used by journalists, courts, civil society, public institutions and international actors throughout the Americas, with deliberate attention to Central America and the Caribbean, whose realities must weigh as heavily on the Office's agenda as those of the hemisphere's largest countries.

Personal competencies. I am comfortable working with colleagues from culturally diverse backgrounds and always seek to act with tact, diplomacy and sensitivity — skills sharpened by two decades of coalition work across Latin America, from the Southern Cone to the Andean region, the Caribbean and the United States. I work well both collaboratively and independently, and I am at my steadiest under pressure: leading Fundamedios through a state dissolution attempt in 2015, and through the security crises that drove journalists into exile in 2023, required calm decision-making, rapid prioritization and the ability to manage multiple urgent demands without losing strategic focus. I am driven, self-motivated and consistently meet deadlines across competing obligations.

I respectfully submit my candidacy with full awareness of the responsibility this position carries. The Special Rapporteur must serve the Inter-American Commission, the standards of the System and the peoples of the Americas with independence, seriousness and moral clarity. I would be honored to contribute my experience, judgment and commitment to that task.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Ricaurte', with a stylized flourish at the end.

César Ricaurte