

Death threats prompt journalist to flee country El Nuevo Herald's Bogotá correspondent left the country amid death threats after President Uribe accused him of slander. Posted on Sun, Oct. 07, 2007

BY GERARDO REYES El Nuevo Herald

The correspondent in Bogotá for El Nuevo Herald, sister newspaper to the Miami Herald, was leaving Colombia on Saturday after receiving death threats.

Gonzalo Guillén had already been under the protection of the national police after his newspaper got word of an earlier plan to assassinate him.

Guillén said he received more death threats after President Alvaro Uribe publicly accused him on Oct. 1 of being "behind" a book by Virginia Vallejo that accused Uribe of having befriended in the 1980s drug trafficker Pablo Escobar, who was killed by Colombian police in 1993 after 16 months as a fugitive.

"I hunkered down right after I learned of a plan to murder me . . . now President Uribe has put me in other people's cross-hairs and it seems he's not concerned about it," Guillén told El Nuevo Herald.

In the past three days, Guillén said he has received 24 threats via e-mails and calls from rented cellphones.

For three months, Guillén had been escorted by two government bodyguards. On Tuesday one was suddenly removed by the National Police, even though a report from the national security agency had concluded that he faced "an extraordinary risk," Guillén said.

The report, issued Sept. 28, was sent to the prosecutor general's office by the Administrative Department of Security. That office recommended that he leave the country, Guillén said.

In response to complaints from two international press associations, officials offered Friday to provide a bodyguard without a motorcycle.

Guillén rejected that offer, saying he did not trust an institution that had lied to him. "Our correspondent has no guarantees of security and we see no sign from the president that he will rectify matters, so we think the best decision is to take Gonzalo out of the country as soon as possible," said El Nuevo Herald's editor, Humberto Castelló.

In two national radio interviews on Monday, Uribe accused Guillén of constantly slandering him and of ghostwriting Loving Pablo, Hating Escobar, by a former lover of Escobar.

Guillén, an El Nuevo Herald correspondent for seven years, denied involvement with the book.