To Whom it May Concern:

We, the 2006 journalism Knight Fellows of Stanford University, are writing to express our deep concern about the attacks on freedom of speech and the press in Colombia, exemplified by death threats against our colleague, Daniel Coronell. Mr. Coronell, an award-winning television news director with two decades’ experience, joins 20 other distinguished journalists from around the world in residency at Stanford University this year. But his case has special urgency. Mr. Coronell’s investigative work exposing political corruption, drug trafficking and Colombia’s ongoing civil war has led to repeated and escalating death threats against him. The anonymous threats have also targeted Mr. Coronell’s wife, award-winning “Canal Uno” news anchor Maria Cristina, as well as the couple’s small daughter. One of the threats included a funeral wreath sent to the 6-year-old, forcing the family into exile in the United States. Mr. Coronell’s case has been publicized since 2002 by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, which cites Colombia as one of the world’s most dangerous countries for reporters.

Threats against Colombian journalists from right-wing paramilitary forces, communist guerrillas, drug traffickers and corrupt politicians continue today. In the last 10 years, 30 journalists have been murdered in Colombia, including a veteran radio reporter gunned down earlier this year. In 2005, dozens of other courageous journalists have received serious threats or have survived attempts on their lives. The CPJ reports that this year alone, six explosions and a car bombing have damaged news facilities in Colombia, including radio and television stations.

Mr. Coronell, who directs a current affairs program on the Colombian television station Canal Uno, and writes a weekly column for “Semana,” the nation’s largest news magazine, has been undeterred. In 2002, he revealed then-presidential candidate Alvaro Uribe’s alleged ties with drug traffickers. The revelation centered on a helicopter belonging to candidate Uribe’s father, which in 1984 was retrieved from a cocaine laboratory dubbed “Tranquilandia.” Alvaro Uribe, as director of Colombia’s civil aviation, had licensed the helicopter.

“Noticias Uno” has aired additional stories which have led to the death threats against Mr. Coronell, including exposés on the connection between right-wing paramilitary organizations and drug trafficking, and the problematic aspects of reconciliation between paramilitaries and the current government.

Journalists in Colombia like Mr. Coronell must be safe in order to continue their critical work as public watchdogs, yet the authorities have done little if anything to protect them. Even more alarming is the proximity of the government to those apparently issuing the deadly threats. Through Internet sleuthing, Mr. Coronell traced the e-mail threats he
received to the Bogotá mansion of former Congressman Carlos Nader Simmonds, a close
friend of President Uribe. Nader admitted the messages were sent from his computer, but
initially denied having sent them himself.

We urge the Colombian authorities to investigate the threats leveled against Mr. Coronell
and other journalists. The perpetrators must be exposed and brought to justice.
Simultaneously, we urge the U.S. to demand that its Colombian allies take seriously any
and all attacks on reporters and press freedom. The government’s responses to this urgent
matter will be watched by journalists from all continents, and will face the scrutiny of
international public opinion.