



For immediate release – 26 July 2010

PRESS RELEASE

Venezuela: Government Cracks Down on Critics

Venezuelan authorities are clamping down on dissident voices, particularly journalists and civil society representatives operating in the country. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with international funding have come under intense scrutiny from Public Prosecutors and the government has recently acquired a stake in *Globovisión*, the privately-owned TV station critical of the government.

On 20 July 2010, the Venezuelan National Assembly adopted the conclusions of a report which links international funding agencies to the failed coup staged in 2002. The report recommendation request that the Public Prosecutor investigates media professionals and NGOs supported by these agencies.

The accusations regarding the failed coup arise at a time when the government is planning to adopt an International Cooperation Bill, which would centralise policy and regulatory decisions and could jeopardize the activities of independent human rights organizations in the country. A local source believes that the allegations of foreign interference are a smokescreen for the country's economical and security crisis, including the recent scandal of thousands of tons of expired food in public warehouses and ports.

The alarming polarization in Venezuela is also affecting voices of the media. A major opposition broadcaster, *Globovisión*, will eventually have a government representative on its board now that the state is a minority shareholder of the company. The owner of *Globovisión*, Guillermo Zuloaga, is currently wanted on the basis of charges which human rights groups believe to be politically motivated.

ARTICLE 19 and CIVICUS are urging the Venezuelan government to refrain from persecuting dissident voices and to promote an environment which encourages pluralism and political debate, in addition to adopting positive measures to promote, protect and defend the right of freedom of expression.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.