

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/surinam-former-minister-seeks-eur230-000-03-10-2013,45281.html>

Americas - Surinam

Libel suit

Former minister seeks €230,000 in damages from magazine

3 October 2013

Reporters Without Borders voices its support for the investigative monthly *Parbode*, whose publisher, **Jaap Hoogendam**, is being sued by former public works minister Ramon Abrahams (pictured) over a report about his alleged corrupt practices before he was fired without explanation.

Parbode received a letter from Abrahams' lawyer on 26 August announcing that the former minister was seeking 1 million Surinamese dollars (230,000 euros) in damages and a correction in the magazine's next issue. A Paramaribo court is due to begin hearing the suit today.

"*Parbode* could be forced to close if the court orders it to pay this amount of damages," Reporters Without Borders said. "This would not only be devastating for *Parbode's* journalists but would also have a deterrent effect on any other publication that might be interested in doing investigative reporting on government officials.

"We are also concerned by the fact that, instead of using his right to have his response published in *Parbode*, Abrahams is demanding a correction, that is to say, he is insisting that the magazine's reporters retract what they wrote. This would be tantamount to self-censorship. As a public figure, the former minister should expect to be criticized."

This case could be decisive as regards the position that Surinam's courts take on whistleblowers and respect for the confidentiality of journalists' sources. One of the former minister's main charges against *Parbode* is his claim that the report was not supported by any hard evidence.

Parbode responds that the article was based on interviews with businessmen, architects, politicians and members of Abrahams' own party. The magazine's editor in chief, **Armand Snijders**, has said it could not identify its sources because of the harm this would cause them.

Widely read in Surinam and the Netherlands, where it is registered, *Parbode* is one of the few Surinamese publications with investigative reporting and opinion pieces.
