

Reporters Without Borders

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Americas - Haiti

Poisoned climate

President-elect urged to help defuse tension, threats to media freedom

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Four journalists have been summoned to give evidence today in the criminal defamation action that **Pradel Henriquez**, the director-general of state-owned *Télévision Nationale d'Haïti (TNH)*, brought against two of the [five journalists he recently fired](#) on questionable grounds. The hearing was postponed for a week at the last moment because of the death of a lawyer. The dismissed journalists have meanwhile filed a complaint with the Anti-Corruption Unit accusing Pradel Henriquez of questionable practices as *TNH* director-general.

The four journalists – **Valery Numa** and **Maxime Hilaire** of *Radio Vision 2000* and **Jean Monard Metellus** and **Marc Joël** of *Radio Caraïbes FM* – interviewed the *TNH* journalists about their dismissal. The summons, which threatens them with unspecified sanctions if they fail to appear, was announced by Henriquez's lawyer on 16 April.

A three-member special commission that was appointed by the culture and communication ministry on 15 April meanwhile has until 2 May to decide the fate of the five journalists who were fired – **Jacques Innocent**, **Guemly Saint-Preux**, **Stéphane Cadet**, **Josias Pierre** and former editor in chief **Eddy Jackson Alexis**. Only the last two are being sued by Henriquez.

The *TNH* management accused the five journalists of putting their political preferences before their professional duties, while the journalists accused *TNH* of biased coverage or even outright propaganda in favour of candidate Michel Martelly during the second round of the presidential election, in which Martelly beat former first lady Mirlande Manigat. They were fired shortly after a courtesy visit to *TNH* by the president-elect.

"Equal air-time during an election campaign is a key democratic principle, especially for a national public broadcaster," Reporters Without Borders said. "The *TNH* management must explain its actions and reinstate those journalists who just raised a matter of public interest. The tone of the summonses issued to the four radio reporters says a lot about the appalling climate caused by these very political dismissals.

"The journalists who have been summoned as witnesses were just doing their job when they covered this story. They do not have to justify what they did before any court. Using journalists as witnesses in an attempt to convict colleagues in a defamation case constitutes a serious attack on the profession's unity.

"We hope that the ministry's commission meets its deadline – it has just a few days left – and makes appropriate recommendations in this matter even if it cannot usurp the role of the courts. There is a great deal of post-electoral tension and the president-elect needs to speak out before his inauguration on 14 May. The victor by a broad margin, Michel Martelly must promise to guarantee pluralism, civil liberties and basic constitutional principles. By helping to defuse this case, he could calm things down and ease the transfer of power."

Torched radio station

An initiative of this kind by the president-elect is all the more urgent as the announcement of the results of the legislative elections has triggered a new wave of violence in which some media and

journalists are being targeted, as they were after [the first round of the presidential election](#).

Reporters Without Borders condemns an arson attack on *Radio Tèt Ansanm*, a community radio station in the town of Carice (in the department of Nord-Est), on 21 April. The attack is being blamed on supporters of former INITE parliamentarian Jean Berthold Bastien, who was beaten by rival candidate Fanèse Laguerre. An investigation must be carried out at once and those responsible must be punished,

The press freedom organization is awaiting a detailed evaluation of the damage to the radio station with a view to helping to rebuild and reequip it.
