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Americas - Honduras

Judicial harassment

Leading opposition broadcaster facing criminal libel charges

27 August 2014

A Tegucigalpa-based high court announced this week that it is ready to hear a criminal defamation action by Sonia Inéz Gálvez, a lawyer married to the deputy prosecutor-general, against David Romero Ellner, the head of Radio Globo.

The lawsuit could result in a sentence of up to 15 years in jail for Romero and the closure of *Radio y TV Globo*, one of Honduras' most popular opposition broadcasters since the June 2009 coup d'état.

In her suit, Gálvez accused Romero and three of his *Radio y TV Globo* colleagues – **Ivis Alvarado, Rony Martínez** and **César Silva** – of insulting and defaming her on the air in connection with a 2002 case involving her and Romero. The court said it would only consider Gálvez's complaint against Romero.

Romero recently accused Gálvez of abusing her influence over the public prosecutor's office to obtain his conviction in the 2002 case.

A few days before she filed her complaint, Romero reported having been threatened by suspicious individuals and accused Gálvez of being behind an attempt to intimidate him. The National Commission for Human Rights (CONADEH) [was asked to protect him](#).

"We call for the immediate withdrawal of this criminal defamation action against Romero," said Camille Soulier, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Americas desk. "Journalists were already censoring themselves so who will dare to speak out now? The closure of one of Honduras' leading opposition media would deal a major blow to freedom of information."

The case exacerbates an [already critical moment for freedom of information](#) in Honduras five years after the 2009 coup, which saw physical attacks by the security forces against Tegucigalpa-based *Radio Globo*, as well as *Radio Progreso* in the north of the country and [Canal 36 Cholutelsat-Sur](#) in the south.

The current offensive against *Radio Globo* comes just days after a court convicted Lieutenant Colonel José Arnulfo Jiménez, the military officer responsible for the armed assault and forcible closure of *Canal 36* during the coup.

Attempts to tighten control of the media and an escalation in violence against journalists have eclipsed the start of a debate with civil society – to which *Radio y TV Globo* was not invited – about a proposed law on protecting human rights defenders, journalist and others that it currently before the national congress.

Dagoberto Díaz, the owner of local TV station *Canal 20*, was gunned down in Danli, in the southeastern province of El Paraíso, on 23 August, becoming the eighth journalist to be murdered in Honduras this year. He was killed just nine days after TV presenter [Nery Soto](#) was gunned down in the northern city of Olanchito.

Honduras is ranked 129th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).

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