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<http://www.rsf.org/bolivia-residents-blockade-missionary-tv-17-10-2011,41225.html>

Americas - Bolivia

TV threatened with seizure

Residents blockade missionary TV station to prevent takeover by labour union

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Residents of El Alto, near La Paz, have organized a blockade of a television station affiliated to a Catholic missionary organization after the town's main labor union announced plans to take it over.

The head of the missionary organization *Cuerpo de Cristo Foundation*, German priest Sebastian Obermaier, called for a residents' blockade of the *Canal 57-CVC* television station after the labor group COR announced plans to seize media outlets that it said conflicted with social organizations affiliated to the union.

The union's announcement, of which Reporters Without Borders has received a copy, specifically refers to *Canal 57-CVC*, and to another broadcaster, *Radio Bartolina Sisa*.

The document advocates the creation of a "press tribunal" responsible for punishing "blackmailers and bad journalists". Its authors refer to local government laws which allow for the establishment of community courts in certain circumstances.

Reporters Without Borders condemned the actions of the union group. "The allegations by the COR against the television station and its parent organization in no way sanction the illegal seizure of a news organization or allow for censorship of journalists," the worldwide media freedom organization said, urging the group to withdraw its "hateful and repressive" announcement.

It noted the Bolivian government had called for appeasement and urged it to ensure *Canal 57-CVC* and its staff were able to resume normal activity, adding that the COR's expressed desire for negotiations would pave the way for a return to normal.

Since 13 October, staff have been spending the night on the premises of the television station to guard its equipment. The following day, Wilfredo Mamani Hidalgo, the influential leader of a casual workers' organization affiliated to the COR, arrived with a van with tinted windows and no license plates, and a large truck, in the hope of removing equipment from the set of a TV programme, "Mi Barrio", of which he was the director until last August.

About 200 people responded to Obermaier's call to prevent Mamani from carrying out his action. Via the TV station, the union leader said he had merely come to collect equipment and he was opposed to the seizure of media organizations at the instigation of the COR. Mamani was assaulted by supporters of the TV station and was taken to hospital for treatment. Reporters Without Borders condemns such acts of violence.

The incident provoked unanimous condemnation by professional organizations in Bolivia, such as the La Paz Journalists' Association and, on the employers' side, the National Press Association.

Bolivian Vice-President Alvaro García Linera has asked union leaders to take no action against news organizations, and appealed to the latter to exercise "self-regulation and self-correction". Through its local boss, Remigio Condori, the COR promised no immediate action would be taken against *Canal 57-CVC* pending a meeting in the near future with the Roman Catholic bishop of El Alto, Jesús Juárez.

The union, for its part, called on the Cuerpo de Cristo Foundation to undertake “new social measures” on behalf of the large number of non-contract workers.
