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Americas - Bolivia

Progress

## Judge rules that press court, not criminal court, should hear "spying" case

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**A La Paz court has ruled on 5 August that the government's "spying" case against *La Razón* reporter Ricardo Aguilar and the newspaper's editor, Claudia Benavente, should be heard by a press court and not a criminal court, as the prosecutor-general wanted.**

Ruling in favour of **Aguilar** and **Benavente**, presiding judge Virginia Crespo said she was taking account of Bolivia's constitutional provisions, its press law and the international conventions it has ratified.

The decision was greeted enthusiastically by the many journalists and civil society representatives in the court, who see it as a good precedent for freedom of information. Prosecutor Héctor Acre said he would not appeal.

*"We hail the judges' decision to refer the La Razón case to the press court,"* said Camille Soulier, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Americas desk. *"It shows the authorities that they are not above the law as regards press offences. But it is just a first step and we still demand the withdrawal of all charges against La Razón's journalists."*

[The authorities accuse](#) Aguilar and Benavente of revealing state secrets in an article in the newspaper's *Animal Político* supplement on 13 April about the complaint that land-locked Bolivia recently brought against Chile before the International Court of Justice in The Hague in an attempt to recover access to the Pacific Ocean.

The prosecutor-general charged Aguilar with "espionage" and Benavente with "complicity" on 22 April. Then, on 7 May, a court ordered Aguilar to reveal his sources for the report within five days.

*La Razón's* lawyer responded by filing a counter-motion against the judge in charge of the case, Jhonny Machicado, and prosecutor Facundo Coronel, accusing them of incompetence.

Bolivia is ranked 94th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).

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