

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/venezuela-government-likens-media-coverage-02-10-2013,45277.html>

Americas - Venezuela

New threat

Government likens media coverage of shortages to “war propaganda”

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Globovisión, a TV station that is used to [being harassed](#) by the National Communications Commission (CONATEL) and other government agencies, has been the target of a new CONATEL investigation since 30 September.

The station is facing a possible fine of up to 10 per cent of its annual income for its coverage of the shortages of food, electricity and other essentials that Venezuela is currently suffering. Those affected include the print media, especially local newspapers, which are finding it hard to obtain newsprint.

President Nicolás Maduro criticized coverage of the shortages shortly before CONATEL began its investigation. Alluding to offences defined in the Radio, TV and Electronic Media Social Responsibility Law ([RESORTEMEC](#)), he described the coverage as “war propaganda (...) liable to spread panic among the public” and encourage “compulsive buying.”

Arguments of this kind were used in the past to impose [generalized censorship](#) in a case of alleged contamination of drinking water.

“A badly drafted law is yet again being used to justify the government’s calls for censorship,” Reporters Without Borders said.

“The authorities think that just referring to the shortages is tantamount to ‘destabilizing the country’ and ‘panicking’ a public that is too ignorant to understand the situation. So they assume the right to decide what is in the public interest and what media coverage can be tolerated.

“This censorship is all the more serious now that Venezuelan citizens no longer have the ability to challenge it under the Inter-American human rights system, from which Venezuela withdrew on 10 September. Will the Venezuelan media be reduced to doing nothing more than carrying the official announcements known as cadenas?”

This latest problem represents a new setback for the media at a time when they are facing economic and political problems.

On the economic front, the shortage of newsprint has forced some newspapers to cut back or even suspend production altogether. This is the case with the Maturín-based daily *Diario El Sol* and the Anzoátegui-based daily *La Antorcha*, which have not been on sale since August. Some newspapers, such as the Barquisimeto-based *El Impulso*, have cut back on the number of pages. Others have reduced the number of issues. They include the Anzoátegui-based *La Prensa*, which has dropped its weekend issue.

On the political front, President Maduro announced on 10 September that all broadcast media would soon be required to carry two cadenas every day. These official messages, which are abused for propaganda purposes, have never been subject any regulation as regards frequency, length or content.

Closures of radio stations by the authorities are also fuelling the climate of concern. Four stations in the state of Amazonas – La Voz del Orinoco, Chamánica, La Deportiva and Impacto – had to stop broadcasting in September as a result of CONATEL’s intervention. In each case, their frequencies were withdrawn and equipment was seized.
