

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/venezuela-travel-ban-is-now-part-of-regime-s-19-05-2015,47908.html>

Americas - Venezuela

Overview

Travel ban is now part of regime's harassment of independent media

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Reporters Without Borders condemns the increased pressure that the Venezuelan authorities are putting on the country's few independent news media by using their control of the judicial apparatus and access to resources.

On 5 May, Judge Maria Eugenia Núñez banned 22 editors and executives of three independent media outlets – the newspapers *Tal Cual* and *El Nacional* and the news website *La Patilla* – from leaving the country and ordered them to appear before the court once a week.

Her decision was in response to the libel suit that national assembly speaker Diosdado Cabello brought against the three publications on 23 April for quoting a report in the Spanish daily *ABC* that Cabello is alleged to be the head of a drug-trafficking cartel called Los Soles.

Cabello's suit accuses them of "aggravated and continuing defamation." The publications all took care to stress that these were allegations. Other foreign news media also quoted the *ABC* story.

Those banned from travelling abroad include **Teodoro Petkoff**, a winner of Spain's Ortega y Gasset Prize for the defence of freedom, independence and rigour in journalism, who is also the target of another libel suit by Cabello. The Venezuelan authorities often bring defamation actions against news media but until now the effects have usually been limited to fines and have not included travel bans.

"We condemn this utterly disproportionate court order against 22 editors and executives of *Tal Cual*, *El Nacional* and *La Patilla*," Reporters Without Borders deputy programme director Virginie Dangles said.

"In no way does this defamation action constitute grounds for depriving these media professionals of their freedom of movement. We deplore the misuse of prosecutions by senior officials to gag Venezuela's few independent voices and we call for the unconditional withdrawal of these proceedings."

These judicial proceedings join a long list of intimidation attempts designed to throttle freedom of information. Since January, several media outlets have been the targets of threats and accusations that have gone completely unpunished since they mainly came from government officials including President Nicolas Maduro.

On 3 March, Maduro accused the privately-owned Venezuelan TV station *Telegen* and the international Spanish-language broadcaster *CNN en Español* of participating in a coup plot against him.

These threats are all the more worrying because they are often followed by physical attacks. According to the Press and Society Institute (IPYS), a Venezuelan NGO, [at least one journalist have been physically attacked](#) since the start of the year and [at least three others have been arbitrarily arrested](#) while doing reports.

Not content to censor media outlets or encourage self-censorship by constantly suing journalists who do not toe the official line, the government also uses economic asphyxiation against

independent news media by controlling their access to resources.

Using newsprint supplies for indirect censorship

El Impulso, a leading independent newspaper that had already suffered from the shortages of newsprint resulting from a national distribution system, announced on 10 May that it would have to reduce the number of pages in each issue from 16 to eight and might have to stop publishing within ten days or so.

Created in 1904, *El Impulso* is Venezuela's oldest daily. Two other newspapers, *El Siglo* and *Ultima Hora*, have sounded the alarm about their newsprint supplies since the start of the month.

In a press release [last September, Reporters Without Borders already criticized the newsprint distribution system, which is controlled by the Corporación Maneiro](#), an entity that reports to the president's office. Two other independent newspapers, *El Carabobeño* and *El Nacional*, had serious problems in March.

The government's use of economic pressure is not new and has succeeded in convincing most media outlets to censor themselves. Since becoming president, Maduro has been very hostile to independent media and freedom of information, and has encouraged the creation or reinforcement of pro-government media.

[Venezuela is ranked 137th out of 180 countries in the 2015 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.](#)

(Logo: AFP)
