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PRESS RELEASE

Venezuela: Six Cable Channels Suspended

According to information received by ARTICLE 19, at midnight on 24 January 2010, six cable television channels had their programming suspended. The Government of the Republic of Venezuela justified this oppressive measure on the basis that the channels had breached their legal obligation to broadcast official messages from the Presidency. ARTICLE 19 calls for this oppressive rule to be repealed and for the channels to be reinstated.

The channels, which are carried by all cable television operators in Venezuela, were in breach of a new law that obliges all channels with more than 30 per cent Venezuelan content to broadcast the President's messages. According to ARTICLE 19's sources, the decision to suspend them was imposed directly by the government-controlled National Commission on Telecommunications (Conatel), with no due process or opportunity for the channels to present a defence. These closures follow the shutting down of 32 radio stations and two small television stations in August 2009, along with another 29 radio stations in September 2009.

ARTICLE 19 has repeatedly called for a complete revision of the regulatory system for broadcasting in Venezuela. We call on the Venezuelan Government to stop justifying its extreme repression of broadcasters by appealing to notions of democracy and the public interest and, instead, to put in place a truly democratic and public interest regulatory system.

This requires that the rules governing broadcasting should be thoroughly revised so as to conform to international standards, including by adding fair procedures, and that these rules should be implemented by an independent regulator. Any requirements that broadcasters carry government messages are clearly open to political manipulation and this rule should be repealed. Furthermore, the rules should allow for the suspension of channels, an extreme measure, only in the most extreme cases of repeated and serious abuse of the rules, if at all.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.