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Americas - Venezuela

Radio closed

Carabobo state radio station shut down illegally and without explanation

12 April 2011

Carabobo Stereo 102.3 FM, a radio station based in the northern state of Carabobo, has been off the air since the evening of 18 March when around 30 representatives of the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL) turned up unannounced with soldiers, shut it down and seized its equipment.

Claiming to be carrying out a routine inspection when they arrived, the CONATEL officials asked the station's representatives to accompany them to the Cerro Copey transmission centre, giving them no chance to bring their lawyers. At Cerro Copey, they were told the station was being closed and its equipment confiscated for using a frequency clandestinely. No attempt was made to verify their claims that all their papers were in order.

Carabobo Stereo had been broadcasting legally for the past year and a half after obtaining permission from CONATEL and the ministry of communication and information (MINCI), which had insisted that the station register on their website for the purposes of paying taxes and submitting the reports required by CONATEL.

A few months later, in September 2010, *Carabobo Stereo* was surprised to learn that the authorities had assigned its frequency, FM 102.3, to another station. *Carabobo Stereo* has filed an appeal against its closure, submitting documentation showing that it was operating legally. CONATEL now has 30 days to respond.

Why did the authorities do this? Why did CONATEL close *Carabobo Stereo* and seize its equipment without giving its manager any warning, thereby preventing him from consulting his legal advisers? Why was *Carabobo Stereo*'s frequency assigned to a new station? The answers to these questions are not yet known.

It is nonetheless clear that the authorities are currently being very aggressive towards certain news media. Four journalists were harassed in two separate incidents on 7 April.

Globovisión TV reporter **Laura Domínguez** and cameraman **Heisser Daniel Gutiérrez** were aggressed verbally and physically in the western state of Trujillo while reporter **Maolis Castro** and photographer **Ernesto Morgado** of the newspaper *El Nacional* were held for seven hours without a warrant by military police in Caracas. They said they physically attacked.
