

Confiscated airwaves?

Resolution could threaten minority radio access to broadcast frequencies

3 February 2011

Reporters Without Borders calls on the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL) to withdraw a draft resolution under which the granting of low-power broadcast frequencies to radio stations would be suspended.

“At a time when small radio stations such as *Faluma Bimetu* and [La Voz de Zacate Grande](#) are being hounded, we have every right to suspect that this measure would be used to suppress or rein in certain media for political reasons,” Reporters Without Borders said. “It poses a real danger to minority and community radios that opposed the June 2009 coup d’état and are being targeted by the current government.”

CONATEL unveiled the draft resolution on 31 January, announcing a five-day consultation period ending tomorrow. The shortness of this period alone raises suspicions about the commission’s intentions. And who is being consulted, anyway? The resolution is also discriminatory as it leaves no alternative for small radio stations that cannot afford more powerful frequencies.

When Honduras underwent a Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council last November, it undertook to bring its telecommunications legislation into line with international human rights standards. This resolution is a flagrant violation of that pledge.

Furthermore, article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights forbids any restriction or limitation on the right of expression by indirect methods or means such as the abuse of government controls. If adopted, the resolution would violate this article of the convention, which Honduras signed.

1.02.11 - Afro-Honduran community radio resumes broadcasting amid great tension

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) and Reporters Without Borders are waiting for the Honduran authorities to give a clear undertaking to provide physical and legal protection to the country’s minority news media and will hold them responsible for any act of censorship against Radio Faluma Bimetu.

Also known in Spanish as Radio Coco Dulce, this community radio station is the mouthpiece of the country’s Garifuna (Afro-Honduran) community. Based in Triunfo de la Cruz, in the Atlantic coast municipality of Tela, it resumed broadcasting on 26 January after being forced off the air for [12 days by threats](#).

Watch the video report:

The fate of Triunfo de la Cruz and its radio station is being threatened by the same combination of forces that is undermining much of the rest of the county: the collusion of local officials with the agrarian and industrial oligarchy; the impact of organized crime along the Atlantic seaboard, [where one journalist was murdered among 10 other in the country last year](#); and the repression stemming from the June 2009 coup d'état, which has targeted [minority media and journalists in particular](#).

AMARC and Reporters Without Borders call not only for an end to impunity for the murders of journalists but also for the restoration of real media pluralism, which was shattered by the coup. The government, which recently obtained foreign aid, is going through the motions of solving last year's murders of journalists but the fact remains that opposition media continue to be persecuted, threatened and intimidated. What happens to Radio Faluma Bimetu will serve as a test.

Radio Faluma Bimetu received assistance from AMARC and Reporters Without Borders after it was destroyed by an arson attack in January 2010. Now, a year later, Tela's municipal authorities are trying to impose a management board (patronato).

*Community leader **Alfredo López**, who is the station's director, appeared in court on 14 January in connection with an exchange of shots in Triunfo de la Cruz three days earlier, but in the absence of evidence against him, he was not charged. It was then that the station decided to temporarily suspend broadcasting, for fear of further reprisals.*

The special rapporteurs on freedom of expression of the United Nations and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights have voiced concern about the mounting violence against community media in Honduras and have called on the government to comply with its international obligations regarding human rights and freedom of expression, including the duty to protect the practice of journalism by community media, which are currently fulfilling a key role in social debate and reporting news that other media deliberately omit.

Tela mayor David Zacaro Morlachi and the other municipal authorities will be held to account in the courts for any incident that prevents Radio Faluma Bimetu from operating normally.
