

# Reporters Without Borders

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Americas - Ecuador

Travel ban

## Eagerly awaited free speech hearing in Washington, but radio director under travel ban

25 October 2011

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Amid continuing tension between the Ecuadorean government and some of the country's privately-owned media, Reporters Without Borders hopes that solutions will emerge from the hearing on freedom of expression in Ecuador that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) is due to hold today in Washington (4.30 pm local).

Expectations are all the greater as three Ecuadorean cabinet ministers – foreign minister Ricardo Patiño, justice minister Johana Pesántez and national secretary for communication [Fernando Alvarado](#) – are due to attend.

As well as the main journalists' organizations and the media monitoring NGO Fundamedios, the hearing's participants are to include the leading targets of libel cases brought by President Rafael Correa: **Juan Carlos Calderón** and **Christian Zurita**, [the authors of a book about the president's brother](#), and the three co-directors of the daily *El Universo*, who have been sentenced to jail terms and a massive fine on criminal libel charges.

The *El Universo* case has been under appeal before the national court of justice in Quito since 5 October, but the appeal does not include former *El Universo* columnist **Emilio Palacio**, who was also convicted in same case. Palacio fled to the United States, from where President Correa has said he will not try to have him extradited.

"This face-to-face under the IACHR's auspices should be the occasion to settle the dispute which has been exacerbated by the exorbitant sanctions imposed on *El Universo* and to remind the Ecuadoran state of its relevant obligations under the American Convention on Human Rights," Reporters Without Borders said.

"We welcome the participation of three government ministers in this hearing, and we note the government's recent gestures, including the withdrawal of proceedings against seven radio stations in connection with a programme about freedom of expression. This hearing could also serve to reach the basis of a compromise on [the communication bill](#) which the national assembly is currently debating again."

The allocation and management of broadcast frequencies is another major issue. In this regard, Reporters Without Borders regrets that **Wilson Cabrera**, the head of a radio station (*La Voz de la Esmeralda Oriental*) that has been silenced since April, was prevented from boarding an international flight in Quito on 23 October with the aim of attending the IACHR hearing.

Cabrera was told he was forbidden to leave the country under a judicial control order issued by a court in Guayas that dates back to 19 June 2007. Cabrera told Reporters Without Borders he had never previously been notified of this order's existence.

"Assuming the travel ban was not prompted by the invitation to attend the IACHR hearing, it is clear that Cabrera would not have attempted this trip if he had been told of the four-year-old court order," Reporters Without Borders said. "He should be allowed to travel. The interest in his participation is sufficient grounds. We urgently appeal for him to be given permission to travel today."

