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Americas - Paraguay

War on broadcasters

Community radio stations face crackdown for “inciting crime”

14 August 2012

After [the purge of the state media](#) in the wake of President Fernando Lugo’s removal from office by parliament in June last year, community radio stations could soon be the next target of the new government.

The Paraguay Broadcasters Union (URP) was one of the first professional bodies to ally itself with the government of Federico Franco as soon as the former president was removed.

At a meeting yesterday with the state attorney-general, Javier Díaz Veron, the leader of the URP, Javier Correa, called for action against “more than 1,200 pirate radios operating in the country” which he accused of “inciting crime” on many occasions. He also asked the telecoms watchdog CONATEL to withdraw the licences of all stations implicated in what he termed illegal acts, without specifying what they were.

Correa said he had received a favourable reply from the authorities, while CONATEL had already pledged on 8 July to dismantle about 200 community radio stations operating without permission.

“No-one should be fooled by the legal and administrative veneer claimed by the body that represents the country’s main private and commercial radio and television organizations, almost all of which campaigned for the parliamentary coup against Fernando Lugo,” Reporters Without Borders said.

“Such lobbying directly serves the interests of a disputed government. Community radio stations were born out of protest movements and most support the popular protests that began with the president’s removal from office. Do they believe that the protests will subside if the radio stations are shut down? What would then remain of the principles of free expression and media pluralism? By giving in to this kind of economic and political pressure, the government will be making a final break with constitutional principles and the American Convention on Human Rights.

“Only a telecommunications law that allows space for all types of broadcasting – state-run, private and community – and guarantees their independence will provide a way out of the current stalemate. It is particularly unacceptable that a spokesman for the main radio and television broadcasters should call for censorship of other media organizations.”

Concern about the fate of community radio stations, which began with Lugo’s removal, grew on 31 July when three CONATEL officials tried to carry out an inspection at the premises of *Radio Candela* in the southern city of Encarnacion.

The station, which is owned by the feminist organization [Kuña Róga](#) (House of Women), has been broadcasting for 10 years with support from an organization set up by CONATEL. The officials told editorial staff the reason for the visit was an “irregularity”, but left after they were unable to produce the necessary paperwork and in the absence of a legal representative of the station. A few days earlier, the station had reported on a protest demonstration against the Franco government.

Photo: Coco Arce, Ape Paraguay

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