

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/equateur-four-radio-broadcasters-and-two-tv-13-06-2012,42788.html>

---

Americas - Ecuador

Crackdown on the airwaves

## Six radio broadcasters and two TV stations shut down in two weeks

13 June 2012

---

After 59 years on the air, the Quito radio station *La Pantera 960 AM* was closed down and its equipment seized two days ago by the chief of police of Pichincha province, Fausto Velásquez, accompanied by 15 officials from his department and representatives of the public prosecutor's office and the telecoms regulator Supertel.

The closure was officially in response to the station's arrears in the payment of its licence fees. The same reason was also given in the cases of four of seven other media outlets closed down in the past fortnight. Representatives of the radio and television stations concerned believe, however, that the real reasons were political. This encroachment on the airwaves is a serious cause for concern.

The closure of *Radio Cosmopolita* was followed a day later by that of two more stations, *RU Matriz Cadena Sur Ecuador 120 AM* and *K-Mil 89.5 FM*, both based in El Oro province. The first was shut down for "lacking a licence to broadcast" and the second for "failing to comply with its licensing agreement". According to its own figures, Supertel has closed 14 media outlets since the start of the year.

"In the case of *Radio Cosmopolita* and the others, not all legal avenues have been explored and that arouses suspicions about the reasons for these steps against broadcasting organizations, which include not just the withdrawal of frequency rights but also the seizure of equipment," Reporters Without Borders said.

"These operations have had the worst possible political fallout, just as the debate on [new legislation](#) designed to create greater equilibrium in the media has run into trouble.

"Against this background and in the light of previous media outlet closures, we have previously argued in favour of an overhaul of the Register of Radio Frequencies and a wide-ranging reform of the National Telecommunications Commission (Conatel) and Supertel which is dependent on it. This recommendation was made in May 2009 by a group of international experts consulted by the government. Why was it never carried out?"

The Quito station *Radio Cosmopolita* was closed previously for the same reason, on 16 May last year, but was able to resume broadcasting after referring its case to the Constitutional Court.

The highest authority decided that the station should be able to carry on using the frequency it had been allocated pending a ruling by the Disputes Tribunal, the competent authority in the matter of licence payments. This was ignored, however, in the operation against the station two days ago. The station's management, quoted by the organization [Fundamedios](#), which campaigns for freedom of expression, sees it as retaliation for inviting former president Lucio Gutiérrez on to its airwaves three weeks earlier.

On 6 June, the station *Net* in Ambato, in Tungurahua province, suffered the same fate, and for the same reasons, as the Quito broadcaster. On that occasion 50 police officers were deployed to confiscate its broadcasting equipment. In this case, too, the operation was carried

out without waiting for a ruling by the Disputes Tribunal.

Supertel, supported by the police, carried out two similar operations on 24 May in the Amazonian region of Napo against the local television station *Lidervisión*, based in the city of Tena, and *Radio Líder* in Archidona. A day earlier, in Sucumbíos province, the station *El Dorado*, which broadcasts from Nueva Loja, received a similar visit for licence payment arrears amounting to 72 dollars. The management decided to appeal to Supertel.

In all these cases, officials of the media organizations said they had received no prior notification that closure of their station could be imminent.

On 23 May, the regional television station *Telesangay* in Macas, in Morona Santiago province, was visited by Supertel officials and 50 police officers. In this instance the dispute was over the media outlet's failure to meet the installation and start-up deadline specified in the television and radio broadcasting law, which has been disputed by *Telesangay*. A Conatel notification to this effect was sent to Marcelino Chumpi, the prefect of Morona Santiago. However, the station's management was given no official document at the time of the operation.

---