

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/venezuela-attacks-on-three-maracaibo-media-08-06-2012,42754.html>

Americas - Venezuela

Politically motivated violence

Attacks on three Maracaibo media amid continuing tension in run-up to election

8 June 2012

With just four months to go to a 7 October election in which President Hugo Chávez is being challenged by former Miranda state governor Henrique Capriles, journalists continue to be [the targets of physical violence](#) and there has been a worrying new development in the form of armed attacks on news media buildings.

"We note that the recent attacks are being investigated, but we are still very worried by the intensity of the violence in the run-up to the October presidential election," Reporters Without Borders said. "Such extreme polarization affects not only freedom of information but also journalists' basic freedom of movement. Normal election coverage could prove to be impossible if the following emergency measures are not taken."

Reporters Without Borders recommends the following three emergency measures:

- That all physical attacks on news media and journalists linked to the elections should be handled by a single court, which operates in consultation with media and journalists' organizations of all political colours.
- A solemn undertaking to respect freedom of information should be given jointly by the candidates and their staff, an undertaking to ensure that their supporters fully respect journalists as they go about their work.
- All the media, especially the broadcast media, should undertake to provide the fairest possible coverage of political debates and the fairest possible allocation of space and air-time to the candidates.

Three media have been the targets of armed attacks in Maracaibo, the capital of the western state of Zulia. The first was a grenade attack on the daily *Qué Pasa* on 29 May which damaged its facade. In the second, just a few hours later, 14 gunshots were fired at *Catatumbo TV's* headquarters by men in a pickup. In the latest incident, shots were fired from a pickup at the headquarters of the daily *Versión Final* on 3 June. Fortunately there were no injuries in any of the attacks.

The management of all three news media said they thought the attacks were a direct reprisal for their editorial policies. The Forensic and Criminal Investigation Division (CICPC), which is handling the investigations, is working on this hypothesis. *Catatumbo TV's* coverage of the recent violence in Maracaibo's Sabaneta prison may have been the motive in its case.

Coverage of a wave of riots and violence in Venezuelan prisons is thought to have been behind the anonymous threat that **María Isolié Iglesias** (photo) of the daily *El Universal* received in 1 June, "warning" her that she would soon be the target of an "ambush." With the support of the National Journalists' Association (CNP) and the National Press Workers' Union (SNTP), she filed a complaint with the Victims Protection Unit on 5 June.

Stigmatized by both sides

These latest attacks and threats have exacerbated existing tension resulting from a series of physical attacks on reporters in the field, who are being branded as partisan on the basis of the media they work for. Those employed by state media are accused of being pro-government. Those working for privately-owned media are assumed to be pro-opposition.

Telesur reporter **Jordán Rodríguez** and cameraman **Claybord Saint Jhons** were attacked by a group of individuals on 8 May outside La Planta prison, near Caracas, where a riot was taking place. The only reason for the assault was the fact that they work for *Telesur*. At the same time, National Guard members seized and damaged the equipment of reporter **Guillermo Colina** and cameraman **Luis Reaño**, who work for privately-owned *Globovisión*.

Two days later, **Danny Vargas**, a cameraman with the leading state TV station, *Venezolana de Televisión (VTV)*, was physically attacked while covering a rally held by opposition presidential candidate Capriles in the western state of Barinas.

In a similar incident, **Oneiver Rojas**, a cameraman working for the privately-owned TV station *Televen*, was attacked after a Capriles campaign appearance in the eastern state of Anzoátegui on 17 April because he was mistaken for a *VTV* cameraman.
