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Americas - Argentina

Mysterious sabotage

Salta broadcaster repeatedly sabotaged, other attacks on radio stations

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The broadcasts of TV and radio stations owned by *Norte Visión Satelital*, a media company based in the northern city of Salta, have been seriously disrupted by the deliberate destruction of an antenna by persons unknown on 3 October. Other regional broadcast media have been affected by this act of sabotage, the fourth against the company since the start of the year.

In an interview for Reporters Without Borders, *Norte Visión* owner **Daniel Longarela** expressed his concern about the apparent absence of motives for the attacks and the lack of progress in the police investigation. He felt helpless, he said.

"We are not aware of having any enemies. We do not broadcast opinions for or against. Sometimes we criticize, but we stress the positive points too. We try to stay neutral but it is clear that someone wants to silence us." He did not recall a threat ever being made against a journalist employed by his group, which includes local TV stations *Canal 2* and *Canal 10* and radio *FM Atlántida 93.5*.

He pointed out the degree of preparation and organization involved in the latest act of sabotage, in which the 66-metre antenna's guy-wires were all severed, causing it to collapse. *Norte Visión* has resumed broadcasting using low-power equipment pending the installation of a new antenna, which is expected to be completed within 40 days. Measures have also been taken to guard the installations.

The company's transmission cables were severed in February and again in June, without serious consequences. Intruders cause more serious damaged when they managed to get into the company's premises on 15 September and set fire to the main broadcasting terminal.

Violent attacks on media and journalists are rare in Argentina but there have been several attacks on local broadcast media in recent weeks. An arson attack cause major damaged to the premises of *FM Estación 93.3*, a radio station based in Zárate (in Buenos Aires province) on 30 September. The Forum for Argentine Journalism (FOPEA) reported that the station was nonetheless able to resume partial broadcasting with emergency equipment.

FM Pajsachama, a community radio station based in El Retiro, in the northwestern province of Santiago del Estero, has been off the air since unidentified armed assailants ransacked its installations and threatened its personnel on 10 September.

Owned by the Santiago del Estero-Vía Campesina Peasant Movement (MOCASE-VC), the station defends the indigenous population and has enemies within the local political class. Reporters Without Borders has obtained a breakdown of all the damage sustained by the station and has undertaken to help it to rebuild.

"Regardless of the motives, these attacks must not go unpunished," Reporters Without Borders said. "We urge the authorities in these provinces to intensify the investigations and to protect the most exposed and vulnerable radio stations. We also recommend the creation of a support fund for media that lack emergency backup equipment so that they can always continue broadcasting without interruption."

