

# Reporters Without Borders

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Americas - Haiti

Journalists persecuted

## State TV chief fires three journalists, brings criminal defamation suit against them

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Reporters Without Borders condemns the criminal defamation action that **Pradel Henriquez**, the director-general of state-owned *Télévision Nationale d'Haiti (TNH)*, filed in Port-au-Prince on 8 April against three *TNH* journalists – **Eddy Jackson Alexis**, **Josias Pierre** and **Jacques Innocent** – who say they were fired for being critical of President-Elect Michel Martelly. Alexis was *TNH*'s news editor.

Henriquez, who also heads state-owned *Radio Nationale*, accuses the three journalists of waging a smear campaign against him. He fired them on 5 April – shortly after a courtesy visit to **TNH** by the president-elect – on the grounds of “grave insubordination” and their alleged inability to prevent their political affiliations from affecting their professional duties

“We call for their immediate reinstatement as they appear to have fired because of their political views,” Reporters Without Borders said. “At no time did their opinions affect the quality of their work or cloud their objectivity. This seems to be a case of political persecution and, as such, is a very bad start for Michel Martelly, who was proclaimed president-elect a week ago.”

The press freedom organization added: “We appeal to the future president to take a clear position and we hope that media freedom and editorial independence will be respected during his five-year term of office.”

Alexis and Pierre have accused the *TNH* management of orchestrating a propaganda campaign in favour of Martelly during the run-up to the second round of the presidential election, at the expense of his rival, Mirlande Manigat.

They claim that on Henriquez's orders, there was massive imbalance in the air-time that *TNH* assigned to the candidates, with Martelly getting 45 minutes for every 10 minutes given to Manigat. They also accuse Henriquez of authorizing full coverage of a four-hour concert-cum-meeting that Martelly, a Haitian pop music singer, gave during the campaign. His rival was offered nothing in return.

While recognizing that the three journalists leaned towards Manigat in their political views, Henriquez insists that the grounds for their dismissal were insubordination and “professional shortcomings,” not their politics.

The *Association of Haitian Journalists (AJH)*, Senator John Joel Joseph, and several lawyers including Osner Fevry have agreed to give the three journalists legal assistance. Senator Joseph said he is making his lawyer available to them.

The three journalists are meanwhile bringing a counter-suit against Henriquez because he likened their behaviour to that of the Iraqi journalist who threw a shoe at US President George Bush. This is tantamount to accusing them of being terrorists, they say.

Under Henriquez's criminal action, Alexis and Pierre are being sued for 50 million gourdes in damages (approximately 857 Euros). A three-year jail sentence is also being requested .

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