



VENEZUELA

Closure of *Radio Caracas Televisión* paves way for media hegemony

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The most popular and one of the oldest of Venezuela's news media, *Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV)*, stopped broadcasting at midnight on 27 May, 53 years after it first went on the air. There were tears and anger at its Caracas headquarters. The last news programme was followed by farewell hymns and prayers. Outside, the Venezuelan capital shook to the rhythm of demonstrations by the many opponents and fewer supporters of what the former called a "closure" and the latter called "the end of a frequency concession."

RCTV is no more. It had to surrender its broadcast channel to a new public TV station, *Televisora Venezolana Social (Tves)*, on the orders of President Hugo Chávez. *RCTV*, whose mascot is the lion, was accused of supporting a coup five years ago, one that briefly ousted the president from 11 to 13 April 2002. Without waiting for



Televisora
Venezolana social

RCTV to exhaust all of its appeal possibilities, Chávez signed the decree creating the new state-owned station on 11 May. At *RCTV*, employees and management had been hoping until the end for an 11th hour reprieve. But the game was lost and a new media landscape is emerging in which *Globovisión*, with a signal that reaches only Caracas and four nearby cities, is the only opposition TV station that survives - and it might not survive for much longer.

President Chávez likes to deliver long radio and TV addresses which all the broadcast media, including the privately-owned ones, simultaneously transmit in "cadena" whether they want to or not. He also has his own Sunday programme called "Aló Presidente" on the leading public TV channel. So he already has an impressive media apparatus at his disposal for getting his message across.



Hugo Chávez

Why did he need to take *RCTV*'s broadcast frequency and give it to another of his own stations? Why was *RCTV*'s management not charged and prosecuted at any point in the past five years for its "involvement" in the coup, especially as under the law this is a condition for

refusing a TV station the right to broadcast for the next 20 years? Finally and above all, why did President Chávez go ahead with a measure that was so unpopular, even among his own supporters? Opinion polls says 70 per cent of Venezuelans disapprove of *RCTV*'s closure - this in a population in which four out of five get their news from television alone.

Reporters Without Borders went on a fact-finding trip to Venezuela from 24 to 28 May, meeting with national and foreign journalists, media owners, media specialists, human rights activists and political analysts. It was at *RCTV* on the day it stopped broadcasting. Its requests for meetings with government officials and representatives of public and pro-government media went unanswered. Their silence was as eloquent as the comments of the people it did meet, and tends to confirm that *RCTV*'s closure was not just an administrative measure. On the contrary, it was a political move, one that establishes government hegemony over the broadcast media and constitutes a grave danger for editorial pluralism. It also revealed a new aspect of this political system known as "Chavism" - one that could be called media hegemony.

Presidential addresses

Imagine yourself with a TV remote control, zapping between five or six TV stations all showing exactly the same images of the president giving a speech. This bizarre situation is the almost daily lot of Venezuelans. The president's speeches rarely go on for less than three hours and some go for seven if he is feeling inspired. Far from limiting himself to cutting ribbons at openings, making the occasional formal address to the nation or praising the recipients of awards, Chávez delivers dissertations. Whenever the fancy takes him, he talks at length about contemporary geopolitics, about the works of independence hero Simón Bolívar, about his own works (what he has written and what he intends to write), about the Russian revolution and about what his own grandmother used to tell him.

Wouldn't one TV station be enough for such a verbose speaker? No at all. President Chávez prefers speeches in full to extracts, and he imposes them on all the TV and radio stations, including the privately-owned ones, as he is entitled to do under article 10 of the Radio and

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Television Social Responsibility Law of November 2004. The system of “cadenas” (obligatory simultaneous broadcasts) is one of the key levers of a regime that largely governs for and by communication. There have been 1,542 Chávez “cadenas” in all since 1999, with a total of 922 hours of airtime. In the same period, there have also been 1,000 hours of his personal programme “Aló Presidente,” broadcast on Sundays by the state-owned *Venezolana de Televisión (VTV)*. One the recent “cadenas” in particular, on 28 December 2006, caught the public’s attention.



“Aló Presidente”

Three weeks after his reelection as president by a very large margin, Chávez gave a speech to the armed forces at the Caracas Military Academy in which he unexpectedly commented towards the end: “There will no longer be any [frequency] concession for that TV station that was an accomplice to the coup, the station called *Radio Caracas Televisión*.” The threat at first met with incredulity. Six years before he was democratically elected in 1998, Lt. Col. Hugo Chávez had also tried to stage a coup - the 15th anniversary of which he marked with a military parade on 4 February. So he did not seem to be in a position to use “coup-mongering” as a charge to bring against his detractors.

Despite its 42 per cent average viewer rating, far ahead of any of its public or commercial rivals, *RCTV* and its viewers soon realised the president was not joking. Communication and information minister William Lara said on 2 January that *RCTV*’s broadcasting licence had been renewed for 20 years by a 1987 decree and expired on 27 May 2007, and that three options were being studied for replacing *RCTV* as terrestrial broadcast Channel 2. There were moral and political charges as well as administrative ground for not renewing its licence – *RCTV* was accused of broadcasting pornography and, above all, of playing a leading role in the April 2002 coup and the petroleum industry strikes in 2003 and 2004. Let us go back and look at all of this.

11 April 2002... then TV silence

Headed by Marcel Granier and with a markedly

right-wing editorial line, *RCTV* had the occasional problem with previous governments as well. It was suspended for periods ranging from 24 to 72 hours in 1976, 1980 and 1981, long before



Marcel Granier

Chávez came to power, because of “sensationalist” content or, in the last instance, an “enticing and erotic” ad. In 1987, when social-democrat Jaime Lusinchi was president, the government decreed that

broadcast frequencies were conceded for a period of 20 years. Until then, there had been no limit. The measure was above all targeted at *RCTV*, which was being critical of what was called “government omnipotency,” said Carlos Ayala, a lawyer and former president of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). The commercial TV stations and the state-owned *Venezolana de Televisión* were all suspended for 24 hours in 1989 for broadcasting a cigarette ad.



Chávez’s election as president was hailed for a while by some of the privately-owned news media but *RCTV* maintained its same editorial line and continued until the end to criticise violent crime, corruption and the cost of certain government measures and to always refer to “Lt. Col. Hugo Chávez” instead of “President Hugo Chávez.” Like the other opposition media, the events of 11 April 2002 gave *RCTV* the chance to sound the charge against the Chávez government. “11 April 2002 was initially a demonstration against government policy,” said Antonio Pasquali, a former Central University of Venezuela professor and specialist in communication. “The privately-owned media, especially the big TV stations, gave it the dimensions of a coup. Unlike the media owners, most of the demonstrators did not know Pedro Carmona, the Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce president who briefly replaced Hugo Chávez.”

The 11 April clashes left 17 dead. Splitting their screens in two, *Venevisión* (owned by media mogul Gustavo Cisneros), *Telegen*, *RCTV* and *Globovisión* simultaneously broadcast the speech Chávez gave before leaving the Miraflores presidential palace and the

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exchanges of gunfire taking place during the demonstration. “There was complete confusion,” said an independent journalist. “You did not know who was firing on whom, but what you could see on the screens reinforced the idea that the government had given orders for shots to be fired at the crowd.” *Globovisión* director Alberto Federico Ravell said: “The only reliable source at that moment would have been the defence ministry, but we had no access to it. No one knew until the end of the day whether or not Hugo Chávez had left the country.” Ravell denied inciting the coup: “I willingly admit that I was not unhappy to see Hugo Chávez go, but there is a big difference between that and saying I organised a coup.”

Carlos Correa, the head of the watchdog Espacio Público, said: “You have to know that on the evening of 11 April, Pedro Carmona, the short-lived interim president, was invited on to the *Venevisión* set until two o’clock in the morning. If you accuse *RCTV* of coup-mongering, you have to accuse all the other privately-owned TV stations as well.” Carmona announced on 13 April that he wanted to dissolve parliament and rescind the mandates of governors and mayors. The coup appeared to be a *fait accompli*, but the public got angry and the military ousted Carmona. Chávez then resumed control as president but all the privately-owned TV stations except *Globovisión* concealed this by broadcasting entertainment programmes and soap operas. Chávez has not forgotten this silence.

Tiger submits, lion rebels

“If Chávez had been really Bolivarian, he would have had all the privately-owned TV stations closed down after the coup or he could at the very least have brought criminal prosecutions against each of their managements,” said Pasquali, who regards Cisneros, the owner of



Venevisión (whose mascot is a tiger) as “one of the masterminds of the events in 2002.” None of the TV stations accused of supporting or participating in the 2002 coup has even been the target of any prosecution, summons or judicial report. The legal controversy about the non-

renewal of the lion’s licence stems from this.

“If you accept that *RCTV* was guilty of a coup, a legal problem immediately ensues,” said Ayala, the lawyer. “Under the 1987 decree that has been invoked by the current government, a broadcaster may request the renewal of its concession if it has not been found guilty of any ‘serious misconduct.’ In the absence of any judicial proceedings against it, *RCTV* therefore had a right to request and presumably obtain the renewal of its broadcast concession. Furthermore, the telecommunications law of 2000 stated that, from the moment it took effect, the government had two years to update the frequency registers and renew the frequencies for another 20 years.”

On the basis of these laws, *RCTV* maintained that its licence expired in June 2022, not May 2007 and it filed some 20 appeals with the National Telecommunications Commission (Conatel) and the supreme court. Although it is normally supposed to issue a ruling within four days, the supreme court took five months before it finally rejected *RCTV*’s appeals as “inadmissible.” But the court only took 24 hours to order that *RCTV* equipment (including 58 transmitters throughout the country) be made available at no cost to the new station *Tves*, at the risk of jeopardising *RCTV*’s cable transmission.

“Legally both *RCTV* and the government were right,” said Silvia Alegrett, the publisher of a local newspaper and co-director of *Expresión Libre*, a journalists’ collective created a month after the coup. “The licence did end on 27 May but *RCTV* could under the law request its renewal. *Venevisión*, whose licence expired on the same date, succeeded [on 23 May, the same day that the supreme court’s constitutional division rejected *RCTV*’s appeal] in being able to continue to broadcast for another five years.” What is the reason for this different treatment?

“It is very simple,” said Hugo Díaz Milano of *Expresión Libre*. “*Venevisión* negotiated its survival after the coup. The president succeeding it getting it to withdraw its political analysis programmes and to fall in line with the government’s information. *Telegen*, the other national commercial TV station, did the same.” Pasquali added: “Gustavo Cisneros is a powerful man and close friend of

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George Bush Sr., but that did not prevent him from reaching a deal with Hugo Chávez. He has been able to continue to run his businesses in exchange for his media support.”

Ayala pointed out: “This is a violation of the article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights. Forcing a news media to change its editorial line is a free speech violation.” But business is business. Several sources said the government buried the hatchet with the two stations, *Venevisión* and *Televen*, shortly before the 2004 recall referendum on Chávez’s continuing in office, which he won with 70 per cent of the vote.

Túlio Hernández, a sociologist and *El Nacional* columnist who for a while supported the government, is not fooled by the reasons given for silencing the *RCTV*. “It was a unilateral decision, taken without any consultation or any serious thought about television as a public service,” he said. “It is true that *RCTV* had the lion’s share of the advertising market, in a country where a lot of money is spent media advertising. And you can question, as I do, Marcel Granier’s concept of news and information. But as a remedy, closing *RCTV* is worse than the disease. The coup was just a pretext, and the ‘pornography’ charge does not stand up.”

As evidence, Hernández points to “La Hojilla” (The Razor Blade), one of the leading programmes on the state-owned *Venezolana de Televisión*. “It has a very simple premise – to demolish everything the competition does,” he said. “It is a collection of insults, calumnies, smutty comments and vulgarities.” A screening confirms that “La Hojilla” hardly conforms to the accepted requirements of public service broadcasting. If *RCTV* broadcasts a cartoon in which a white youth mistreats a black youth, “La Hojilla” says it proves that *RCTV* “incites young people to racism.” If *RCTV* screens Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket*, it is guilty of “exalting the American army and the atrocities committed by the Empire.” And “La Hojilla” concludes: “This is the transculturalism that *RCTV* has been vomiting on the air for 53 years.”



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Opposition media - a useful

pretext?

Six days before the supreme court’s constitutional division approved *RCTV*’s closure, the court’s political-administrative division issued a similar ruling. Granier immediately realised that the fate of *RCTV* and its 3,000 employees was sealed, although its previous appeals had been received favourably by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. President Chávez does not care about international law and has already let it be known that, if need be, he would withdraw from the Organisation of American States. The supreme court’s ruling on the day of the closure was the coup de grâce.

“OAS jurisprudence takes precedence over national law and as an OAS member state, Venezuela has to comply,” Granier explained to Reporters Without Borders in his office on the fateful day. “We obtained favourable rulings on the approximately 100 physical attacks against our journalists, but the government ignored the decisions of both the commission and court. The IACHR also ordered protective measures for *RCTV* employees and equipment, but again, nothing. At the time of our closing down, the judge who was supposed to implement the international decisions has been fired by the supreme court.” Now it is over. And now Venezuela has only one privately-owned opposition TV station – *Globovisión*. But for how much longer?

“Created 12 years ago, the station has 400 employees,” said Ravell, *Globovisión*’s director. “According to the government, our licence expires in 2015. Nonetheless, we are the target of about 50 judicial and administrative procedures with charges ranging from ‘insults’ to ‘unpaid taxes.’ The recent nationalisation of the main telephone and Internet operator, CANTV, has deprived us and all of the privately-owned opposition press of a major advertiser.”



Alberto Federico
Ravell

Like *RCTV*, *Globovisión* has appealed to OAS bodies about 70 cases of violence against its journalists since 2001. “No investigation has ever been carried out and no one has ever been convicted, although the people involved were identified,” Ravell added. “Whenever the president makes an

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aggressive speech about us in a 'cadena,' we are immediately the target of violence."

Two days before *RCTV's* closure, *Globovisión's* headquarters were vandalised by a group of pro-government activists. Footage of the attack was broadcast by all the TV stations and those responsible made no attempt to hide. On 29 May, two days after *RCTV's* closure, *Globovisión* was accused by Hugo Chávez of "calling for his murder" although yet again there was no sign of any formal judicial complaint. Nonetheless, Ravell and the Leopoldo Castillo, the host of the discussion programme "Aló Ciudadano," now face the possible of criminal prosecution. Before this new development, Ravell said: "The government has the means to

silence us. But it could also decide to use us as pretext for saying that an opposition press, and therefore press freedom, still exist in Venezuela." The concern is



Leopoldo Castillo

shared by the owners of the leading opposition dailies *El Nacional* (with print run of 100,000 copies) *El Universal* (130,000) and *Tal Cual* (25,000).

"*RCTV's* closure has made us fear the possible closure of other opposition media, one after another, even if the print media are less influential than the broadcast media," said *El Universal* editor Elides Rojas. "As soon as we utter the least criticism, we become the enemy. For example, an editorial about the judiciary in June 2005 led to our being accused of 'insulting a professional body and harming the reputation of a public institution' under the new criminal code which had been promulgated two months before. The case was finally closed the following August by the supreme court but the government's constant recourse to threats forces us to censor ourselves." Miguel Henrique Otero, the chairman of *El Nacional's* board and son of its founder, said: "The 'cadenas' and the programme 'La Hojilla' are used to identify this or that journalist for condemnation. It is an excellent method of harassment, even if I don't think the print media has been completely weakened, because it is not the leading target."



Miguel Henrique Otero

Media hegemony and political

plans

What exactly was Hugo Chávez trying to achieve by pressing ahead with *RCTV's* closure although it was widely condemned by the Venezuelan public and the international community? Why did a president who is so concerned about his image as the Third World's new leader allow himself to be criticised by a European Parliamentary resolution on 24 May, by virtually all human rights and press freedom groups, by the governments and parliaments of many Latin American countries including Brazil, Mexico and Chile, and even by his Bolivian counterpart and ally Evo Morales, who said he was "determined not to do the same."

A guerrilla leader in the 1960s and now editor of the daily newspaper *Tal Cual*, Teodoro Petkoff has tried to rally a divided opposition with no parliamentary representation and, during last year's presidential election, acted as campaign



Teodoro Petkoff

manager for Chávez's main rival, the social democratic governor of the western oil state of Zulia, Manuel Rosales. As such, Petkoff is one of the few public figures Chávez dares not attack in public. In Petkoff's view,

RCTV's closure can only be understood as part of the overall political and media context. "It is more sophisticated than a mere act of censorship," he said. "This is not Cuba or the former Soviet Union, and it is not a dictatorship. But it is a personal and almost total takeover of the public arena."



Manuel Rosales

Like Hernández, the sociologist, Petkoff points to the president's plans for the future. "Chávez wants the constitution amended in 2008 so that he can be reelected indefinitely," Petkoff said. "The constitutional reform would include an institutional overhaul that would weaken the state's federal structure and the status of the governors as counter-weights [two of the current ones are Chávez opponents]. Also under discussion is a so-called enabling law that would endorse government by decree, which already exists in practice. A state takeover of sports, involving a merger of the Venezuelan

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Olympic Committee and the ministry of sports, is in the works. And the culture ministry's role would be refocused on mass education."

According to Petkoff, there are also plans for the creation of a United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) - although this is for the time being opposed by the centre-left Podemos, the left-wing Patria para Todos and the Communist Party - as well as a reduction in university autonomy and "complete government control over the armed forces, with the president becoming their military commander in chief as well as their constitutional head."



Various journalists and analysts said there was little agreement on these grand plans, even in the corridors of power. "Indefinite reelection is not popular," Petkoff said. "Nor is the enabling law. Nearly 200 recall referendums have been convened by the people against governors or mayors, including Chavist ones. The unions and NGOs are reacting particularly badly to the state's takeover attempts. But where is the political opposition?"

Gregorio Salazar, the secretary-general of the National Union of Press Workers (SNTP), which represents 20,000 journalists, including 16,000 who are affiliated to the National College of Journalists, endorsed this view. "Hugo Chávez's presidential project cannot accommodate the presence of social intermediaries such as the media, professional or humanitarian organisations or even unions likely to criticise him," Salazar said. "RCTV's closure is a way of silencing any comments about, for example, violent crime or shortages of essential products. The 2002 coup became an argument for justifying this takeover of the means of expression and public structures. The government tried for a while to take advantage of broad support in the journalist community. It has turned journalists against it by announcing RCTV's closure, even those who did not like this station. Now we are all in an impasse."

The Foreign Press Association (APEX), which groups more than 90 correspondents of about 50 news media, took an equally pessimistic view, stressing the climate of mistrust between the press and government (a problem also

reported in certain diplomatic circles). "A decree in January confirmed a situation that had existed since 2002," said one of the APEX's foreign representatives. "Information is now entirely centralised within the communication and information ministry (MINCI). The press offices of the other ministries are no longer of any use. Officials are no longer allowed or no longer dare to say anything, except to the official press which just asks easy questions." The Venezuelan correspondent of a foreign newspaper concurred: "As the 28 ministers are totally subservient to the president, we have to content ourselves with anonymous sources within the ministries. Some officials told me they disagreed with RCTV's closure but begged me not to quote them by name for fear of seeming like 'coup supporters'."

Bereft of many of its advertisers, the regional press has to cope with competition from new local newspapers with direct state funding. No fewer than 63 newspapers have seen the light of day since January, all reporting the official news.

No more NGOs?

Forum for Life, a coalition of 20 NGOs founded in 1997, has reason to worry. A draft law on international cooperation that passed on its first reading in June 2006 aims to limit "foreign influence" over NGOs by restricting their funding. "Similar initiatives were tried in Colombia and Peru," said Humberto Prado, the coordinator of an NGO that monitors Venezuela's prisons. "In this case, the aim is also to restrict the NGOs' room for manoeuvre and independence as much as possible, especially those that intervene in sensitive areas such as prisons, abuse of authority by the army and police, and human rights in general. My NGO, for example, is no longer able to go as a 'visitor' into prisons where violence is endemic. Venezuela has 18,500 detainees, of whom 133 died in their cells in the first quarter of 2007, 18 of them on the same day in the same prison. This situation did not begin under Chávez, but it bothers them because it has not been resolved since he took office."

At the same time, the 204 NGOs that used to get subsidies from CANTV are waiting to see what will happen now that it has been nationalised.

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In the wait for the law's final adoption, the government does not lack ways to put pressure on journalists and NGO activists who are too talkative or obstructive. "The 2004 recall referendum that Hugo Chávez won was requested by the opposition," said Prado. "At the time, deputy Luis Tascón produced a list of all the signatories to the petition demanding the referendum – 12 million names with their political leaning, their ID card number and so on. It caused a scandal because it



Luis Tascón

The *RCTV* affair has seen this kind practice revived under the aegis of Eva Golinger, a Venezuelan-American lawyer based in New York and author of a book entitled the "El Código Chávez" (The Chávez Code) about US involvement in the 2002 coup and the recipients of US funding in Venezuela. On 25 May, she produced a blacklist of Venezuelan journalists who have travelled to the United States. It included the Reporters Without Borders correspondent.

Does Chavism dissolve in freedom of expression?

Let us sum up. Complete control of the state, government and armed forces. No opponents in parliament, as the opposition boycotted the 2005 legislative elections. A ruling party that is virtually the only party. Twenty-two out of twenty-four state governors who are entirely loyal. And soon, a largely neutralised civil society.

By closing *RCTV* and above all by taking its equipment for *Tves*, Chávez has tightened his grip on the last bastion that was holding out – the media. The media under his control now include the main national daily, *Últimas Noticias* (with a print-run of 200,000 copies), a score of radio stations (and many of the community radio stations), the public TV stations *Venezolana de Televisión* (with its programmes "La Hojilla" and "Aló Presidente"), *Telesur*, *Vive TV*, *Asamblea Nacional* and now *Tves*, the commercial TV stations *Televen* and *Venevisión*, and the telecommunications and Internet operator CANTV.

With all these media, the president no longer a

was unconstitutional to do this. The government denied it at first. Finally Chávez ordered the government not to use the list any more."

longer needs a law to impose his "cadenas," which his opponents hail by honking car horns and beating pots and pans. "On the radio, we have to put up with the noise of tanks when Chávez insists on military parades being broadcast," a journalist complained. Two more public TV stations are soon to be launched – a cable *Canal de Noticias* and a terrestrial *Canal 1*. Is there no limit to this voracious appetite?

It is the appetite of "a man whose own country is not big enough," says Hernández, the sociologist. "Venezuela is too small in his eyes. For Chávez, the cult of the military and the almost religious cult of Simón Bolívar are linked. His regime is based on an army-caudillo-people triptych with Third World leader ambitions." Among the foreigners who have inspired the future constitutional reform



Juan Carlos Monedero

are such different people as Spanish academic Juan Carlos Monedero, *Le Monde Diplomatique* editor Ignacio Ramonet and Argentine political scientist Norberto Ceresole, former éminence grise of the "carapintadas," an

far-right military faction that staged uprisings during Raúl Alfonsín's presidency.

So, does Chavism mean dictatorship? "No," replied Hernández, "it is more of an authoritarian mix of different discourses, including the discourse of a dispenser of justice and revenge, anti-Americanism, calculated references to Cuba, militarism and primitive religion in the form of the dream of a new man. But all the while with guarantees, promises of democracy."



Ignacio Ramonet

One democratic guarantee has perhaps gone with *RCTV*'s closure. Street demonstrators of all political tendencies spoke of a "first step towards a dictatorship." The reality is much more nuanced, but the deed is there. President Chávez may believe he has put an end to a media war that had gone on for five years, but he certainly has not pacified an extremely polarised society.

Intentions

- As "the participation of *Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV)* in the coup of 11 April 2002" was not legally established (and this was essential in order

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to have grounds for not renewing its licence);

- As the supreme court ruling of 25 May ordering the seizure of *RCTV*'s equipment for the new TV station, *Televisora Venezolana Social (Tves)*, clearly violates the telecommunications law of 12 June 2000, which recognizes that the media own their equipment;

- As this seizure not only deprives *RCTV* of its terrestrial broadcast outlet but also jeopardizes its ability to broadcast by cable;

- As the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuelan, a member of the Organisation of American States (OAS), violated the American Convention on Human Rights, to which it is bound, by failing to comply with the injunctions of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights regarding the protection of *RCTV*'s personnel and equipment;

- As the president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuelan decided unilaterally to close *RCTV*;

Reporters Without Borders intends to refer the case of *RCTV* to the United Nations Human Rights Council, whose next session will be in Geneva from 11 to 18 June, to the UN special rapporteur for freedom of expression and to the Council of Europe. The press freedom organisation also intends to refer the case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and to its special rapporteur for freedom of expression and information. Referring the case to the IACHR obliges the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to cooperate with the commission and attend any hearing it convenes.