



30 November 2009

Honduras: Elections Without Democracy

Statement of the International Mission of Freedom of the Press and Freedom of Expression in Honduras - 29th November 2009.

ARTICLE 19 and six international organisations¹ participated to an international mission to Honduras from 1 to the 7 of November 2009. One key finding of the mission is that in the current political context, journalism has become a high risk occupation. Actions taken to influence editorial lines, including physical aggressions against media workers, are currently commonplace in Honduras by both sides of the political conflict. These findings are corroborated by two previous ARTICLE 19 missions to the country since July, as well as months monitoring the situation.

- Press freedom in Honduras was exercised in an adverse climate and in conditions of insecurity long before the coup. However the current political crisis has worsened the threats and risks that confront those exercising their right to freedom of expression through the media. The multiple pressures resulting from the two parts of the political conflict to influence the editorial lines, including physical aggressions against media workers, are a distinctive characteristic of the prevailing situation for journalists in Honduras.
- Since the coup, at least 31 journalists have been injured in the practice of their profession by either the authorities or demonstrators. One of the first actions of the interim government was to close a number of radio and TV stations. During the week immediately after the coup the signals of CNN, *Cubavision* and *Telesur* were blocked. A number of opposition media organisations such as, *Radio Globo* and *Chanel 36* have faced judicial harassment, jamming of their signals and threats against their employees.
- On 5 November, during the week of the international mission, an explosive device was detonated in the offices of the radio station *Radio HRN*, wounding one person. This has been a common method of intimidation in the past few months. *Channel 11* was attacked on 6 July, *El Heraldo* on 15 August, and *Channel 36* and *Radio Globo* on 23 August. Most recently, *Channel 10* was attacked on 24 November and *Radio America* on 27 November.

¹ World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) / The Association of Journalist Bodies of Argentina (ADEPA), World Association of Community Radios (AMARC), International Federation of Journalists (FIP), Free Voice, International Media Support (IMS) and Reporters without Borders (RSF).

- A number of testimonies collected by ARTICLE 19 mentions the existence of “black lists of journalists”. These lists are allegedly elaborated by political supporters from both camps, and circulated on the internet. They contribute to the feelings of insecurity among journalists and create self-censorship.
- For instance, editors and journalists from one of the few newspapers that continues searching for an editorial balance told the international mission that; *“sometimes we self censor under pressure from the public. We would like to say more than we can produce more hard data; link the acts, a better development of the interpretative genre. In the editorial we let people know our position of rejection of the coup, but it is not enough.”*
- The media is not only reflecting the political polarisation that has been exacerbated by the coup on 28 June, but it is also actively promoting it. As a result of this, society’s access to objective information is severely limited.

Not only is this repression affecting press freedom, it is also an obstacle to the work of human rights defenders in the country.

- A number of programmes broadcasted by private radio stations and produced by the teachers union, feminist groups and human rights organisations have been cancelled due to the political opinions that they were airing.
- Members of Cofadeh, a national human rights organisation, have reported continuous and increasing harassment against its employees, including death threats through their emails and mobile phones, surveillance of unknown men in the proximities of their houses and hacking of their email accounts. On 22 September, the police threw tear gas into the office of Cofadeh. At the time there were approximately 150 people inside the building seeking refuge and filing complains following the repression of the demonstration outside the Brazilian Embassy.

The international mission visited four cities where it had the opportunity to hold a total of 22 meetings with groups of journalists and editors and with four organisations working in the fields of freedom of expression, press freedom and human rights.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.