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"A government which closes media outlets is afraid of truth"

IAPA Executive Director Julio Muñoz condemned the demise of RCTV

POLITICS

The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) is worried about freedom of expression in Venezuela. "Every time we come, we realize that there is deterioration of basic freedoms, deterioration of pluralism, and deterioration of citizens' possibility to express themselves."

The remarks were made by the Executive Director of the organization that pools editors and owners of journals in the Western Hemisphere, Chilean Julio Muñoz. The top officer recently visited Caracas to take part in a forum held at the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB). There, the potential risks on citizens' ability to get and disseminate ideas and information were discussed.



The IAPA head urged the government to discuss on freedom of expression (Photo: Osver Díaz Mireles)

"We cannot think about the existence of a society without plural opinions; about people being unable to get information from various sources (...) Nobody may finish these rights, and he, who does it is for fear that people know what is going on." In this way, he clearly referred to government measures, such as the action last August resulting in 34 radio stations off the air, and the latest decision which caused the removal of Radio Caracas Televisión Internacional (RCTV Internacional) from cable and satellite TV systems.

Muñoz noted that the right to information and opinion is the most important one after the right to life, as it allows development of other rights, such as education, health, labor or protest. "The government is an employee of people. The government has no right to take hold of information. People should have full access to information (...) We do not want dictatorship of opinion or monopoly of information, but we seek pluralism, citizen's access to any communication means, that citizens can choose whatever means at will. That is democracy and freedom."

Recipe for export

In view of the IAPA Executive Director, actions such as the measures adopted against radio stations or RCTV Internacional; legal reforms which make penalties stiffer for some offenses, such as defamation and slander, and attacks on journalists cast doubts on the "democratic nature" of the government of President Hugo Chávez.

"A very vertical scheme is being set up here. It is a scheme with a very practical recipe which goes from a country and it is exported to foreign countries. What is happening today can be seen in Nicaragua, Ecuador, Bolivia, and to some extent, in Argentina, because these governments are not comfortable with a society watchdog, such as the media. It is commonly said that the media are the fourth power. I would rather call them the counter-power, as they have the possibility of watching authorities and giving the people all that what is going on."

Muñoz clarified that the whole array of measures implemented in Venezuela against the

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On the Cover



Cuban presence in Venezuela labeled as neo-colonization

12:42 PM. POLITICS.

On Friday, February 5, 2010, a training course for headmasters and headmistresses was completed at the Venezuelan Ministry of Education. The authors of the literature used in the training were Cubans; the texts were edited in Havana and Moscow, and the main concept was control, Leonardo Carvajal, Coordinator of the Education Assembly Association, reported.

☆☆☆☆



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media and reporters come from Cuba.

"The recipe does not come from Venezuela. The recipe comes in a tape from the middle of the Caribbean," he added.

The IAPA Executive Director urged democratic governments in the region and organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS) to keep a watchful eye over the ongoing events in Venezuela.

Government invited to sit down and talk

Despite criticism of President Chávez's performance, Muñoz made the same request that has been made over the past few years. He asked the Executive Office to come to terms and discuss the issue of freedom of expression.

Muñoz invited the Venezuelan government to send a representative to the IAPA upcoming meeting that will be held in Aruba.

jalonso@eluniversal.com

Translated by Conchita Delgado

Juan Francisco Alonso
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