

AFX International Focus

July 11, 2007 Wednesday 6:00 PM GMT

Venezuelan TV station heads to cable

LENGTH: 358 words

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) - An opposition-aligned TV station forced off the air by President Hugo Chavez will take its programming to cable television while it continues waging a legal battle to regain its broadcast license, the channel's top executive announced Wednesday.

Radio Caracas Television, or RCTV, which went off the air on May 27 after Chavez refused to renew its license, will reach viewers via cable beginning on July 16, station executive Marcel Granier said.

'Venezuelans want RCTV, and they will have it,' Granier told a news conference. 'Until we achieve the goal of regaining our signal we must try to return to the air as soon as possible through alternative means.'

Cable reaches fewer than 30 percent of Venezuelan households.

Granier said the priority for RCTV, which was one of the few major privately-owned TV channel that was critical of Chavez's administration, is still trying to return to viewers as a regular network on the open airwaves.

'We will not cease our efforts until we regain our signal and our equipment,' he said. 'This commitment is for all Venezuelans throughout the country to have RCTV again, for free.'

Chavez and his supporters accuse RCTV of supporting a failed 2002 coup, violating broadcast laws and regularly showing programs with excessive violence and sexual content.

RCTV executives deny wrongdoing, arguing the president's decision not to renew the channel's license was aimed at muzzling his critics. Chavez defends the move as a means of democratizing the airwaves by turning over RCTV's signal to a state-funded public broadcasting station.

International press freedom groups, the European Union, the U.S. government, Human Rights Watch and others have expressed concern about the move against Radio Caracas Television.

RCTV has appealed a series of rulings handed down by Venezuela's Supreme Court that permitted Chavez's administration to force the opposition-sided channel off the airwaves and allowed the new public-service channel to use RCTV's broadcasting equipment.