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Venezuela wants subscription channels to carry government slots - watchdog

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Text of report in English by press release by Paris-based organization Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF) on 19 July

[Report: "Government wants to force cable and satellite TV stations to carry president's speeches"]

The resumption of broadcasting by Radio Caracas Television (RCTV) on cable and satellite on 16 July has been followed by an announcement by information and communication minister William Lara that the law will be amended to force pay-TV cable and satellite broadcasters to carry the same occasional government programming that terrestrial broadcasters are already obliged to transmit.

The system of "cadenas" (obligatory simultaneous broadcasts) was established by the telecommunications law of 2000 and the broadcast media social responsibility law of 2004. It allows the government to take over all the terrestrial frequencies whenever it wants to broadcast official messages.

It is used mainly by President Hugo Chavez to force the privately-owned media to simultaneously retransmit his speeches when they are broadcast by the state media. Privately-owned broadcasters are fined when they do not comply.

Lara announced on a state-owned radio station that pay-TV stations will also have to "retransmit the national anthem and connect to the 'cadenas' of the government, the National Electoral Council and other state authorities." He added that the required amendments to the existing broadcasting laws would be incorporated into an upcoming law that will empower President Chavez to govern by decree, without going through parliament.

Many cable and satellite TV broadcasters including RCTV (which renamed itself RCTV Internacional after being forced off the terrestrial broadcast frequencies on 27 May) are registered as foreign companies. RCTV's headquarters are now located in the United States and the station has said it would not submit to the system of "cadenas".

Source: Reporters Sans Frontieres press release, Paris, in English 19 Jul 07