

URGENT ACTION



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2 October 2009

UA 263/09

Excessive force / fear for safety

HONDURAS

Employees of Radio Globo, Canal 36, El Libertador and other journalists

Media workers in Honduras have been under attack since Roberto Micheletti seized power on 28 June. Since 23 September, a radio station director says he has been threatened, and a newspaper photographer has been abducted and tortured. Micheletti issued a decree on 26 September allowing newspapers and broadcasters to be closed down if they “insult public officials.” A radio station and a television channel have since been taken off the air.

Decree PCM-M-016-2009 allows newspapers or broadcasters which “insult...public officials” (*ofendan ...a los funcionarios públicos*) or “threaten peace and public order” (*atenten contra la paz y el orden público*) to be closed.

Soldiers and police arrived at the Radio Globo offices in the capital, Tegucigalpa, on 28 September at 5.20am. They shouted at the staff inside to get out, and then shot the lock off the door. Some of the journalists jumped from the windows to get away, and one of them broke his arm. Once inside the building, the soldiers and police confiscated all of Radio Globo’s equipment, and destroyed other material. Radio Globo journalists outside the building said they were photographed and harassed by the security forces. Other media workers present were arrested and beaten. The security forces closed down TV station Canal 36 the same day.



On his way to cover events at Radio Globo and Canal 36, photographer Delmer Membreño, working for El Libertador, was forced into a red pickup truck by four men in balaclavas, who put a hood over his head and drove off. They stopped after around an hour and a half, dragged him out and put a gun to his head. One of the men shouted, “Take the hood off him because I want to see his eyes when you kill him.” (*Quitale la capucha porque yo quiero ver a sus ojos cuando lo maten*). Another said, “No, don’t kill him, it’s better to leave him alive so he gives the message to the director [of El Libertador, Johnny Lagos] that we will treat him even worse.” (*No, no lo mates, mejor dejarlo para que de el mensaje al director [de El Libertador, Johnny Lagos] que a el lo vamos a tratar aún peor*) The men then beat him and burned his face and torso with cigarettes; eventually they left him outside Tegucigalpa. On 30 September, Delmer Membreño received a phone call at his house from a man who said only, “You dogs,” (*Perros*).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The democratically elected president, José Manuel Zelaya Rosales, was deposed on 28 June by a military-backed group of politicians led by Roberto Micheletti, the head of Congress. There has been widespread unrest in the country since then, with frequent clashes between the police and army and civilian protestors. According to local sources, at least seven people have died in unclear circumstances since 28 June.

Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.

Journalists outside the capital have also been intimidated. On 23 September a correspondent and three other staff of Radio Progreso, based in the north-west of the country, received a threatening text message on their mobile phones. It read, "The sons of Micheletti in El Progreso offer half a million [Lempiras – equivalent to US\$26,500] for the head of Padre Melo, René J." (*Los hijos de Micheletti en El Progreso ofrecen medio millón [de Lempiras] por la cabeza del Padre Melo, René J.*) The next day, Radio Progreso staff saw six men loitering around the building. When staff went out to confront them, the men fled in a minibus. As he left the Radio Progreso office on the morning of 25 September, Padre Melo noticed a red car parked nearby, with the engine running. He waited 10 minutes before getting into his own car. The red car followed him at a distance of around 50 metres for around seven blocks before Padre Melo turned off. Graffiti has also appeared in the town over the past several weeks, with slogans such as "Get out priest" (*Cura fuera*).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible:

- Call on Mr Micheletti to immediately rescind Decree PCM-M-016-2009 in its entirety;
- Call on him to publicly instruct the police and army to act in accordance with international human rights standards and disregard the provisions contained in Decree PCM-M-016-2009;
- Demand that the *de facto* authorities allow media workers to carry out their work free from attacks, threats and intimidation.

APPEALS TO:

Roberto Micheletti
Casa Presidencial
Boulevard Juan Pablo Segundo
Palacio José Cecilio del Valle
Tegucigalpa
HONDURAS
Fax: 011 504 239 3298
(may not be reliable, please send appeals by post as well)
Salutation: Mr Micheletti/Sr. Micheletti

COPIES TO:

Comité por la Libre Expresión (C-Libre)
Colonia Rubén Darío,
Calle Palermo, casa No. 2244B
Tegucigalpa
HONDURAS
Fax: 011 504 239-8246

Mr. Eduardo Enrique Reina
Embassy of Honduras
3007 Tilden St. NW Suite 4M
Washington DC 20008
Fax: 1 202 966 9751
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PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.

Check with the AIUSA Urgent Action office if sending appeals after 13 November 2009.