

Emergency Forum on freedom of the press in Haiti: journalists are threatened

Port-au-Prince, February 3, 2005(AHP)- The Inter American Press Society (SIP) organized this Friday in Port-au-Prince an emergency forum on freedom of the press in Haiti.

It is the vice-president of the association, Rafael Molina, one of the directors of the Dominican newspaper El Nacional, who opened the works by denouncing the grave danger that hangs over the press in Haiti. SIP chairman Sergio Muñoz spoke in the same sense. He was very critical about the attitude of the regime in place in regards to the freedom of the press and he considered that the threats that hang on the Haitian press are very serious and that they are a great source of worry for the SIP.

This forum was organized at the time when protests of indignation come from everywhere after the murder of journalist Abdias Jean on January 14th while he was covering a police intervention at Village de Dieu, a popular district of the capital.

In parallel, correspondent of the Reuters Agency, Guyler C. Delva, has been receiving serious death threats for several days, and he was the target of a strong attack from the prime minister's press office after he published a dispatch. Two journalists from the newspaper Le Nouvelliste were severely beaten up on January 14th by armed individuals in the popular district of Bel-Air while on the same day, the police threatened a team of reporters from the private television station "Télé Guinen" and seized their camera and gave it back without the cassette.

This forum is organized while Radio and Teletimoun, owned by the Aristide Foundation for Democracy, have been closed down for 8 months, without any official explanation from the government. The only explanation given was from General Secretary of Reporters Without Borders, Robert Ménard, who arrived from Paris last June and was the first one to inform that these two media hadn't been closed down for political reasons, but for administrative reasons.

Speaking at the SIP forum, director of the Ecumenical Center of Human Rights Jean Claude Bajoux, also a member of a governmental commission in charge of giving compensation to supporters of the former opposition who reportedly suffered damage during the GNB anti-Aristide movement, considered that the press is not threatened under the interim government.

For his part, director of the newspaper " Le Nouvelliste " Max Chauvet said he recognizes that there are problems, but an emergency forum would have made more sense under the Lavalas government.

General Secretary of the Association of Haitian Journalists Guyler C. Delva declared that an emergency forum was justified. Every time a media or journalists denounced violations before, there were massive denunciations orchestrated and today, a great number of media a pressure groups don't say a word for unknown reasons, even when a journalist is murdered.

"This forum is a rare opportunity for journalists, professionals and ordinary citizens to talk about the problem of the freedom of press and expression and the running of the press in Haiti", the Reuters correspondent explained. He declared that the culture of intolerance is still obvious among many sectors of society and among governmental structures.

Mr. Delva call the media and the journalists to show solidarity in order to face the challenges to come. He recommended a responsible practice of the freedom of the press and the respect of professional ethic.