

BOLIVIA

Today as never before, the issue of freedom of expression is under debate in Bolivia. There is no lack of reasons, considering that since the year 2000, the country has been undergoing a change process that is even more marked under the current administration of Evo Morales-Ayma (2005 to the present day). Amidst social and political tensions, Bolivia is struggling to define a new political constitution for the state. Two visions of the country are in confrontation and this also affects the regions which demand departmental autonomy. Parallel to this is the issue of land ownership and social inclusion. In this context, the media and the journalists do not operate on the national sidelines and each day ethical and legal principles are challenged in their coverage. Almost daily, they are cited by government authorities and/or social actors, and they are also questioned or praised by the population and by journalists themselves.

1. GENERAL INFORMATION ON MEDIA AND MEDIA USE

Bolivia is one of the three least-developed countries in Latin America. Of its 9 million inhabitants, approximately 60 per cent live below the poverty line. The situation in the rural areas is even more dramatic, with poverty affecting nine of every ten inhabitants. The economic situation is reflected in high levels of unemployment, lack of medical care, and illiteracy. The data of the 2001 National Census revealed that 13.3 per cent of the Bolivian population – somewhat more than one million – cannot read or write. Only 4 per cent have access to the internet and of these only 25 per cent have a direct connection.

Literacy and education

There is a serious process of rural-urban migration and from west to east. The greater part of the population and the economic activity are concentrated in the central axis of the country (La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz). The media, whose number and the trust placed in them by the population, make Bolivia a media-oriented country, are also found here.

Disregarding the quantity of media which operate illegally (mainly in the rural areas), the 741 radio stations of modulated frequency with short and medium-wave bands, 431 TV channels (local, regional, only five national networks) and 27 local circulation newspapers and magazines, daily, weekly and bi-weekly, are overwhelming evidence of the importance placed on the media, either as instruments of diffusion or as an entrepreneurial option.

Media landscape

The state, in addition to two licences for radio stations and one for TV at national level, has installed at least 20 of 100 community-based radio stations, which it expects to put into operation during its term in office. Entrepreneurs, churches (Catholic and Protestant), NGOs and social groups are owners of radio stations, TV channels and written media. Their poor economic sustainability due to the quantity of existing media and the small size of the advertising pie (approx. USD 50 million), mean that media bodies are continually for sale, which attracts interested buyers.

The process for the legal setting up of a communications organisation involves requesting a licence from the superintendence of telecommunications – the only entity authorised to assign the radio or television frequencies – and/or the legalisation of a transaction and its registration (with a transfer of licence), in the case of TV channels and radio stations. The written press must register with

Fundaempresa, a foundation for entrepreneurial development in charge of administering the Register of Commerce, and in their municipality, just like all other private enterprises in the country.

How can the existence of so many media entities be justified in a country like Bolivia? The answer may be given from two different angles. On the one hand, there is the simple and entrepreneurial vision, seeking profits, lowering costs, writing-off quality of content and human resources. The over-supply of students and graduates from communications careers, improvisation and the need to sustain programming, will create conditions which will only accentuate the mediocrity of the media. On the other hand, there are sector interests, such as churches – the Catholic and Protestant churches prevailing in the country – which use the media to spread the word of God and, taking advantage of captive audiences, other content for informative nature. A statistical recount of the last five years shows the rapid increase of religious FM, (local outreach) radio stations and UHF TV channels.

Party media There are currently no political parties which are openly owners of media entities; however, given the polarisation of the social and political context in Bolivia, entrepreneurial sectors try to use their media to strictly supervise the government's administration, beyond what is ethically permitted. The issue of freedom of expression is frequently debated.

The government initiative of installing community-based radios has also been strongly questioned, given that this decision was not only accompanied by the strengthening of the infrastructure, equipment, contents and human resources of state media, but also by decrees such as Decree 29174, which restricts the economic activity and the diffusion of content of other media in the rural areas¹.

In this process of constant media expansion, the use of new technologies plays a fundamental role, to the point of permitting the incorporation of areas of the country which, up to two years ago, only existed in the public's mind when there were natural disasters or very significant political events involving bloodshed. The extensive areas of the northern departments of Beni and Pando are not connected to the national microwave circuit. Only in the last three years have the rural areas acquired a national presence.

In terms of content, technology has facilitated the application of the national concept with local outreach, and that is how radio stations and TV channels have integrated networks which cover the entire Bolivian territory. With respect to coverage, these networks and the regional media undertake local coverage with departmental or local importance and with national repercussion. This opportunity for outreach facilitates the diffusion of contents on issues of local interest in native languages .

Internet media The use of the internet is, without doubt, an artefact of this change in scope and concept of media management. It must be noted that only 1 per cent of the national population have a direct connection to the internet and the proliferation of internet cafes and the accessibility to these centres (using the internet in a town or city costs as little as EUR 0.10 cents), 4 per cent of the national population has access to this technology.

This possibility of access to the world via the internet has permitted an elite culture and politics sector to open blogs (open spaces) for the discussion of different issues, which range from how a certain TV anchor looks to more profound political, social and/or cultural issues. The internet has also permitted hooking-up signals of TV channels and radios and the publication of documents for relevant reflection. Email chains are also frequent. The government has not developed any system of restrictions, except for public denouncements through the media of specific content, calling it racist, intolerant or against the current "progressive" political project in the country.

General media access It is clear that the bulk of the population has direct and free access to the mass media. According to data in the World Fact Book (CIA 2005) in 1997 there was a ratio of nine people to each television. Today, commercial projections speak of an average of seven people per television.

In view of the lack of specialised institutions which provide more accurate data, Captura, a market survey company, carries out periodic studies of media use and preferences. According to their report of October 2007, television has a 64.7 per cent penetration in the cities in the central axis, 47 per cent in radio and 30 per cent in the internet. Cable TV, which is a high growth sector, registers 10 per cent penetration, newspapers 8 per cent, cinema 4 per cent, and weekly publications at 1 per cent.

Of an average of 18 continuous hours of programming by the TV channels from Monday through Friday, four hours are dedicated to newscasts and/or factual programmes and two hours over the weekend. There are few specialised news programmes, the great majority of which are weekly.

National media production is low and uses canned programmes, including soap operas, films and serials fill the spaces. In October 2007, the media preferences captured by Captura show the UNITEL chain leading with 31 per cent, followed by ATB with 25 per cent and the Red UNO with 21 per cent. Bolivisión registers 8 per cent, tying with PAT and TVB, the state channel, which are included in the category 'others' for their low ranking. In October 2007, in Santa Cruz 51 per cent preferred UNITEL, 35 per cent Red Uno and 5 per cent preferred ATB together with Bolivisión and others.

*Media
consumption*

The world of television is expecting more accurate data, given that the Bolivia Media Company, which specialised in measuring rankings, stopped operating in May 2007. Medios y Mediciones of Colombia, which planned to start working in Bolivia, closed operations in its own country, and IBOPE of Brazil, which made a presentation in its application to start work in Bolivia, is a costly service, which television channels and publicity agencies are studying at this moment because of their need to reduce costs.

In terms of radio, the tendency is for AM broadcasters to include entertainment programming (music, show-business gossip and curiosity notes) and information. The great majority of modulated-frequency radios are monothematic and musical. Some FM radio stations also reproduce AM radio signals.

CIDEM is the company which for 12 years has supplied the market with radio ratings for the central axis. In their report of November 2007, they established that for news, there is a consistent preference for Radio Panamericana in La Paz, followed by Radio FIDES, also in La Paz. ERBOL is an alternative which keeps its position as third or fourth choice. Radio Patria Nueva, a state radio, registers more growth in rural areas and does not enjoy massive favour in the cities. Local radios have achieved an interesting position in their own environments, as a result of the demands for autonomy in some regions in the country.

In spite of the tensions in the country, the low reading levels among the Bolivian people and their habitual preference for oral communication mean that people most frequently refer to TV and radio, and only sometimes make use of newspapers and the internet among an elite sector.

The paradox about media influence on the formation of public opinion in the country is that the newspapers, while not reaching the population massively, do reach powerful groups, and so have the opportunity to influence the government and set the agenda for radio and television.

*Media influence
on political opinion*

The audiovisual media have a strong influence in generating the concept of citizenship and through this influence the government. The latest studies of attitudes establish that the media with 69 per cent are considered as one of the most trustworthy entities, after the church with 80 per cent, before the armed forces with 67 per cent and the national police with 66 per cent (AOM 2007).

The political crisis, the tendency of the Bolivian people to favour the 'strong man' (caudillo), the positioning of the media, the limited criticism of the media contents and the level of illiteracy, all explain the strong media influence on the opinions held by citizens.

A study of attitudes of undergraduates at the San Andrés University in September 2003, indicated that different strata of the population of La Paz believe what they hear on the radio, and when watching TV, they do not doubt the contents because they see them. Given the credibility that the population gives the media, it is important to understand their role in the present circumstances. The polarisation in the country extends to the media, which, according to some critics, have become entrenched in positions from which they seek to influence public opinion, under the guise of providing information.

The government, in the voice of the president himself (this will be expanded on later), constantly judges the daily coverage of the private media, describing it as an opposition force and 'neoliberal' – a common phrase of denigration among Bolivians. It must be recognised that, above all, the coverage of the private TV media is highly critical of the present government and gives spaces to analysts and sources who question government actions. Some radio stations at the other extreme must also be mentioned. To them, everything the government does is unquestionably considered to be positive and totally identified with the interests of the impoverished majorities in the country. There are few journalists and media which can, or try, to maintain a neutral position.

State-owned media and published opinion State media coverage clearly serves government interests, to the point that state radio and TV are a means of propaganda. The present administration shows a determination to have a direct impact on public opinion, through propaganda in the private media, and transmitting information and opinion through its own media. This objective has been reiterated by the president of the republic and the presidential spokesman: 'The informative distortion of private radio stations and channels must be counteracted'. To achieve this, it has been necessary to design and sustain a structure suited to these purposes, so the head of TVB and Patria Nueva Radio are direct appointments by the Ministry of the Presidency. The hiring of journalists depends on the news director together with the heads of each of these media.

What is most important is that the private, religious and state media all have access to the same sources, or to those which they wish to consult for information. In many cases, the state media have used a "clean signal" so that other channels and radios have access to their extensive content, making it possible for them to freely hook up to this signal.

2. LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

Freedom of expression Bolivia, as signatory of conventions and international laws², is committed to guaranteeing respect for human rights of first, second and third generation. To do this, it has had to adjust some of its laws. Others have become obsolete and some have been maintained in spite of the wish to modify them.

In Bolivia, the Constituent Assembly has just completed the drafting of a new political state constitution, which must be submitted to referendum in the course of the next few months, once Congress has approved a specific law to implement this popular consultation. The approval process for the new constitution was marked by confrontation and questioning by the opposition of the procedures used by the governmental block to accelerate the approval process.

To date – January 2008 – in the constitution currently in force, in Article 7, clause (b), freedom of expression is explicitly guaranteed. There is no specific definition of journalistic practice and the media is covered in Article 22, which guarantees private property provided that its use does not impair the common good. Expropriation of property can be imposed when the property does not fulfil a social function.

Free media coverage The principle of freedom of expression finds an echo in other laws, such as the Law of Freedom of the Press. Even though it goes back to 1925, it is specific as to the right of each citizen to publish his/her thoughts in the press (making reference only to the written press and, by necessary extension, today – 2008 – to radio, TV and the internet).

The Law for Professionalisation of the Journalist of 1979 (Law 494) recognises and institutes the journalist profession as a nationally recognised degree and establishes a generic framework for carrying out the profession, with a national registry for journalists that has not been implemented to date.

Other laws of lesser rank such as the Organic Statute of the Journalist of 1984 – the Supreme Decree which regulates Law 494 – are not only unknown by the bulk of practising journalists, but indeed ratify freedom and responsibilities for those who publish a thought, news and/or commentaries.

Regulation of media coverage

Concepts which protect the honour of any citizen, define and punish defamation and calumny, establish obligations on retraction and other matters, are inserted in instruments such as the Civil Code of 1975, the New Penal Procedure Code of 2002, the Law of Telecommunications of 1995 and the 1991 Electoral Law.

Supreme Decree 27329 of 31 January 2004, on 'transparency', seeks to procure the transparency of, and access to, government information. It implicitly establishes free access for any citizen to state information, other than that classified as state security.

There is a general consensus to unionise journalists and the media to defend the enforcement of the Law of Freedom of the Press. The sanctions it establishes are financial only and do not deprive anyone of his or her freedom. Nonetheless, the lack of knowledge and the limited dissemination of other instruments related to the right to freedom of expression are of great concern.

It worth noting the start of a debate in some elite circles about the right to communication and the right to information, at a time of great social and political transformation in Bolivia.

The debate has caused the Association of Journalists of La Paz (APLP) to develop a constitution for an ethical council of journalists and brought about the installation of reader protection offices in some printed media organisations and the establishment by the National Press Association (ANP) of an ethics tribunal to comply with and enforce its recently approved (September 2007) ethics code. These are all mechanisms of self regulation designed to increase the credibility of and trust in the press.

The need for media self-regulation is a constant theme, with ethics codes and internal behaviour and union self-regulation being seen as mechanisms to preserve freedom of expression and free journalistic practice.

Legal censorship

External bodies, such as foundations and universities, promote the debate and have set up bodies such as the Media Observatory (of the UNIR Foundation), a private institution which seeks to investigate, monitor and analyse the behaviour of the media in different areas and journalists' activities.

In this legal framework, Bolivian journalism feels it is protected and has juridical freedom to exercise its role. Aspects such as the official accreditation for the Government Palace and Congress, are followed by the media or national or international news agencies. To date, no requests for credentials have been denied. There is no specific law that names bodies to which a journalist who suffers harassment or state repression may appeal. However, bodies such as the ombudsman have already taken up this issue when the need has arisen and also when the media have been attacked by social groups. The associations which represent journalists and media have also expressed their views through public warnings.

Journalists' legal status

As Bolivia is a signatory of international conventions safeguarding freedom of expression and because the unions are affiliated to international organisations which support this principle, cases of harassment of the media, with specific references to journalists, have been denounced in the last few months. To date, there has been no legal action and only pronouncements have been made.

- For example on 21 March 2007, directors of the media approached the Inter-American Press Association (SIP) to denounce what they considered to be signs of opposition to freedom of the press. The denouncement was included in a general reference to the region.
- On 25 September 2007, the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CCP) suggested removing restrictions on the freedom of the press.
- On 31 October 2007, the minister of rural development threatened the journalist Julieta Tovar of the FIDES News Agency, with a law suit. The APLP sent a letter to the minister demanding explanations.
- On 12 December 2007, the president of the republic in person assailed the privacy of the journalist Roxana Lizarraga of the UNITEL TV network. The Association of Journalists of La Paz publicly denounced this type of aggression.

The year 2008 started out with a scandal about espionage and the surveillance of politicians, public relations men and a journalist. These generated a reaction and complaints from unions, paving the way for an investigation by the Bolivian Senate Constitution Committee, which publicly revealed the activity of the Police Intelligence Unit, one of the five police intelligence teams in charge of the security of the state, as a Special Group (GE) under the suspicion that its members were the authors of the surveillance of politicians and journalists in 2007.

Coincidentally, on 14 March 2008, the superintendent of telecommunications, Jorge Nava, announced in a circular that sanctions could be imposed on those media that publish 'information, even though authentic' which may damage or alarm the population either by the means of diffusion or the manner of its propagation.

This event was denounced and vigorously questioned by the media and press unions, who called upon government figures on 23 March to request the authorities to withdraw such sanctions. This led to a landmark – the resignation of Alex Contreras, government spokesman – through a letter made public in which he confirmed his commitment to freedom of expression rather than censorship, transparency rather than acts of corruption, and to the need for dialogue rather than the practice of misinformation. Contreras also states in his letter that: 'The quality of information defines the quality of democracy'. By contrast, international events such as 9/11 and anti-terrorist regulations from within Bolivia or from abroad have not affected the practice of journalism in the country.

Monopolies and cartels As regards multimedia monopolies, the case can be cited of the ATB Television Network and the daily newspapers, La Razón of La Paz and Nuevo Día of Santa Cruz, which recently changed owners and the PAT Network and the El Deber newspaper of Santa Cruz. Both are solid entrepreneurial groups which do not necessarily limit their investments to the one editorial line.

In any case, the consolidation of national television and radio networks and the possible influence of public opinion have motivated the government to include this issue in the new project for a political constitution of the state. Article 107 establishes that the state guarantees the right to freedom of expression, opinion and information, to rectification and reproduction, and the right to freely express ideas in any medium, without prior censorship. Furthermore, it recognises freedom of conscience for those working with information. Article 108 then states that the media cannot directly or indirectly form monopolies or oligopolies. Another point asserts that the state will support the creation of community media. It also establishes that all information and opinion must be accurate and responsible. This last point has been questioned by journalists who want a distinction to be made between information and opinion.

3. POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Coverage of marginal groups Given the current political situation, the legal framework in force and the proliferation of the media, journalistic coverage is diverse and allows freedom of the press from community to national levels. Except for geographic limitations related to access and connectivity, the different social sectors are included in one way or another in the news broadcasts.

Nonetheless, it is important to pay attention to the forms, the proportion of spaces and the times assigned to the protagonists. All these elements are in many cases fundamental to the complaints of people who accuse the media of more or less disproportion in their coverage.

The polarisation in the country, as has been said many times, also extends to the media, but to date has not reached the extreme of excluding different sectors for political reasons.

Every Bolivian citizen has the freedom to follow, compare and give an opinion on the range of possibilities offered daily by the media. No action by the state deprives them of this freedom. However, sectors of society identified with the government or the opposition have harassed the media and journalists to the extent of demonizing the media.

This public questioning has been evident since 2003, which was the year in which the mobilised sectors of society began to chant slogans against specific media or take aggressive action against journalists or media infrastructure. These events, together with the initiation of the debate on the role of the media, have made the media stronger in some cases and in others has made them implement self-censoring systems and codes.

Self-censorship

The Bolivian Association of Radio Broadcasters (ASBORA), the National Association of Television Enterprises (ANET), the National Press Association (ANP) and other unions have made recommendations to their affiliates to self-censor their news content, as a way to safeguard their credibility and the enforcement of freedom of expression.

Issues such as respect for identity and the images of minors in police cases, which are safeguarded by the Code of Children and Adolescents, press leaks and issues related to the private lives of individuals, are some of the areas in which self-censoring is applied.

In spite of efforts to promote a more ethical practice, information obtained by the existing media is politicised: whether consciously or not, this leads journalists to become entrenched in ideological positions which lay the foundations for their coverage and, in some cases, leads them to militant journalism.

Militant journalism is mentioned because this is cited on different occasions and has led, in this last year, to the state taking repressive action against journalists and the media. In one example a minister threatened a journalist and the closure of Channel 20 in Quillacollo in Cochabamba and in another, the superintendence of communications justified this closure, arguing that the channel was operating outside its authorised geographical area.

State repression

The economic issue deserves separate consideration. Former owners of the PAT Television Network – Carlos Mesa, a former president of the republic, amongst them – announced that they were victims of government repression due to the lack of investment in state advertisement. It should be noted that the state is currently the major advertiser. The Channel 'A' Television and the UNITEL Network also questioned this situation.

The specific cases cited in this document may be subject to debate. It is evident that the lack of investment in government propaganda has put pressure on the media since the installation of private television channels. No doubt, the national situation has meant that these cases of economic pressure have gained greater notoriety

Another factor which raised suspicions, with or without basis, was the creation of the National Paper Factory, a project personally promoted by the president. Bolivia is a country which imports paper. The La Razón and El Deber newspapers and the Sagitario Press are the major importers and distributors of paper because of the volume of their operations. At the time, there was speculation about possible protective measures once the factory began operating.

Government control over print media

4. ECONOMIC PRESSURES

State subsidies Investment in advertising in Bolivia, which covers radio, TV, the written press and small media rises to USD 50 million per year approximately, and 1,199 officially registered media enterprises compete for this advertising pie. Fewer than 10 receive 60 per cent of this amount³. The state is the greatest investor with 7 to 9 per cent⁴, followed by ENTEL (telecommunications), Unilever (household products), NUEVATEL (telephone company), Nestle (consumption), Coca Cola (beverages), Pepsi (beverages) and CBN (beer). Of the total amount, TV takes 58 per cent, the written press 28 per cent, radio 10 per cent and the small media the remaining 4 per cent. The data are projections using follow-ups by current general managers. The information of the Tax Service is an indicator, however, it should be noted that some media and enterprises evade taxes, other transactions are not registered and except for investment in electoral propaganda, there are no time limits for publicity investment costs.

The tariffs per second or centimetre per column are the starting point for negotiation between the media and the investors. Those purchasing global, bi-annual, annual or campaign time or space try to lower the costs. There are cases where negotiations start at USD 30 per second and closes at USD 3. Given the limited nature of the investment, many of the media are sustained by entrepreneurial groups, churches, foundations and NGOs. The state also sustains these media economically.

Further aspects As in all markets, investment in advertising is used to apply pressure in negotiations with the media, which is not necessarily apparent. The state, for example, uses its propaganda as a prize or a punishment. Some of these cases denounced by the media have been cited above. It is obvious that the great majority of these situations are not made public.

How independent is the action of the news departments from those in the advertising departments? This is an uncomfortable question, which was placed on the agenda by a study carried out by the Media Observatory which demonstrated, through monitoring carried out on the media and investors over a period of time, that news coverage was closely related to news investment. The example of the businessman, Samuel Doria Medina, chief leader of the Unidad Nacional party, caused surprise at the revelation of the amount of time and space assigned to his person in spite of his reduced parliamentary and Constituent Assembly representation.

In the case of state investment and news coverage, extremes can be identified. UNITEL (TV) takes an anti-governmental position and RTP (TV) has a very friendly disposition towards the government. There is infinite variety between these two attitudes, which vary according to the context.

5. NON-STATE REPRESSION

Repression by non-state groups Cases denounced by the Association of Journalists of La Paz (APLP) and the National Press Association (ANP), in addition to direct denouncements of the media to the public, are testimonies of the hostile environment in which journalists carry out their daily work. Physical aggression towards journalists and cameramen, the destruction of equipment, the attacks on installations, intimidation, insults and threats have been reported with progressively greater frequency in the last five years.

Social groups, mobs or specific groups close to the government in the west of the country and to civic committees in the east are responsible for this aggression. Television images and photographs are shown by the media to denounce and defend their members. In the midst of the polarisation in the country, repression is related to how the mobilised groups perceive the editorial line of the media under attack. The vision transmitted by the media has politicised all news coverage, thus, all questioning is directed at the treatment given to political, social and contextual events.

Of the many incidents registered in 2007, the following have been officially denounced:

- **9 January 2007:** aggression towards journalists in Cochabamba in social uprisings
- **3 February 2007:** Juan Carlos Macias, cameraman of the ATB Network, is injured by a rubber bullet while covering the dislodging of the Transredes installations in the gas-producing population of Camiri
- **22 August 2007:** the superintendence of communications closes Channel 20 in Quillacollo. The APLP send a letter to Mr Clifford Paravicini, the superintendant, requesting legal and technical arguments for this closure
- **23 August 2007:** Journalists, cameramen and employees of the Patria Nueva network, TVB and the state information agency – ABI – suffer aggression at the hands of regional groups
- **25 September 2007:** Journalists and cameramen from the UNO Network and Cadena A suffer the burning of their camera and violent acts perpetrated by university students

In all these cases, the Association of Journalists of La Paz has asked the government for guarantees for journalistic activities and respect for freedom of expression and opinion. The APLP demanded that they be investigated and the persons responsible identified. To date, no case has been made, far less sanctions imposed.

Given this aggression, there is fear among the media that these groups may take action against their members or installations, considering that these have become more and more violent.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Freedom of expression in Bolivia is officially consecrated in the political constitution of the state. In recent times journalism has been subject to a diversity of threats and aggressions originating from social groups related to the government or the opposition and the executive branch itself.

Freedom of the media: general situation

The media, owners, employees and journalists have repeatedly asked for guarantees to be able to carry out their work. The denouncements have also been heard in international spheres, where union organisations have viewed the Bolivian situation with concern.

Changes in the past five years

The political polarisation which is dividing Bolivia between two diametrically opposed views on how the country should be run, has also led the media and journalists to politicise information and to defend positions in a 'militant' manner. Few professionals can maintain balanced positions. In any case, emphasis has been placed on the promotion of self-censorship as a means to preserve the right to free expression, the practice of journalism and credibility before society.

Limitations in training, an excessive workload, low salaries and constant turnover place restraints on the development of human resources. The excessive number of media organisations (1,199, officially recognised) and an advertising pie of approximately USD 50 million limits entrepreneurial development. In spite of this, Bolivian society places great credibility on the media, which have an important role at present.

Major obstacles to free media coverage

Thanks to the democratic process, there is journalism that is absolutely committed to the government and absolutely in opposition. Mention can also be made of the entrenchment of the media and efforts being made for the inclusion and integration of a country with the characteristics of Bolivia. It is not unusual then – and journalists agree – that, with the exception of the aggression registered during this period and the technical, physical and country limitations, journalists' work does not encounter great obstacles but remains is a challenge.

Maria Rene Duchén

- 1] *Supreme Decree 29174 restricts the opening of community radios to authorities of the three powers of the state, politicians, leaders and priests, among others. It also dictates that the message must be educational and cultural and not political in addition to restricting its activities to the municipal area. It imposes a series of conditions for the reception of political propaganda in electoral times.*
- 2] *Bolivia is signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), The American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, the American Convention on Human Rights known as the Pact of San Jose (1969), the International Pact of Civil and Political Rights of the United Nations (1976). Bolivia also ratified the Convention on the Rights of Children and the International Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, among other International Instruments.*
- 3] *Alberto Rojas, general manager of the PAT Network maintains that it is difficult to give an exact figure for the total amount of national advertising investment, given the absence of registration systems. However, it is possible to make approximate projections from historical behaviour.*
- 4] *Data from the Ministry of Finance establish expenditure of USD 9,175,532 on advertising and propaganda.*

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