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PRESS RELEASE

**Venezuela: Authorities Threaten to Close
Another 29 Radio Stations**

On 5 September 2009, Minister Diosdado Cabello, Director of Venezuelan's National Commission on Telecommunications (Conatel), announced that 29 unidentified radio stations will soon be forced to cease operations. They will bring the number of closures in the last couple of months up to 63 radios and TV stations.

Conatel notes that all the cases involve stations whose licenses are up for renewal, whose owners have died or given up their rights, or where proposed title transfers have been denied. According to reports received by ARTICLE 19, Conatel has also opened administrative procedures against more than 200 broadcasters, which may lead to temporary or permanent suspension of their licences. Minister Cabello claims that the closures are aimed at "*democratising access to the airwaves*".

ARTICLE 19 notes that Conatel is not independent from the government, as broadcast regulators are required to be by international guarantees of freedom of expression, and that, as a result, Conatel is not in a position to promote broadcasting in the wider public interest.

Broadcasting is by far the most important source of information, as well as of entertainment, for most people in countries around the world. Due to its centrality as a source of information and news, and its growing profitability, governments and dominant commercial interests have historically sought to control broadcasting. Governments have exerted control through the licensing process and other regulatory measures, as well as through informal pressure, while commercial interests have used wealth and connections to monopolise the broadcasting sector, often leading to a focus on low quality but profitable programming.

Oversight by a regulator which is independent of both government and commercial interests, and which has a clear mandate to promote broadcasting in the public interest, is the key to democratising the sector and avoiding regulation being abused to allow for government control.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Venezuelan authorities to establish an independent broadcast regulator with a mandate to promote pluralism in the airwaves, through rules that are fair and objective, and that ensures that due process is respected in all administrative procedures. Radio and TV stations should not be closed down due to their political views and editorial lines.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information please contact: Paula Martins, Brazil Coordinator, paula@article19.org, +55 11 3057 0042
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.