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Americas - Venezuela

Exorbitant fine

Venezuelan authorities impose 2-million-dollar fine on private TV station

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The chairman of the National Telecommunications Commission, Pedro Maldonado, yesterday imposed a fine of 9.3 millions bolivars (2.162 millions dollars) on the private television channel *Globovision* over its coverage of riots at El Rodeo prison, near Caracas, in June.

"This astronomical penalty is merely a pretext to force *Globovision*, a private broadcaster which has already been the target of several [suspensions and threats of closure](#) in the past, to close its doors and halt its operations once and for all," Reporters Without Borders said.

The commission's decision is a direct attack on freedom of information and undermines the pluralism of the media, already being whittled away in Venezuela, the press freedom organization said.

The fine set by the commission represents 7.5 percent of the channel's gross income for 2010.

"We are punishing its editorial behaviour and the manner in which the news was handled," Maldonado said. He added that the fine did not mean the media organization would be suspended. He set a payment deadline of 31 December.

In June, several riots took place at the El Rodeo jail, exposing the [failings of the Venezuelan prison system](#) such as poor hygiene, overpopulation and violence.

Globovision, the only opposition channel still authorized by the government to broadcast, was accused of promoting criminal activity and provoking disturbances of the peace with its coverage of the riots.

The charges were based on a law setting out the public duties of radio, television and the electronic media, which authorises the suspension of media organizations on such grounds.

Maria Fernanda Flores, vice-president of the channel, said *Globovision* "will do what it can to find the cash to pay the fine and continue broadcasting." However, she said she believed it was impossible for the company to pay the sum and it could ruin the channel financially.

[Flores: "impagable" es la multa contra Globovisión par *Globovision*](#)

She said *Globovision* would appeal to higher authorities.
