WAN-IFRA denounces Ecuador government's authoritarian turn

QUITO, ECUADOR / PARIS, FRANCE / DARMSTADT, GERMANY: The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) published a report recently that illustrates how the government of Ecuador is carrying out "a sophisticated strategy of marginalising all voices independent of state power".

WAN IFRA

The report, built on WAN-IFRA's research and on the findings from a WAN-IFRA mission to Quito and Guayaquil from 26 October to 2 November 2011, reveals that the Ecuadorean government is "establishing a strict control over all arenas of public debate, while couching this in a debate centred around media plurality."

The report reveals contradictions between the official discourse, which calls from greater media plurality, and the authoritarian practices of the President of the Republic, Rafael Correa, and his government.

"The government appears to have decided to follow a path that distances it from democracy," said Christoph Riess, who added "Not only is it the wrong path, but it is a dangerous path as well."

Intimidation

The report comes out only a day before the National Court of Justice hears an appeal from *El Universo*. The newspaper's former opinion editor, Emilio Palacio, the newspaper and its executives Carlos César and Nicolás Pérez Lapentti, were sentenced in July 2011 to three years in prison on defamation charges and ordered to pay US$40m to the president. The sentence was upheld by an appeal court in September. The case has caused international indignation at the president's pursuit of a criminal case to intimidate voices critical to his administration.

"With upcoming elections in one year's time, to which Rafael Correa will most probably be a candidate, we must be ready for more violations to freedom of expression," said Riess, and added: "The international community will closely follow events."

Download the full report here.

More on the case, and WAN-IFRA's intervention, can be found here.