

Report of RedesAyuda

Repression of freedom of expression in the pandemic

Report of violations to the freedom of expression and information access rights against media and press

workers during the COVID-19 pandemic in Venezuela, since February 21 to April 14, 2020.

REDESAYUDA

The Non-Governmental Organization RedesAyuda was founded in 2014 with the intention of

contributing to the promotion and strengthening of the creation of human social networks (digital or

analog) free and independent as an indispensable instrument for the promotion and defense of human

rights in a democratic society.

Among its main areas of interest are: human rights, freedom of expression, media, access to the

internet and the strengthening, preparation and training of activists, leaders, and defenders in the field

of digital security and information.

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REPRESSION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN THE PANDEMIC

The first two cases of the coronavirus COVID-19 in Venezuela were confirmed by the Nicolás Maduro regime on March 13, 2020. COVID-19 is a virus that has affected more than 1,773,084 people and caused more than 111,652 globally deaths, according to data from the World Health Organization, as of April 14, 2020. Due to its rapid spread, Venezuelans have been quarantined since March 15, 2020.

In public health emergencies, it is extremely important that citizens stay informed about numbers, state decisions, prevention and cases; therefore, the work of journalists and the media to offer timely, necessary and verified information is essential.

However, since the quarantine started in the country, journalists, cameramen, broadcasters, photographers and the media have been victims of blockades, threats, harassment and arbitrary arrests. All this, despite the fact that Vladimir Padrino López communicated on a national wide speech that journalists and the media were empowered to continue exercising their work during the quarantine, having a safe-conduct and their credentials.¹

In this report, we talk and developed the cases in which the Venezuelan regime has restricted, criminalized and limited the exercise of freedom of expression and freedom of the press in Venezuela, in breach of those established in article 337 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (CRBV) and article 7 of the Organic Law on the States of Exception.

- **Article 337 of the CRBV:** "... the guarantees enshrined in this constitution may be temporarily restricted, except those referring to (...) the right to information and other intangible rights."²
- Article 7 of the Organic Law on States of Exception: "It will not be allowed to restrict (...) the rights to: (...) information".3

¹ YouTube (2020): "Vladimir Padrino: FANB will strictly control access during coronavirus quarantine". https://bit.ly/2xkWn2h

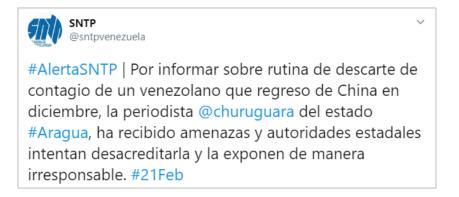
² Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela [CRBV] article 337 (Venezuela). https://bit.ly/34rM2Os

³ Organic Law on States of Exception. Government Gazette N° 37.261. August 15, 2001. Article 7. (Venezuela) https://bit.ly/3ecmCZm

Journalists and media cases (since February 21 to April 14, 2020)

Gregoria Diaz - Crónica Uno (Friday, February 21):

In Aragua state, journalist Gregoria Díaz was threatened by local police, after reporting on a possible positive case of COVID-19 in this state.⁴ She has an open legal process against her.



José Ramírez - VPI TV (Friday, March 13):

An officer from the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) recorded without authorization to the correspondent of *VPI*, José Ramírez,⁵ while conducting interviews at the pharmacy of the *Luis Razetti Hospital* in Barcelona, Anzoátegui state.



⁴ Twitter @sntpvenezuela (2020): https://bit.ly/34I508u

⁵ Twitter @sntpvenezuela (2020): https://bit.ly/2wtjCHb

Melquiades Ávila - El Pitazo (Saturday, March 14):

The Delta Amacuro state governor, Lizeta Hernández,⁶ ordered the chief of the Comprehensive Defense Operational Zone (ZODI) on a regional radio speech, to look for the correspondent of *El Pitazo*, Melquiades Ávila, thus criminalizing his work on the health sector in this state.



Jesús Castillo and Jesús Torres - Radio La Cima 96.7 FM (Saturday, March 14):

After publishing a video about two alleged cases of coronavirus at the *Victorino Santaella Hospital*, the announcers of *Radio La Cima 96.7 FM*, Jesús Castillo and Jesús Torres, were presented at the headquarters of the Corps of Criminal Scientific Investigations (CICPC)⁷ of Los Teques, Miranda state, where they ordered precautionary measures on March 15.

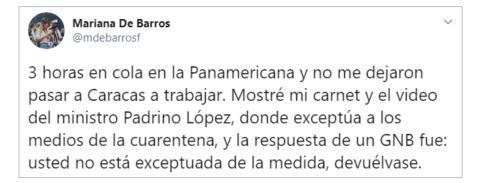


⁶ Twitter @sntpvenezuela (2020): https://bit.ly/3c9ATEe

⁷ Twitter @espaciopublico (2020): https://bit.ly/3casvVo

Mariana De Barros - VivoPlay and TV Venezuela (Monday, March 16):

Officials of the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) prohibited the reporter from the *VivoPlay* and *TV Venezuela* media, Mariana De Barros,⁸ from moving to Caracas through the Pan-American highway, despite the fact that she showed her card and a video in which Vladimir Padrino López exempts the press workers from quarantine, the response from the officials was "you are not exempt from the measure, go back."



Ariadna García and Tairy Gamboa - Crónica Uno (Monday, March 16):

Officials from the Caracas Police arrested the workers of *Crónica Uno*, Ariadna García and Tairy Gamboa, while they were on a tour in Catia, in the city of Caracas, to document the quarantine due to COVID-19. Both were forced by officials to delete the collected material because "they could misrepresent the information in a delicate situation" and were later released.



⁸ Twitter @mdebarrosf (2020): https://bit.ly/3e9TnX3

⁹ Twitter @sntpvenezuela (2020): https://bit.ly/39ZruxR

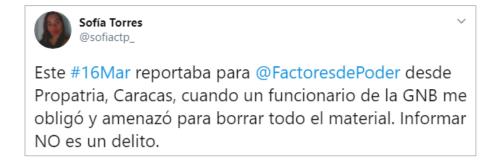
César Saavedra - Centro de Noticias Venezuela (Monday, March 16):

Chacao Police officials harassed the cameraman of the *Centro de Noticias Venezuela (CNVE24)*, César Saavedra;¹⁰ they asked him to not record, photographed him and asked for his identification while he was covering the closure of a mask and glove selling place on the Francisco de Miranda avenue, in Caracas.



Sofía Torres - Factores De Poder (Monday, March 16):

A GNB official threatened and forced the correspondent of the media *Factores De Poder*, Sofía Torres, to erase all the material that she had recorded while she was covering in Propatria, in the city of Caracas, ¹¹ during the quarantine. Also, the official expressed that she was no one to report and who reports is "the Commander in Chief Nicolás Maduro".



¹⁰ Twitter @espaciopublico (2020): https://bit.ly/2wuhrmL

¹¹ Twitter @sofiactp (2020): https://bit.ly/3c0TXVg

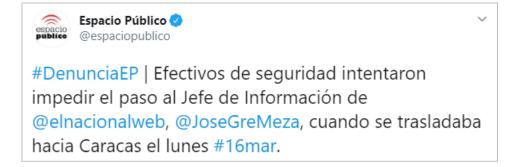
Diario 2001 (Monday, March 16):

GNB officials prohibited the pass of transport units carrying the printed version of the *Diario 2001* newspaper.¹² In addition, they prevented them from opening some kiosks where the newspaper is sold.



José Meza - El Nacional (Monday, March 16):

GNB officials tried to block the passage of *El Nacional*'s Information CEO, José Meza,¹³ on his way to Caracas; he showed his credentials and reminded officials of what the Venezuelan regime's defense minister, Vladimir Padrino López, had said, to which they replied that "no doctors, no journalists, no one can pass."



¹² Twitter @cnpcaracas (2020): https://bit.ly/2UYkixA

¹³ Twitter @espaciopublico (2020): https://bit.ly/3edm9Ge

Kerlin Mosquera - Diario 2001 and Meridiano TV (Tuesday, March 17):

Officials from the CICPC, the Bolivarian National Police (PNB) and the Special Actions Forces (FAES), detained for 40 minutes and broke the identification of the journalist from the *Diario 2001* and *Meridiano TV* media, Kerlin Mosquera.¹⁴ He was detained when he was boarding public transport on Urdaneta avenue, allegedly for not wearing face masks.



La Mañana Digital (Tuesday, March 17):

The Falcon state governor, Víctor Clark, described as terrorists and threatened legal actions against the newspaper *La Mañana Digital*, ¹⁵ for allegedly ignoring and promoting measures against the pandemic. "If the newspaper *La Mañana wants to become a political operator to ignore the legitimate measures of the Bolivarian Government to prevent the pandemic, let it abide by the consequences"* said the governor on a regional radio speech.



¹⁴ Twitter @cnpcaracas (2020): https://bit.ly/2JXw0lC

¹⁵ Twitter @cnpcaracas (2020): https://bit.ly/2RrHuCp

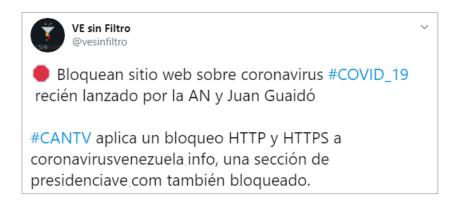
LUZ Radio 102.9 FM (Tuesday, March 17):

Due to the lack of fuel and safe-conduct to guarantee the transfer of its workers, the radio station *LUZ Radio 102.9 FM* went off-air.¹⁶ The delivery of the safe conducts was denied to journalists at the ZODI headquarters in Zulia state.



Coronavirusvenezuela.info and presidenciave.com (Wednesday, March 18):

CANTV, the main Internet Service Provider (ISP) in Venezuela, applied a "HTTP" and "HTTPS" block to the informative portal www.coronavirusvenezuela.info¹⁷, launched by the National Assembly and the President (E) Juan Guaidó, as well as the website of the National Communication Center of the Presidency, www.presidenciave.com. Other operators such as Movistar, Digitel and Supercable maintain a DNS block to the latter.



¹⁶ Twitter @codhez (2020): https://bit.ly/34qCvXG

¹⁷ Twitter @vesinfiltro (2020): https://bit.ly/39WOQEm

National Police prevent access to journalists (Wednesday, March 18):

PNB officials who were at the La Paz exit towards the Francisco Fajardo highway in Caracas, prohibited access to press workers on an alleged order from the director of Transit. 18



Radio Chévere 97.5 FM, Oceánica 98.5 FM and Río 90.5 FM (Friday, March 20):

By order of the Delta Amacuro governor, Lizeta Hernández, *Radio Chévere 97.5 FM*, *Oceánica 98.5 FM* and *Río 90.5 FM* stations in Tucupita, went off-air.¹⁹ The National Electric Corporation (CORPOELEC) was in charge of cutting the electric service.



¹⁸ Twitter @cnpcaracas (2020): https://bit.ly/2RpBee4

¹⁹ Twitter @sntpvenezuela (2020): https://bit.ly/3a1AceS

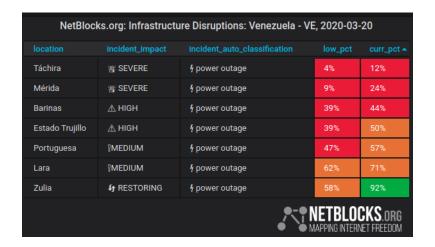
Diario La Calle (Friday, March 20):

The printed version of the newspaper *Diario La Calle* went out of circulation due to the lack of fuel and the rationing measures to supply itself with fuel in Valencia city, as reported in a statement in which they will also steadily continue with their work of informing on their website and social networks.²⁰



Power failure affects Internet connectivity in the west country side (Friday, March 20):

An electrical failure affected Internet connectivity in the states of Táchira, Mérida, Barinas, Trujillo, Portuguesa. Lara and Zulia.²¹



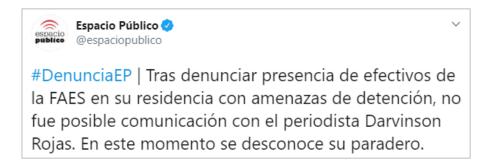
²⁰ Instagram @diariolacallevzla (2020): https://bit.ly/3c8nFrC

²¹ Twitter @redesayuda (2020): https://bit.ly/3edNdVV

Darvinson Rojas (Saturday, March 21):

FAES officials arbitrarily detained the journalist Darvinson Rojas with his parents,²² who are currently released, and assured that their son is in a FAES command in the La Quebradita sector.

On March 22, the FAES refused to report on the journalist's whereabouts; after visiting various police centers, it was learned that he was selected detained at the FAES headquarters in UD5 of Caricuao, where he was transferred from the La Quebradita command the previous night. On March 23, the journalist was presented clandestinely and accused of instigating hatred and public instigation (under the anti-hate speech law).



Mónica Salazar - Crónica Uno (Monday, March 23):

Officials from the Autonomous Institute of the Sucre State Police (IAPES) prevented the correspondence of *Crónica Uno*, Mónica Salazar,²³ from going to the *Antonio Patricio de Alcalá University Hospital*, in Cumaná; where a press conference was held.

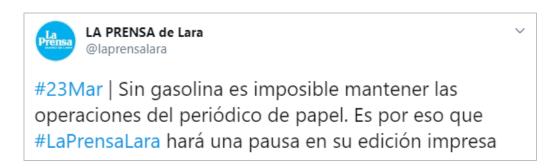


²² Twitter @espaciopublico (2020): https://bit.ly/2wsKVBk

²³ Twitter @espaciopublico (2020): https://bit.ly/3cawUHR

La Prensa Lara (Monday, March 23):

The printed version of *La Prensa Lara* was suspended due to restrictions regarding the supply of fuel in the country,²⁴ making it difficult for press staff to move to the news site and to distribute copies of the newspaper to over 200 points of sale.



Rosalí Hernández - Caraota Digital (Tuesday, March 24):

FAES officials arbitrarily detained the *Caraota Digital* photo reporter, Rosalí Hernández.²⁵ Also, they took her work equipment and erased all the material that she had recorded while she was reporting in Catia. One of the officials said "no one has authorization to be recording in the area, or anywhere else."



²⁴ Twitter @laprensalara (2020): https://bit.ly/2wuaxxR

²⁵ Twitter @espaciopublico (2020): https://bit.ly/34qqMlz

Beatriz Rodríguez - La Verdad de Vargas (Tuesday, March 24):

The director of the newspaper *La Verdad de Vargas*, Beatriz Rodríguez,²⁶ was twice summoned to the Prosecutor's Office to give statements about the news published by the portal about a nurse from the Venezuelan Institute of Social Security (IVSS) infected with COVID-19. In his second summons, on March 25, she was issued a ban on testifying to the media.



Yarnaldo Tovar - 360 Grados Internacional (Wednesday, March 25):

PNB officials arbitrarily detained the journalist Yarnaldo Tovar, from the *360 Grados Internacional* media,²⁷ while he was making a report on the COVID-19 at the *Coche Peripheral Hospital*. The journalist was released that same night.



²⁶ Twitter @sntpvenezuela (2020): https://bit.ly/39Rt3xK

²⁷ Twitter @360gradosinter1 (2020): https://bit.ly/3a2cXkJ

Alexander Zerlin - Rumbera 94.7 FM (Wednesday, March 25):

A GNB official detained the journalist from *Rumbera 94.7 FM*, Alexander Zerlin.²⁸ He was at a service station in San Carlos, at Cojedes state, demanding to be supplied with fuel to continue working. Officials alleged that the journalist was disturbing public order.



Personal information of journalists was published (Thursday, March 26)

After the United States government filed drug trafficking charges against Nicolás Maduro and offered a reward of 15 million US dollars for information leading to his capture and prosecution, the phone numbers of the journalists Luis Gonzalo Pérez, Gabriela González, Osmary Hernández, Edwar Rodríguez, Joan Camargo, Fernando Tineo, Mildred Manrique and Beatriz Adrián were released from the Twitter account @PatriotaRedes. Also, they were described as being the "most wanted for longline and treason".



²⁸ Twitter @espaciopublico (2020): https://bit.ly/2xm0f30

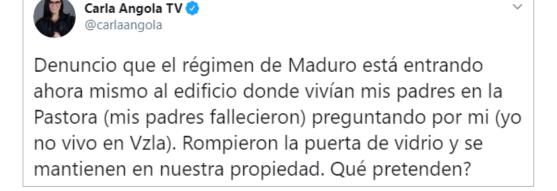
Electrical failure affected Internet connectivity in west country side (Thursday, March 26):

An electrical failure affected Internet connectivity in different cities of the states: Trujillo, Barinas, Zulia, Portuguesa, Mérida, Táchira and Falcón.²⁹



Carla Angola (Tuesday, March 31):

The journalist Carla Angola denounced in her Twitter account that an alleged group of Venezuelan regime officials entered the building where her parents lived in La Pastora,³⁰ Caracas. They asked for the journalist who is not living in Venezuela.



²⁹ Twitter @redesayuda (2020): https://twitter.com/RedesAyuda/status/1243211735823245317

³⁰ Twitter @carlaangola (2020): https://bit.ly/2wyFbWU

Alberto Rodríguez - Alberto News (Tuesday, March 31):

Alleged group of criminals on behalf of the Nicolás Maduro regime, wrote intimidating messages at the entrance to the residence of the journalist Alberto Rodríguez, in Caracas.³¹ He reported that their parents and niece live in the house.



Albertonews.com (Wednesday, April 1):

The independent news portal http://albertonews.com/, was blocked by the main ISP of Venezuela, ABA CANTV.³² Also, other operators such as Movistar, Digitel and Supercable also keep access to the information portal blocked.



VE sin Filtro @vesinfiltro · 1 abr.

Confirmado bloqueo de albertonews.com @albertonews en #internetVE

#CANTV, empresa estatal y el principal proveedor de #Venezuela aplica un #bloqueoDNS y #filtradoSNI.

Los operadores privados como #MovistarVE, #Digitel y #supercable solo bloquean mediante DNS

³¹ Twitter @sntpvenezuela (2020): https://bit.ly/39XcjFn

³² Twitter @vesinfiltro (2020): https://bit.ly/2K14bci

Alberto Ravell, La Patilla and El Chigüire Bipolar (Thursday, April 2):

On April 3, Pedro Carvajalino, host of the *Zurda Konducta*'s show of VTV, the Venezuelan regime TV channel, threatened on his Twitter account to the journalist Alberto Ravell, assuring: "We are going to the offices workplaces of La Patilla, Chiquire bipolar and everything that smells like you, witch."³³



Charito Rojas - Unión Radio 105.3 FM (Thursday, April 2):

Unión Radio's journalist, Charito Rojas, received threats after being mentioned by Diosdado Cabello in his state-owned TV show *Con el Mazo Dando*.³⁴

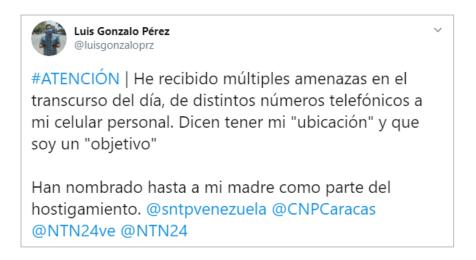


³³ Twitter @pedrokonductaz (2020): https://bit.ly/2K6dUOE

³⁴ Twitter @sntpvenezuela (2020): https://bit.ly/2KaipaJ

Luis Gonzalo Pérez - NTN24 (Thursday, April 2):

The NTN24 journalist, Luis Gonzalo Pérez, denounced in his twitter account receiving multiple death threats trough WhatsApp from unknown numbers,³⁵ this people wrote to him claiming to have the journalist's location, and named his mother as part of this harassment.



Adán Contreras - Giga 91.3 FM (Thursday, April 2):

The journalist from *Radio Giga 91.3 FM*, Adán Contreras, was summoned by the GNB captain in Tovar, at Mérida state, to "talk" about a post on social media in which he replied to a message from Belkis Contreras, a municipal council official, that said: "It doesn't matter if there was no food, it matters in health." Also, after this post, the official threatened to apply the unconstitutional Law Against Hate on him.



³⁵ Twitter @luisgonzaloprz (2020): https://bit.ly/2K6x8nm

³⁶ Twitter @sntpvenezuela (2020): https://bit.ly/2XzGgc3

Esther Yáñez - Sputnik Mundo (Thursday, April 2)

A GNB official and a civilian woman intimidated the Sputnik Mundo correspondent, Esther Yañez, when she was documenting the lane at the fuel service station in La Florida, Caracas, on Thursday April 2.37 The official checked the journalist's phone and deleted the photographs she had taken, and also threatened to take her to "intelligence".



Me pasó la semana pasada y lo denuncié por esta vía. Un Guardia y una mujer "civil" que no se identificó, me increparon, me cogieron mi celular sin permiso, me revisaron todo y me obligaron a borrar mi material. Después, el GNB me amenazó con llevarme a "inteligencia". Unos días

Lack of fuel affected journalists in Carabobo (Friday, April 3)

Correspondents from national and international media in Carabobo state, have stopped documenting due to the lack of fuel to go to the place of the news.³⁸ The media that have been affected are: TV Venezuela, Vivo Play, El Impulso, Caraota Digital, Venevisión, Televen, Impacto TDN, Crónica Uno, El Venezolano TV, El Pitazo, El Estímulo, Unión Radio, El Carabobeño, Carabobo es Noticia and Las Noticias de Hoy. For this reason, reporters have created support groups and divided the work, to request to official sources material for support, which is shared through these groups, as a way to continue guaranteeing the right to information in the face of the pandemic.

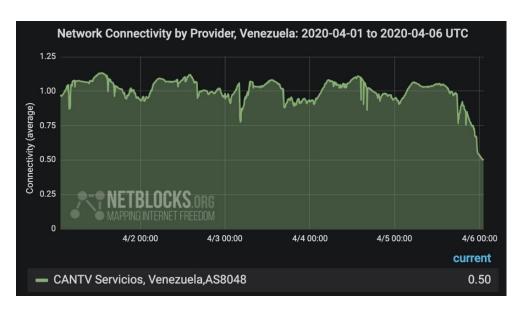


³⁷ Twitter @estheryez (2020): https://bit.ly/3a9v1tB

³⁸ Twitter @ipysvenezuela (2020): https://bit.ly/2RDPfVQ

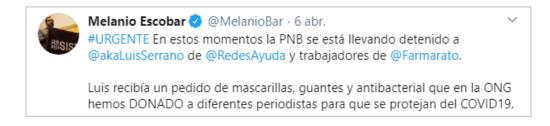
Fire in Chacao affected Internet connectivity (Saturday, April 5)

Netblocks confirmed a gradual drop in Internet connectivity from ABA CANTV after a fire that broke out in the offices of the ISP in Chacao, Caracas.³⁹ Connectivity levels were approximately 50% of usual.



Luis Serrano - RedesAyuda (Monday, April 6)

RedesAyuda coordinator, Luis Serrano, and workers at the Farmarato digital pharmacy, were detained by PNB officials in San Bernardino, Caracas, on April 6;⁴⁰ Luis Serrano, was receiving medical supplies (antibacterial, gloves and face masks) that RedesAyuda in alliance with Free Press Unlimited have been donating to journalists during the quarantine, when PNB officials parked out at the entrance of the residence and they demanded that they accompany them to the command of the area, where they were detained for more than an hour.



³⁹ Twitter @netblocks (2020): https://bit.ly/3enSdHR

⁴⁰ Twitter @melaniobar (2020): https://bit.ly/34HBY3N

Mayerlin Villanueva and Luis Cobaría - La Prensa Táchira (Tuesday, April 7)

GNB officials detained journalists Mayerlin Villanueva and Luis Cobaría, from *La Prensa Táchira* in Peracal, Táchira state,⁴¹ for more than 4 hours, when they tried to access the San Antonio Fire Department on Tuesday, April 7. The officials took the journalists equipment and arbitrarily erased the material and also prevented them from making a call while they were detained.



Ana Rodríguez - Telemundo 51 (Wednesday, April 8)

An official from the Sucre Mayor's Office tried to prevent the reporter Ana Rodríguez, from *Telemundo 51*, from taking support shots in Petare.⁴² Also, the official demanded that she leave the place despite the reporter was wearing his journalist credential.

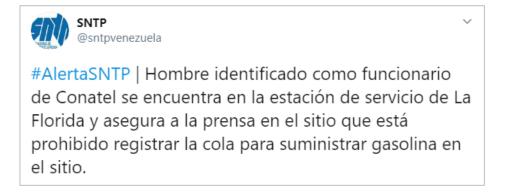


⁴¹ Twitter @sntpvenezuela (2020): https://bit.ly/2RCidp3

⁴² Twitter @sntpvenezuela (2020): https://bit.ly/2XHtaJA

Prohibit to register lanes at gas stations (Wednesday, April 8)

Alleged Conatel official told press workers at the gas station of La Florida, in Caracas, that they were prohibited from registering and record the lane to supply fuel.⁴³



Kariñosa 106.1 FM (Wednesday, April 8)

Conatel arbitrarily closed the *Kariñosa 106.1 FM* station, located in Guanipa, Anzoátegui state,⁴⁴ according to the agency "they operated without a license." Several pieces of equipment were taken, including: a computer, the transmitter, the sound console and two microphones.



⁴³ Twitter @sntpvenezuela (2020): https://bit.ly/2xlaWmN

⁴⁴ Twitter @cnpcaracas (2020): https://bit.ly/2RArk9E

