

Haiti: Radio Stations attacked

In a letter to Minister of the Interior Henri-Claude Mènard, RSF protested the attacks on Radio Vision Nouvelle, Radio Lumière and Radio Vision 2000, during which Fritz Antoine Jean, Radio Vision Nouvelle's guard, was killed and two other watchmen were injured. RSF asked for an inquiry into each of these incidents in order to establish the motives for these attacks and punish the authors.

These events illustrate the degree to which the reigning climate of violence in Haiti seriously undermines press freedom, stated Robert Mènard, RSF's secretary-general.

On 20 April nearly 300 people armed with revolvers, machetes and clubs attacked the long wave transmitters of Radio Lumière and Radio Vision Nouvelle, in the suburbs north of Port-au-Prince.

Antoine Jean, Radio Vision Nouvelle's guard, was killed by the attackers with machetes. Another guard at the station, Alcis Delce, as well as a watchman at Radio Lumière, Félix Jean Charles, were also injured in the attack. The assailants put the installations out of service and took away some of the equipment. Radio Vision Nouvelle estimates the losses at US\$200,000.

The attackers reportedly said they were looking for criminals hidden in this area. Two days earlier, a punitive raid took place in the nearby neighbourhood of Bois Neuf, suspected of sheltering numerous delinquents. In the opinion of Pierre Joseph Louissant, director of Radio Vision Nouvelle, it is very difficult to identify those responsible for the attack.

However, the radio station's manager does not rule out the hypothesis of a premeditated act, emphasising that the radio station has recently been receiving threats. He adds that the end of the broadcasts represents a hard blow for the peasants, for whom the programming was aimed. Luviaud Duvernard, director of Radio Lumière, also considers it to be a troubling act, noting that the same transmitter was the target of an attack in 2000, during which one of the station's guards was injured. Radio Lumière, an evangelical station, had to close for several months in 1992 after soldiers burst into its premises.

Furthermore, on the evening of 15 April, a group of armed men illegally entered the premises housing the studios of the private radio station Radio Vision 2000, as well as Radio Express and Tèlè Express, in Jacmel. The attackers stole some equipment. the profession to be a warning. In a letter addressed to President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) expresses its concern about the reduction in security measures for Judge Claudy Gassant, who is charged with the investigation into the April 3 2000 assassination of Jean Dominique, director of Haiti Radio Inter.

The organisation has asked that security is immediately reinforced. It is unbelievable that the Minister of Justice publicly declares that all possible means have been placed at the disposal of the judge, whereas in fact this is not true at all, said an indignant Robert Mènard, general-secretary of RSF.

He also protested against the acts of intimidation against Judge Gassant carried out by police chief, Evens Saintune. RSF requested that the President use all his influence to bring an end to such pressures.

According to information received by RSF, Judge Gassant confirmed on May 8 2001 that he was worried about his security and was ready to resign if the government did not reinforce his protection. The seven police officers who had been assigned to his security had been transferred and had not been replaced. The judge stated he was now only protected by four civilians, who were less well equipped. It is difficult for me to carry out arrests under these conditions, he underlined. Contrary to the remarks by the Minister of Justice, who declared at the end of April that everything necessary for his security would be placed at his disposal, Judge Gassant asserted that he had not obtained the manpower requested. He also made it clear that a letter addressed to the Minister of Justice, Gary Lissade, at the beginning of April, in which he

requested, in particular, bulletproof vests, better equipment for the men in his security detail, and another vehicle, remained unanswered.

In a telephone conversation with RSF, Claudy Gassant in addition asserted that he had been the object of several acts of intimidation at the hands of police chief, Evens Saintune, over the last few weeks. He reported that on April 16 2001, police chief Saintune, accompanied by ten armed men, intercepted him to ask him to put his armoured vehicle at the disposal of the Ministry of Justice.

Having his orders disobeyed, the police chief became aggressive, hitting the car door as Gassant tried to get out of his car. The judge, who set off again a few minutes later, finally returned the vehicle on 2 May, after two further incidents involving police chief Saintune. According to Claudy Gassant, the Minister of Justice confirmed that he had ordered the police chief to demand the return of the vehicle, without giving explanation. The judge today has only one car compared to four at the end of March.

Claudy Gassant is the second investigating judge to be charged with the Jean Dominique case. His predecessor, Fleury Jean-Senate, gave up the case after coming under undue pressure. Judge Gassant himself has been threatened on several occasions. On January 30 2001, Millien Rommage, a Family Lavalas deputy, accompanied by several heavily armed men, threatened to riddle his car with bullets ?if he continued.? Rommage is a political ally of Senator Dany Toussaint, who appears to be connected to a number of people involved in this case.

In its report published on 2 April 2001, RSF denounced the investigation for its failings at several points. In June 2000, Jean Wilner Lalanne, suspected of having served as an intermediary between those who gave the orders and those who carried out the crime, died in dubious circumstances following his arrest. In January 2001, the judge also ran up against opposition from the Senate when he summoned Senator Dany Toussaint to give evidence.