

IAPA: Freedom of speech jeopardized in Latin America for Venezuelan influence

The Inter American Press Association (IAPA) last weekend said freedom of the press in Latin America is at stake because of the alleged influence on the government of Venezuela, which is trying to export a model "similar to that of the Cuban dictatorship."

The 63rd General Assembly, held in Miami, discussed the situation of press freedom in the Americas, particularly in Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, and Argentina. The organization concluded that the situation "is deteriorating significantly."

The report on the threats against freedom of speech in Venezuela, which is still susceptible of changes before approval next October 16, was at the center of almost the entire debate. Another issue in the spotlight during the meeting was the alleged spreading of President Hugo Chávez's government model to other countries such as Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia.

David Natera, director of Venezuelan newspaper Correo del Caroní, said in the report that respect for freedom of expression and information are constitutional rights and democratic values Chávez's regime "is trying to suppress forever."

"Chávez's dictatorial regime is determined to consolidate its project with systematic actions aimed at a tighter grip over the society, emphasizing hegemony over the news media," the report asserted.

During the debate, Miguel Otero, director of Venezuelan daily newspaper El Nacional, stressed that one of the most worrisome effects of the likely changes to the Constitution is the fact that "free press will be terminated." Marcel Granier, CEO of private television channel RCTV, underscored that the "language of hatred" of the Venezuelan government is spreading to other Latin American countries.