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Venezuela: Globovisión attack must be urgently investigated and journalists protected

Amnesty International today expressed grave concern at attacks against staff at Globovisión television station on Monday and called on the Venezuelan authorities to urgently initiate a full and impartial investigation to ensure those responsible are brought to justice.

According to reports, a group of armed individuals entered Globovisión's main office on Monday afternoon, threw tear gas bombs and attacked staff and security guards. The attackers identified themselves as government supporters.

"Attacks against freedom of expression are a serious long standing concern in Venezuela," said Susan Lee, Americas Director at Amnesty International. "President Chavez must guarantee that the right of the media to exercise its legitimate activity is respected, even when that includes criticism of the government."

In a separate development, Venezuela's Attorney General has presented a draft law that will make it a criminal offense to "disseminate through the media 'false' news that 'harms the interest of the state' and to 'mislead or distort news' ... if this affects social peace, national security, public order, mental health or public morale." Anyone convicted under this law could face a prison sentence of up to four years.

Amnesty International is seriously concerned that the law, if enacted, will impose unacceptable restrictions on freedom of expression in Venezuela.