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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Joint written statement* submitted by Réseau Européen pour l'Égalité des Langues, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[29 May 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

Press freedom: aggression and censorship against journalists in Catalonia.

1. UDHR Art. 19 states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."
2. However, the freedom of the press is under serious threat in Spain. For several years journalists have become the favourite target of Spanish nationalist groups. News professionals have repeatedly been insulted, threatened and injured and their equipment damaged.
3. By way of example, on 27th September 2017 dozens of extreme right-wing demonstrators assembled in front of the Catalan public radio (Catalunya Radio) studios with a banner with the fascist slogan "*Por España me atrevo!*" (For Spain I dare) and insulted the journalist Mònica Terribas, calling her "Hutu" and accusing her of "living off subsidies".¹
4. On 30th September 2017 in Badalona, the tyres of a vehicle belonging to the Catalan language public television channel TV3 were slashed and a window of the vehicle smashed.²
5. On 8th October 2017 several TV3 teams covering a Spanish unionist demonstration were attacked and insulted. The journalist Laura Catalan was hit in the face with a Spanish flag, while other demonstrators called her "whore" and "bitch"³. The journalist Xavi Rossinyol reported having to hide the channel's logo on his microphone to avoid being attacked.⁴
6. On 10th October 2017 a vehicle with the TV3 logo parked in a square in Palma de Mallorca was found vandalised with "Long live Spain! Get out of Mallorca!" scrawled on it.⁵
7. On 25th October 2017, a TV3 team covering a demonstration in support of the Spanish police was attacked by demonstrators. One of the journalists' microphones was snatched away and smashed.⁶
8. On 27th October 2017 hundreds of unionist demonstrators assembled in front of the Catalan radio building and attacked it. A window was broken and several journalists threatened.⁷
9. On 29th October 2017, TV3 teams covering a unionist demonstration in Barcelona were insulted and were the targets of coins, lighted cigarettes and spitting.⁸

1 http://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/politica/MINUTO-Diada_13_685361458_12641.html

2 <http://www.naciodigital.cat/noticia/139515/atac/cotxe/tv3/badalona>

3 http://vertele.eldiario.es/noticias/TV3_0_1947105275.html

4 <https://twitter.com/XaviRossinyol/status/917041447769079810/photo/1>

5 <https://twitter.com/margasoli/status/917707556725968896>

6 <https://www.diariodemallorca.es/mallorca/2017/10/10/pintadas-palma-unidad-movil-tv3/1254519.html>

7 <http://www.canal10.cat/video/15228-concentraci-de-suport-als-agents-de-la-gu-rdia-civil-allotjats-al-c-mping-illa-mateua>

8 <http://www.ccma.cat/tv3/alcarta/telenoticies-migdia/atac-violent-a-catalunya-radio/video/5698030/>

10. On 16th July 2018 in Barcelona, the news photographer Jordi Borràs was attacked when leaving a political event he was sent to photograph. The attacker was an officer of the provincial intelligence section of the Spanish national police. The officer, who was carrying a knife, shouted at the journalist "Long live Spain, long live Franco!" before punching him in the face several times⁹. Disciplinary proceedings were opened against the officer, but he is to be suspended.
11. On 29th August 2018, at a demonstration called by the (unionist) *Ciudadanos* party in Barcelona, a cameraman from the TeleMadrid channel was repeatedly punched and kicked by demonstrators, who had confused his channel's logo with that of TV3.¹⁰
12. On 9th November 2018, at the demonstration on the national day of the Valencia region, extreme right-wing counter demonstrators threw toxic liquids containing irritants at photographers and journalists¹¹. A photographer working for the newspaper El Salto, José Ángel Rocamora, was punched and threatened with attack with a belt.
13. Added to these physical attacks on Catalan journalists is the campaign of legal harassment carried out by several Spanish unionist parties (the Citizens and Popular Party in particular) which has led to censorship and bans on journalists covering certain events, such as demonstrations for the release of the imprisoned Catalan leaders, and using words like "exile" or "political prisoners".
14. Among numerous other examples, on 23rd November 2017, following a complaint lodged by the Citizens party, the provincial electoral commission of Barcelona ruled that using the terms "exiled ministers" for former members of the Catalan government who had left Spain because of the repression of the referendum of 1st October 2017 would violate the "principle of neutrality of information". Following an appeal by Citizens, the electoral commission extended the ban to the use of the terms "Minister" or "President" for the members of the former government. This same ruling penalised TV3's choice to cover a demonstration on 11th November 2017 which had been attended by 750,000 people calling for the release of the political prisoners.¹²¹³
15. On 7th December 2017, pressured by numerous appeals lodged by the Spanish unionist parties, the head of news at the Catalan public channel announced that he would not be covering a demonstration in Brussels (Belgium) in favour of Catalan independence. The demonstration was attended by 45,000 people.¹⁴

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<http://www.naciodigital.cat/noticia/141627/video/aixi/quedat/furgoneta/tv3/despr/manifestacio/unionista/barcelona> ;
<http://www.ccma.cat/324/multitudinaria-manifestacio-a-favor-de-la-unitat-despanya-al-centre-de-barcelona/noticia/2817932/>

⁹ https://www.ara.cat/societat/fotoperiodista-Jordi-Borras-individu-identificat_0_2052394943.html ;
<http://www.publico.es/politica/catalunya-policia-agredio-borras-miembro-brigada-informacion-acusada-mossos-2014-alertar-yihadistas.html>

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<https://www.naciodigital.cat/noticia/161838/video/agredeixen/camera/telemadrid/pensant/tv3/concentracio/ciudadans>

¹¹ https://www.elplural.com/autonomias/manifestacion-extrema-derecha-valencia-ultras-cargas-loreto-ochando_204396102_amp?__twitter_impression=true

¹² https://politica.elpais.com/politica/2017/11/23/actualidad/1511462798_475527_amp.html

¹³ <http://www.ccma.cat/tv3/alcanta/la-junta-electoral-prohibeix-als-mitjans-de-la-ccma-dir-conseller-i-president-als-cessats-pel-155/la-junta-electoral-prohibeix-als-mitjans-de-la-ccma-dir-conseller-i-president-als-cessats-pel-155/video/5705104/> ; <http://www.ccma.cat/324/els-efectes-de-la-decisio-de-la-junta-electoral-central-sobre-tv3-i-catalunya-radio/noticia/2823777/>

¹⁴ <https://comunicacio21.cat/noticies-comunicacio21/125088-tv3-no-retransmet-la-manifestacio-de-brussel-les-pel-marcatge-electoral>

16. On 23rd March 2018, the Spanish central electoral commission ordered the Barcelona municipal television channel Betevé to remove the key words "trial of political prisoners" from its website and not to use these words in its broadcasts, considering that this phrase violated the neutrality of the public channel.¹⁵
17. On 28th March 2019, the same body ordered punitive proceedings to be brought against the Catalan broadcasting corporation (CCMA – which includes Catalunya Ràdio and TV3) for their coverage of a demonstration in Madrid in favour of the political prisoners on trial over their role in the referendum of 1st October 2017. According to this body, the demonstration in support of the prisoners constituted a "party" event and covering it infringed the principles of "political plurality, news neutrality, equality and proportionality". It therefore ordered the channel to offer two hours of broadcasting time to the political parties that did not support the demonstration, in proportion to their parliamentary representation.¹⁶
18. On the same day, in response to an appeal lodged by the Citizens party, the central electoral commission formally banned TV3 and Catalunya Ràdio journalists from using expressions like "exile", "trial of repression" and "political prisoners", stating that these words were contrary to the "principle of political and social plurality" in the electoral period.¹⁷
19. On 9th April 2019 the broadcast of a documentary about the situation of the families of the Catalan political prisoners by TV3 was the subject of a ruling by the central electoral commission, which considered that the documentary "offers an image of victimisation of a sector of Catalan society that openly favours the political positions of sovereignist parties" and "transmits a message legitimising the separatist cause", for which reason it violates the principles of equality, plurality and neutrality.¹⁸
20. These multiple episodes, primarily linked to the political conflict between the Spanish government and the Catalan self-determination movement, have led to repeated violations of the freedom of the press. The cases enumerated above are just a few examples of the dozens of physical attacks and multiple hindrances suffered by news professionals in the main Catalan public media.
21. We call on the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and on the Human Rights Council to ensure that Spain respects press freedom, protects journalists who are the victims of attacks, and pursues and prosecutes those responsible for these actions and for conducting a campaign of censorship against the Catalan press.

Òmnium Cultural, Catalan Institute of Human Rights, UNESCO Centre of Catalonia, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

15 <https://www.vilaweb.cat/noticies/beteve-jec-suprimir-etiqueta-judici-presos-politics-alberto-fernandez-pp-barcelona/>

16 <https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20190328/461314770365/junta-electoral-pide-sancionar-a-tv3-por-como-cubrio-manifestacion-de-madrid.html>

17 https://www.elconfidencial.com/espana/cataluna/2019-03-28/la-junta-electoral-prohibe-a-tv3-decir-las-palabras_1910854/

18 <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/politica/20190502/junta-electoral-expediente-tv3-presos-documental-proces-dins-proces-7435168>