

# Chávez warns cable TV news station

## Venezuela's government said a 24-hour cable news station is 'inciting' assassination attempts against President Hugo Chávez.

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CARACAS --

President Hugo Chávez's government Tuesday began legal action against a private TV station for allegedly inciting people to kill him, even as protesters against his weekend shutdown of the RCTV station continued to clash sporadically with police.

Venezuelan Communications Minister William Lara asked prosecutors to open a case against the 24-hour cable news station Globovisión after it broadcast images of the attempted murder of Pope John Paul II in 1981, accompanied by a popular *salsa* song titled *This Does Not Stop Here*.

Addressing the country on a government-mandated nationwide TV and radio broadcast, Chávez called Globovisión an "enemy of the motherland" and accused the channel of "inciting" people to kill him.

"Gentlemen of Globovisión . . . I recommend that you take a tranquilizer, that you take it easy, because if not, I'm going to make you take it easy," he said before a group of elderly supporters dressed in Chávez's signature red.

Lara also filed a case against CNN for using a clip of protests in Mexico over the killing of a journalist to illustrate alleged violations of press freedoms in Venezuela, and juxtaposing images of an alleged al Qaeda leader and protests in China with images of Chávez.

Globovisión aired its footage during a retrospective of RCTV's decades of news coverage, and director Alberto Federico Ravell called the government's charges "ridiculous." CNN issued a statement acknowledging a mistake with the Mexico video footage and issuing an apology.

Chávez's strong words and legal action come amid continuing street protests over his decision to not renew the broadcast license of the country's most popular channel, RCTV, that resulted in weekend clashes with police. The station stopped broadcasting at midnight Sunday, and the government kicked in with its own cultural and news programming station, TVes, on Monday -- interspersed with political messages.

Chávez called the RCTV act a "sovereign, legitimate decision," but neighboring government leaders, media watchdog groups and human rights organizations have accused him of trying to quell dissent in the media.

"The Venezuelan government's politically motivated decision not to renew a televisión broadcasting license is a serious setback for freedom of expression in Venezuela," Human Rights Watch said in a statement.

### U.S. REACTION

The U.S. State Department Tuesday called on the Chávez government ``to reverse policies that limit freedom of expression."

Student-led demonstrations against the RCTV closing continued across more than seven cities in half a dozen states.

In Caracas, a large group of students from various universities marched to the offices of the Organization of American States, where they handed over a letter demanding the right to peaceful demonstrations and criticizing the RCTV shutdown.

Later, groups of students clashed with police in nearby streets and a cross-town highway. Police used tear gas to disperse the crowds, but there were no immediate reports of injuries. Prosecutors reported that five students had been detained on public order charges arising from Monday's more serious clashes between police and anti-Chávez protesters.

### **CALL TO SUPPORTERS**

Chávez supporters also staged demonstrations backing the decision to close RCTV, and the president, alleging that Globovisión and other media outlets were working to create chaos in the streets, called on backers during his broadcast address to prepare for the worst.

"I'm ready to die for my country. Are you ready?" he asked. ``They've decided to come for us with everything. We're waiting for them. In the hills, in the neighborhoods. People: Be alert."

Some, however, pleaded for calm. At the National Assembly, legislator Ismael García of the pro-Chávez Podemos party called for dialogue. "We don't believe this is the moment to be calling people out for confrontation on the streets," García said.

A self-proclaimed socialist, Chávez has sought to implement widespread political and economic reforms since he took power in 1999. He has instituted popular medical and educational programs as well pushed forward an ambitious and contentious agrarian reform. He's also nationalized parts of the utility, telecommunications and energy sectors.

But he has encountered resistance from middle- and upper-class Venezuelans, media owners, senior military officials and state company employees who accuse him of undermining democracy and imposing an authoritarian system.

In 2002, a military coup ousted him for 48 hours. Protests demanding Chávez return were not covered by RCTV and Globovisión, which instead decided to replay cooking shows and cartoons. The stations' actions earned Globovisión the nickname "Golpevisión," -- *golpe* is Spanish for coup -- and the president's seemingly eternal ire.

"You decide how far you want to take this," Chávez said on Tuesday to the ``Gentlemen of Globovisión."