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OAS Warn Venezuela Concerning TV Station

By **FABIOLA SANCHEZ**
The Associated Press
Friday, January 5, 2007; 9:04 PM

CARACAS, [Venezuela](#) -- The [Organization of American States](#) warned Friday that the possible closing of an opposition-aligned TV station by [President Hugo Chavez's](#) government could undermine press freedom and democracy in [Venezuela](#).

Chavez has said his government will not renew the broadcast license of Radio [Caracas](#) Television, or RCTV, when it expires in May, accusing the channel of having backed a brief coup against him in 2002 and of other subversive activities.

"The closing of a mass communications outlet is a rare step in the history of our hemisphere and has no precedent in the recent decades of democracy," [OAS Secretary-General Jose Miguel Insulza](#) said in a written statement.

Insulza said any move that forces RCTV to close "gives the appearance of a form of censorship against freedom of expression and at the same time serves as a warning against other news organizations, leading them to limit their actions at the risk of facing the same fate."

The government did not immediately respond to the OAS statement, though Chavez has said the decision is final.

RCTV President Marcel Granier told [The Associated Press](#) that the station would be forced to close if the government went ahead with what he called an "illegal" move to revoke its license.

Tensions have risen to a new level between the government and Venezuela's largely opposition-aligned private media since Chavez's December re-election to a fresh six-year term.

Chavez has promised radical changes, including revising the constitution _ possibly to get rid of presidential term limits _ and creating a single, pro-government party.

Many Chavez critics say they fear that Venezuela is heading toward the tightly regulated communist system of [Cuba's Fidel Castro](#),

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Chavez's ally and mentor.

During the campaign, Chavez said he regretted not having shut down RCTV and other channels critical of his administration immediately after a 2002 coup, which he claims they supported.

During the short-lived coup, several private channels broadcast regular programs such as cartoons and movies instead of the leader's return to power during giant street protests.

Insulza said the Venezuelan government's charges against the channel are serious, but that in a democracy such accusations should be addressed through the courts.

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