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Thursday, May 3, 2007

## Venezuela AP

Posted on Sat, Apr. 21, 2007

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### Venezuela opposition protests TV closing

By NATALIE OBIKO PEARSON  
Associated Press Writer

CARACAS, Venezuela -- Venezuelans marched Saturday amid heavy security in the opposition's largest show of support yet for a television station targeted by President Hugo Chavez, whom they accuse of suppressing freedom of speech and democratic rights. Thousands of people turned out for the protest against Chavez's decision to remove Radio Caracas Television, or RCTV, the country's oldest private TV station, from the airwaves.

Hundreds of Chavez supporters in red caps and T-shirts mounted a rival gathering nearby backing the government's decision not to renew the license of RCTV, which they accuse of backing a 2002 coup that briefly ousted Chavez.

"Democracy is being lost in Venezuela," said Pablo Mosco, a 72-year-old retiree from Catia, a vast slum in western Caracas, who opposes the station's closing.

Chavez's opponents charge that the former paratroop commander has decided not to renew RCTV's broadcast license when it expires May 28 in an attempt to silence a fierce government critic and also as a warning to other media outlets.

Chavez's decision has been criticized by international press freedom groups, the Catholic Church and others, and RCTV says the government has not presented a case with sufficient evidence to shut it down. RCTV would still have the option of continuing as a cable channel, but its top executive has ruled out that option.

Chavez and his supporters, however, say the measure is justified. They accuse RCTV and the country's opposition-aligned private media of supporting the 2002 coup against Chavez by broadcasting cartoons and movies instead of street protests that aided his return to power.

Hundreds of police, including some in riot gear, were deployed across downtown Caracas to prevent any potential clashes. There were no reports of violence and the protesters reached their destination without confrontations.



LESLIE MAZOCH / AP PHOTO

Opposition members protest against President Hugo Chavez's decision to kick Radio Caracas Television, or RCTV, the country's oldest private TV station, off the country's free airwaves, in Caracas, Saturday, April 21, 2007.

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