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Panama: On Media Censorship

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On Nov. 8, the government's censorship board fined weekly newspaper Clarin Nacional US$250 for publishing "material saturated with pornography." The board asserted that several articles in the publication "were injurious to moral sentiments and social decorum." Clarin Nacional director Ignacio Occhi said the decision was politically motivated, and pointed out that numerous explicitly pornographic magazines published in Panama did not meet with interference from the board. Occhi asserted that the "pornographic" articles in question were not the real reason for the fine, but rather the newspaper's critical editorial stance with respect to the government, and a recent reprint of an article from Spanish magazine Cambio 16 which associated President Guillermo Endara with drug trafficking. After stating that the "witch hunt" had begun, Occhi said the newspaper had suspended publication of its next issue as a protest measure. In communique released Nov. 13, the National Journalists Association (CONAPE) denounced the persistence of media censorship and harassment under the Endara administration. CONAPE said that since Endara took office in January 1990, at least 300 libel and other personal injury suits had been filed against journalists by government officials, including three by the president. CONAPE noted that repressive legislation pertaining to the media promulgated during the de facto regime of Manuel Antonio Noriega remains intact. (Basic data from ACAN-EFE, 11/08/91, 11/13/91; Agence France-Presse, 11/13/91)

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