



A UN expert has urged the Italian Government to democratise media by allocating the concession of broadcasting frequencies in a fair manner.

The expert, the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue, also urged the Italian Government to ensure that the election of board members of the regulatory body be conducted in a transparent way.

At the end of his first official visit to the country, Mr. La Rue [called](#) for the introduction of a legislative overhaul of the radio-television normative system, especially the anti-trust provisions. “This would allow Italy to overcome the excessive concentration of media and the possible

establishment of monopolies, which limits diversity and plurality of freedom of expression and challenges democracy,” he said.

The Special Rapporteur further recommended that the public broadcasting system (Radiotelevisione Italiana, Rai) be transformed into a completely independent service by transferring it to an independent institution or a national trust fund.

“It is of equal importance to ensure that the appointment of the members of the board of Rai is conducted in a transparent way,” the expert noted, stressing that this be done with participation of civil society. “All this has serious impact on the independence which any public service should have.”

In his preliminary findings, the human rights expert also stressed that the criminalization of defamation remains a significant issue in the country. While recognizing the positive step taken of removing the prison sentence for defamation, Mr. La Rue underlined the need to go further. “Criminalizing defamation limits the liberty in which freedom of expression can be exercised,” he said.

“I strongly believe that defamation should be decriminalized completely and transformed from a criminal to a civil action, considering that any criminal lawsuit, even without a prison sentence foreseen, may have an intimidating effect on journalists,” Mr. La Rue stressed.

The issue of hate speech was raised during the Special Rapporteur’s visit to Italy and he regretted the increasing occurrence of hate speech in many European countries, partly as a consequence of the financial crisis. “Hate speech that incites discrimination or violence against any group must not be tolerated in a democratic society,” he said.

The UN expert took part in an event on the physical and legal protection of journalists hosted by the President of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, where he referred to testimonies he had received from journalists and social communicators who had suffered from threats, intimidation and assaults in the exercise of their profession. “I deeply regret that in many cases, such threats and attacks occur with impunity,” Mr. La Rue said.

During his seven-day visit, the UN Special Rapporteur met with senior Government officials, members of judiciary and legislative bodies, representatives of civil society, lawyers and journalists. He will present his findings and recommendations in a report to the Human Rights Council in June 2014.

*Frank La Rue (Guatemala) was appointed as Special Rapporteur on [the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#) in August 2008 by the United Nations Human Rights Council. As Special Rapporteur, he is independent from any government or organization and serves in his individual capacity.*

*UN Human Rights, country page – Italy: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARegion/Pages/ITIndex.aspx>*

*The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>*

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