

## **Statement on Situation in Venezuela**

May 29, 2015

I have noted with great concern the rapidly deteriorating situation in Venezuela and am closely monitoring the courageous hunger strike undertaken by my pro bono client and Venezuelan opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez, Daniel Ceballos, and numerous other political prisoners. Indeed, this pivotal moment in Venezuela's history reminds me very much of the resolve demonstrated by two former political prisoners such as Anatoly Sharansky in the former Soviet Union and Nelson Mandela in South Africa who challenged their oppressor governments through actions like these from within their own cells.

I am deeply concerned that Daniel Ceballos was arbitrarily transferred to a prison some 150 km from Caracas, without notice to his counsel or family, and to a prison outside the jurisdiction of the court hearing his case. Beyond that, his current conditions, which include limited access to running water, a hole in the floor for a toilet, and thin mattress demonstrate the Government's intent to punish him for having won the primary for his party to run for Parliament.

The demands of Leopoldo Lopez and Daniel Ceballos are eminently reasonable. Specifically, they have called for the release of political prisoners, an end to repression, the scheduling of parliamentary elections, and election observers from the OAS and EU. It is gratifying to see the Venezuelan opposition united in achieving these goals and that they will gather peacefully tomorrow.

I urge the Government of Venezuela to allow the gathering tomorrow to proceed without interference. I ask it allow the International Committee of the Red Cross access to visit Venezuela's political prisoners. And I urge it to allow all those fasting access to doctors of their own choosing to monitor their health and welfare.

Irwin Cotler

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