

THE TRIAL OF LEOPOLDO LÓPEZ COMES TO AN END, AS HIS LIVING CONDITIONS WORSEN; VERDICT IMMINENT

Caracas – On August 25, Judge Susana Barreiros concluded the trial against Leopoldo López. This action taken by the judge came as a surprise, as some of the evidence and witnesses submitted by both the prosecution and the defense were never considered. This includes the speeches made by López during the January-February 2014 protests. López has been imprisoned on the basis of these four speeches, where he advocated changing the Government of Venezuela through democratic, constitutional, and non-violent means. Nevertheless, the Government claimed in its indictment that he persuaded some of his supporters to engage in violence through “subliminal messaging.” The linguistics expert, who originally made this assertion in the indictment, recanted her claim during the defense’s cross examination in February 2015. Over the course of the 70 hearings, which spanned some 600 hours, the judge heard 108 witness and 30 pieces of evidence for the prosecution. There was not a single incriminating piece of evidence to support the prosecution’s case. In addition, López was provided only three hours for his defense. The judge rejected 58 of the 60 proposed defense witnesses, the latter two were unwilling to testify, and no documentary evidence was deemed admissible.

With the trial having ended, López is waiting for the judge’s ruling. He is facing the charges of incitement to commit public crime, conspiracy, damaging public property, and arson. Should he be convicted, he is facing up to 12-years imprisonment. López has already been in prison for 18 months with six of those months in solitary confinement. The end of his trial marks the end of an irrational, highly-politicized, yet closed-to-the-public judicial process that first began in a makeshift courtroom in a bus outside Lopez’s prison, was moved to a militarized courtroom, and saw constant intervention from the Executive Branch. In light of these recent events, López’s international lawyer, Jared Genser said, “While the end of the trial was not expected, we were not surprised that the court continues to act with little regard to due process. This has been a Kafkaesque trial from start to finish. The only legitimate judgment would be an acquittal and López’s immediate release from prison ”

In addition, López’s treatment in his prison has also declined in recent weeks. After the surprise release of a video last week that showed Leopoldo’s conditions in prison, the government moved him to a new cell where he is completely isolated. The government also took away all of his reading materials, as well as the documents regarding his trial proceedings. Without access to his trial records, Leopoldo was unable to properly prepare his case. In another bizarre action of the government, President Maduro claimed this week that he has foiled a plot to kill López. López and his counsel are pursuing legal action against President Maduro to demand he substantiate these claims.

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