

**VENEZUELAN OPPOSITION LEADER, LEOPOLDO LÓPEZ, WRONGLY
CONVICTED AND SENTENCED TO 13 YEARS AND 9 MONTHS**

*Action of Venezuelan Government a Clear Violation of Venezuelan and
International Law*

Caracas – Today, Judge Susana Barreiros of the 28th Trial Court of the Metropolitan Area of Caracas convicted the Venezuelan opposition leader, Leopoldo López, and gave him a sentence of 13 years and 9 months in prison for the charges of conspiracy, incitement to commit crimes, arson, and damage to public property. The Government’s claim was that his speeches about non-violence inspired people to violence because they could be interpreted “between the lines.” While López has already spent a year-and-a-half in prison, this conviction further bars him from elected office for the duration of his sentence.

Upon hearing news of his sentence, López said, “Today they condemn me. But it is the regime that is condemned. For the people of Venezuela will set me free.”

López has been imprisoned on the basis of four speeches, where he advocated changing the Government of Venezuela through democratic, constitutional, and non-violent means. The speeches themselves were not accepted by the court as evidence and were never actually analyzed in court. Beyond the fabricated grounds of his arrest, López’s year-long trial was riddled with a number of due process violations. Taking into account the political nature of the charges and egregious due process abuses, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found López’s detention arbitrary in October 2014 and demanded his immediate release. The Group’s call for his release has been joined by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Committee Against Torture, the former Secretary-General of the Organization of American States José Miguel Insulza, U.S. President Barack Obama, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, Peruvian President Ollanta Humala, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, the European Parliament, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the New York Times and Washington Post Editorial Boards.

In light of the recent sentence and verdict, López’s international counsel, Jared Genser, said, “My client’s conviction is a tragic day for Venezuela and really a conviction of President Nicolás Maduro. For only in an authoritarian regime does an opposition leader get a maximum prison sentence on completely false charges for exercising his rights to freedom of expression, opinion, and association. Leopoldo is completely innocent and should be released immediately.”

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