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Tintori: “Those who persecuted me are now going to take care of me?”

Wife of opposition leader Leopoldo López rejects security offer from Venezuelan government – She is demanding authorities implement precautionary measures recommended by IACHR

By Javier Lafuente

According to Lilian Tintori, wife of opposition leader Leopoldo López, Venezuelan Vice President Jorge Arreaza called her on Saturday night to tell her that intelligence services have gathered evidence suggesting that anti-opposition gangs are targeting her.

López, who served as Chacao mayor, has been in prison for two years and, in September, he was handed down a 13-year prison sentence. On Sunday, his wife told EL PAÍS that Arreaza had said the administration was “very worried” and he offered her a Sebin Venezuelan intelligence service security detail.

“How can those who persecuted me for months take care of me?” she said. “Sebin agents are the ones who follow me, take pictures of me and make videos.”

Tintori rejected Arreaza’s offer, citing the precautionary measures the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) asked the Venezuelan government to take to guarantee her safety, giving her final say on who her guards would be. “My lawyers told me I had to demand that they comply with IACHR precautionary measures because I can choose my protection, and I want it to be Chacao police and I talked to the mayor and his team,” Tintori told this newspaper from her home, where she gave an interview in the presence of her mother-in-law, Antonieta López.

According to Tintori, Arreaza asked her to meet on Saturday but she desisted on her attorney’s advice: “If they want to take care of me, let them take care of me, they know where I live. I am not going to the offices of a government that wants to kill me. If I accept any security besides the precautionary measures, they might take those away. And I don’t trust the authorities in my

country. I trust the Inter-American Human Rights Commission,” she says. “I reiterated to the vice president that if something happens to me, to Leopoldo López in prison, or to my children, I will hold Nicolás Maduro directly responsible.”

Arreaza’s phone call came a few days after opposition leader Luis Díaz was gunned down at a election rally in Guárico state where Tintori was speaking. The government suggested it was a revenge hit among elements of the criminal underworld and not politically motivated violence. “It may be,” Tintori admits but she recalls that Arreaza also told her: “That death was going to happen. I mean, if they know there are gangs and that they were going to kill him, how could they not prevent it?”

This tense campaign season, which ends on Wednesday, has been marked by violence against several opposition leaders. Although Tintori is not running for parliament, she has held more than 50 events for her campaign: “For Freedom.” She says tensions are rising as election day, slated for December 6, approaches.

The most dramatic day of the campaign was last Wednesday. According to Tintori, authorities held her and her team back for three hours in Margarita and they threatened to strip the pilots that were going to pick them up of their licenses. Then, once they arrived at the airport in Valle de la Pascua in Guárico, they had several run-ins with pro-government supporters. After speaking at the rally as planned, they returned to the planes, which had been left alone for two hours. They took off for another location. “Mine landed without any problems but we saw that the other one was not turning around to come down to where we were. Suddenly, there was fire and black smoke coming out of it. My campaign chief, communications director, cameraman, the candidate Rummy Olivo, pilot and co-pilot were on it. The pilot told us the brakes failed as they landed although they had been just fine in the morning.”

The group, however, survived the incident and attended the event where Luis Díaz was killed. “I understand the message. Everything was going against me. They did not want us to fly, they tampered with the brakes, and the bullets were a way of saying ‘Cancel the tour’.” Tintori cancelled the events scheduled for Thursday, Friday and Saturday “in solidarity with the dead and for the security” of her team. She resumed the tour on Sunday in Caracas where she held the final event. For more than two hours, Voluntad Popular leaders, students, the wife of imprisoned Caracas mayor Antonio Ledezma, Leopoldo López’s mother and Tintori tried to send a message to the small crowd: voters, do not let fear intimidate you; go to the polls on December 6.

English version by Dyane Jean Francois.