

IMPRISONED VENEZUELAN OPPOSITION LEADER LEOPOLDO LÓPEZ FILES COMPLAINT TO UNITED NATIONS REGARDING CRUEL, INHUMAN, AND DEGRADING ACTS UNDERTAKEN BY GOVERNMENT OF VENEZUELA

Submission relates to torture and other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment directed against López, his wife, and his mother

Geneva – International counsel for Leopoldo López has just filed a complaint to Juan Méndez, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment. In the complaint, his lawyer provides an update on López's treatment since his sentencing in September 2015. Currently, López spends most of his day in an isolated prison building where he is the only detainee. He is occasionally allowed to attend mass at the prison, but guards accompany him and prevent him from having any meaningful social contact with the priest or other prisoners, such that he has no real respite from years of enforced solitary confinement, which amounts to psychological torture. Furthermore, Mr. López has never been provided confidential attorney-client communication and his visits and calls with his family are subject to constant surveillance.

The petition also denounces the degrading treatment experienced by López's wife, Lilian Tintori, and mother, Antonieta Mendoza de López, who were both subjected to an aggressive, demeaning full-body strip search in front of López's children in January 2016. "It is a sad day when our government is so afraid of its citizens that it tries to torture and degrade us in order to silence us. But we will not stay silent in the face of such despicable behavior," said Tintori.

López has been imprisoned for more than two years. His imprisonment has been ruled arbitrary and in violation of international law by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Amnesty International has labeled him a "prisoner of conscience" and governments all around the world have called for his release. The actions undertaken by prison authorities have drawn harsh condemnation from the international community with many, including Secretary General of the Organization of American States Luis Almagro, even labeling them as "cowardly." It should be noted that López received precautionary measures from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in April 2015 and his family, including Tintori and Mendoza de López, received precautionary measures as well from the IACHR in October 2015. The IACHR demanded the Venezuelan government secure the life and physical integrity of those under its protection, which it has failed to do.

Contact:

Jared Genser (English)
jgenser@perseus-strategies.com
+1 202 320 4135

Juan Carlos Gutierrez (Spanish)
juangutierrez@delgadogutierrez.com
+58 412 33 217 44

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