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López, Imprisoned but Free

Maduro must immediately liberate Latin America's most well-known political prisoner

By The Editorial Board

If President Nicolas Maduro believed that he could neutralize the Venezuelan opposition by arbitrarily imprisoning one of its leaders, Leopoldo López, the two years that have elapsed since then have done nothing but prove his error. The opposition won the massive support of its citizens in the legislative elections of December and López, far from fading into obscurity in Venezuelan and world opinion, has become the most well-known political prisoner in Latin America. No excuses of any kind can stand in the way of his immediate release. The prolongation of his detention is a flagrant violation of human rights.

Last night in Madrid, *Imprisoned but Free* was launched, a book of López's own writings that relatives had been taking out of the military prison building where the former mayor of Chacao is the only inmate. It's a story that shows the moral integrity and the daily suffering of a person deprived of liberty and isolated because of his political ideas, a victim of false accusations – the Prosecutor who charged him escaped from Venezuela and spoke out against the pressures that had been placed on the prosecutors – and a sham judicial process that cannot stand up to even the most minimal scrutiny with regard to legal guarantees. Beyond the human drama (the younger of his two children was only a few months old when he was imprisoned), the pages reveal the failure of an authoritarian regime in its attempt to break the will of a person who believes in democracy as the best way to serve the people.

That there are political prisoners in Venezuela is a strange scandal for a society – rich in human capital and material resources – that does not deserve to go through the material and institutional shortages it is suffering. One could never remind oneself of this too often nor could there ever be too many actions to demand freedom for those who remain imprisoned for defending democracy.