

**LEOPOLDO LÓPEZ APPEAL DENIED BY MADURO-CONTROLLED COURT**

*Ignores Clear Evidence of Innocence Including Prosecutor's Admission Trial was Rigged*

Caracas – Today, judges Evelin Dayana Mendoza, Jimai Montiel Calles, and Nelson Moncada Gómez of the Court of Appeals of Caracas upheld the conviction of the Venezuelan opposition leader, Leopoldo López, and his sentence of nearly 14 years for the charges of conspiracy, incitement to commit crimes, arson, and damage to public property. The ruling ignored clear and substantial evidence that the lower court conviction was based on a blatantly rigged trial that included falsified evidence and gross violations of due process.

Upon hearing news of the Court's decision, López said, "Venezuela's injustice has long been exposed for the world to see. Mine is but a single imprisonment - a token of the mass imprisonment that has been inflicted on the Venezuelan people. We will never tire of speaking out for a free and democratic Venezuela."

López was imprisoned on the basis of four speeches, where he advocated changing the Venezuelan Government through democratic, constitutional, and non-violent means. The prosecution asserted that López used "subliminal messages" to incite his followers to violence during these speeches - even though the government's own expert witness testified that no basis for this claim existed. The main prosecutor in López's trial, Franklin Nieves, later admitted that "100% of the evidence [against López] was made up," and that the conviction was a sham. Beyond the fabricated grounds of his arrest, López's yearlong trial was riddled with a number of due process violations, including denying the vast majority of defense evidence witnesses.

The appeals hearing itself demonstrated a complete disregard for due process. In a brazen abuse of government power, soldiers and security officials blocked international observers from attending the trial, going against the Court's previous order. The Court even turned away two Spanish lawyers serving on López's international defense team, including former Spanish Minister of Justice Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón, impeding Lopez's right to counsel. Another member of López's international legal team, former Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González, was also prevented from helping López prepare for his appeal months earlier.

The conviction has been met with widespread condemnation in the international community. 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, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States Luis Almagro, U.S. President Barack Obama, Argentine President Mauricio Macri, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, the European Parliament, Human Rights Watch, and the New York Times and Washington Post Editorial Boards. Amnesty International has labeled López a prisoner of conscience and over 30 ex-presidents in Latin America and Spain have signed declarations calling for López's immediate

release.\*

In light of the recent verdict, López's international counsel, Jared Genser, said, "The rejection of Leopoldo's appeal by the Venezuela appellate tribunal only reaffirms the judiciary's lack of independence and impartiality. Leopoldo's original conviction was a total sham, based on fabricated evidence and egregious due process abuses. Nicolas Maduro's autocratic rule is only more effective because of the brazen complicity of the judiciary. Had the rule of law been allowed to prevail, there was no question that Leopoldo's conviction should have been vacated and he should have been immediately released along with the more than 80 other political prisoners languishing in Venezuela's jails."

\* The ex-presidents include Nicolás Arbito Barletta (Panama), Oscar Arias (Costa Rica), Jose María Aznar (Spain), Belisario Betancur (Colombia), Armando Calderón Sol (El Salvador), Felipe Calderón (Mexico), Rafael Ángel Calderón (Costa Rica), Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Brazil), Laura Chinchilla (Costa Rica), Alfredo Cristiani (El Salvador), Fernando de la Rúa (Argentina), Ernesto Duhalde (Argentina), Vicente Fox (Mexico), Eduardo Frei (Chile), César Gaviria (Colombia), Felipe González (Spain), Lucio Guitiérrez (Ecuador), Osvaldo Hurtado (Ecuador), Luis Alberto Lacalle (Uruguay), Ricardo Lagos (Chile), Ricardo Martinelli (Panama), Luis Alberto Monge (Costa Rica), Mireya Moscoso (Panama), Andrés Pastrana (Colombia), Sebastián Piñera (Chile), Jorge Quiroga (Bolivia), Miguel Ángel Rodríguez (Costa Rica), Julio M. Sanguinetti (Uruguay), Alejandro Toledo (Peru), Álvaro Uribe (Colombia), and Juan Carlos Wasmosy (Paraguay)

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