

EL PAÍS

September 1, 2016

Venezuela and Its Liberating Spirit

A large and solid majority has risen and seeks political change through democratic means

By Leopoldo López

I have been in the military prison Ramo Verde, close to Caracas, since February 18, 2014. My crime was protesting peacefully against the corrupt, inefficient, repressive, and anti-democratic government of Nicolas Maduro, and promoting a political —electoral— change envisioned in the Constitution of Venezuela. For this, I have been condemned to fourteen years of prison. But I am not alone. There are hundreds of citizens incarcerated for the same cause: the political leaders Antonio Ledezma, Manuel Rosales y Daniel Ceballos, the dozens of activists and students, and the millions who suffer daily abuses from the authoritarian regime that has governed our country since 1999.

The judgment to which I was subjected, together with four students—in which we were condemned without any proof and in violation of due process—and the abuses to which we have been objected to in this prison since day one, are only one example of a politic that systematically denies Venezuelans the plain exercise of their fundamental rights.

This has been the chosen strategy of the dictatorship of Nicolas Maduro to try to impede the rebirth of our democracy. There have been millions affected, but it is obvious that they have failed in their intent to subdue the Venezuelans. The overwhelming defeat that they suffered in the parliamentary elections last December, despite their obscene advantage, demonstrates this. It is a large and solid majority that has risen and looks for a political change in the path to democracy, attached to the Constitution.

This majority chose the route of a presidential recall referendum, provided in our Magna Carta as the appropriate mechanism to give way to that which now is an acute political necessity. The obstacles that the regime has put in front of this mechanism have been many, including the seizure of media and the persecution of dissidence.

While I write this note—which only in fragments can outwit the zeal of the prison guards—a great day of national civil protest is prepared for the first of September, the Great Takeover of Caracas. We are convinced that millions will participate and that with this peaceful public pressure and the accompaniment of democrats of the world, a step will be achieved toward the electoral mechanisms provided for in the Constitution, and we will achieve political change.

The economic crisis devolved into a great humanitarian crisis which has ended in an initiation of a great political mobilization that will inevitably drive the revocation of the mandate of Nicolas Maduro. But, while removing the government is an immediate and important goal, it is not the only one. This long tragedy of almost 18 years, whose cost is immeasurable at all levels, should lead us to re-found a democracy on more just, and therefore more solid, bases. The conceptual failures and the human errors that carried us to this sad situation cannot be re-edited.

This demand drives us to the necessity of a Great National Accord, that includes all democratic sectors. The proposition is to form a civil government in national unit, that will go farther than a simple coalition of parties. A government that will be representative of the diversity and plurality of the liberating and republican spirit of the Venezuelans. A government committed to the objective of consolidating democratic institutionalism, to be able to reach the end that has animated our struggle throughout these years: that all rights are for all people, that all Venezuelans, without exclusion, receive the benefits of democracy and rule of law.

Only a government that arises from this agreement will be able to commit with energy and coherence to the priorities that Venezuela demands: to attend the humanitarian crisis provoked by Maduro and his crazy policies, to stabilize the economy, overcome the shortages and inflation, and to promote the economic growth based on national production and social inclusion.

A government thus conceived will also have as a priority and will spare no force to overcome the insecurity that today terrorizes the Venezuelan public. The insecurity, apart from being ignored has also been promoted by the narrative of this regime, which coupled with the economic crisis, has forced the exodus of millions of compatriots. As a corollary to these policies, there will be policies that encourage the return of all those who felt obligated to emigrate. Venezuela will need all of us.

Finally, and no less importantly, is the situation of the Venezuelan military. We recognize the importance of the Armed National Forces, however, we reject the pretension that this sector is erected as a conductor of the Venezuelan society nor should invade spaces that correspond to the civil sectors. It is enough that there is an Armed Force that functions in the strictest manner to that established in the Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I have no doubt that the noble people of Venezuela are on the verge of a great democratic victory and will rise to the demands of this crucial moment in our history.