

**COUNSEL TO VENEZUELAN OPPOSITION LEADER LEOPOLDO LÓPEZ FILES  
URGENT APPEAL TO UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON TORTURE;**

**DEMANDS PROOF OF LIFE FROM GOVERNMENT OF VENEZUELA**

*The opposition leader and prisoner of conscience has been held incommunicado for 21 days in unknown conditions.*

CARACAS & WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Venezuelan opposition leader and prisoner of conscience, Leopoldo López, completes his second year of unjust imprisonment. In preparation for this unfortunate milestone, his wife, Lilian Tintori, announced on Monday the visit to Venezuela of Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Lech Walesa, former President of Poland, and Oscar Arias, former President of Costa Rica. Additionally, Naomi Tutu, the daughter of Laureate Desmond Tutu, former Archbishop of South Africa, will also visit as part of the same delegation. The dignitaries arrived on Wednesday, February 17<sup>th</sup>.

Counsel to Venezuela opposition leader Leopoldo López today filed an Urgent Appeal to Dr. Nils Melzer, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, requesting his immediate intervention with the Government of Venezuela. In their detailed complaint, Jared Genser and Juan Carlos Gutierrez, state:

“We are gravely concerned that in this turmoil, the Government might act erratically and take extreme action to silence dissent, such as neutralizing the political threat of a popular opposition leader.”

López’s wife Lilian Tintori added:

“Leopoldo has been held incommunicado and without any legal justification for 21 days. I demand that President Maduro provide proof of life and restore full access for his family and legal counsel.”

López was last seen on April 7 by a family member. López, leader of the opposition party Voluntad Popular, in recent weeks sent messages to the Venezuelan people reiterating the importance of peaceful protest in the streets as means to return constitutional democracy to the country.

On March 29, 2017, Venezuela entered a constitutional crisis when, in an ultra vires decision, the Venezuelan Supreme Court assumed the legislative powers of the opposition-controlled National Assembly. Though the Venezuelan Supreme Court overturned part of that original decision, in the wake of extreme domestic and international pressure, the Venezuelan people have understood this action as an attempt by President Maduro to overthrow the constitutional, democratic order in the country. As a result, more than a million people took to the streets in protest.

The Venezuelan Government has responded to these peaceful protests with violence, dropping tear gas from military helicopters and encouraging state military and paramilitary groups to shoot

at peaceful crowds. Current estimates count 28 deaths since the start of the protests. Additionally, in an attempt to further quell dissent, the Venezuelan Government has arrested over 1,500 people since the protests began. In response to the mounting crisis in Venezuela, the Organization of American States' Permanent Council voted yesterday to convene a meeting of foreign ministers of the regional bloc to discuss the situation. The Venezuelan Government, which opposed a meeting of foreign ministers, has declared that it will withdraw from the OAS as a result of this vote.

Jared Genser, López's international counsel, concluded:

“Leopoldo has been a central figure in these recent protests as he is a major opposition leader in the country who had publicly called for peaceful protest in response to the unconstitutional actions of the Supreme Court. He is one of over 140 political prisoners in the country who the Government has tried to silence through arbitrary detention. The world must demand President Maduro provide proof of life and restore his access to his family and legal counsel.”

**Contact:**

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

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

###