

COUNSEL TO VENEZUELAN OPPOSITION LEADER LEOPOLDO LÓPEZ FILE URGENT APPEAL TO UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE INDEPENDENCE OF JUDGES AND LAWYERS

DEMAND LÓPEZ HAVE ACCESS TO HIS LAWYERS

The opposition leader and prisoner of conscience has not been allowed to have any contact with his lawyers for the past 64 days.

Caracas and Washington, D.C. – Counsel to Venezuela opposition leader Leopoldo López have today filed an Urgent Appeal to Dr. Diego García-Sayán, UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers requesting his immediate intervention with the Government of Venezuela. In their detailed complaint, Jared Genser and Juan Carlos Gutierrez, state:

Throughout the trial and ongoing arbitrary detention of Mr. López, the Government of Venezuela has failed to observe minimum international norms of due process. The Government's 64-day prohibition of Mr. López's right to communicate with counsel further exacerbates this ongoing situation of injustice. Urgent Action is now necessary, with the gravity of Mr. López's situation continuing to increase amidst rapid destabilization of the Maduro regime.

López's wife Lilian Tintori added:

It is unacceptable for Leopoldo to not have access to legal counsel. This is in direct violation of his rights as a Venezuelan citizen and as a human being. I demand that President Maduro restore Leopoldo's full access to legal counsel.

López was last able to see a lawyer on April 6th. Leopoldo López, leader of the opposition party *Voluntad Popular*, last Sunday sent a video message to the Venezuelan people reiterating the importance of peaceful protest in the streets as means to return constitutional democracy to the country.

The Maduro regime has taken marked anti-democratic action lately as evidenced by a desperate attempt by the Supreme Court to strip the opposition-controlled Legislature of its powers in March 2017 and President Maduro's even more extreme attempts to form an illegal, undemocratic "constituent" congress in order to rewrite the country's constitution. Since April 1, 2017, hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans throughout the country have been in the streets, peacefully protesting their country's worsening humanitarian and human rights crisis and the increasing repression from the Government. The government has responded to its people exercising their constitutional rights to peaceful protest with an iron fist. Since the start of the protests, over 65 Venezuelans have been killed and over 1,000 Venezuelans have been wounded

as a result of clashes with the government and its supporters. Rights groups have reported that 363 civilians have faced proceedings in military tribunals in recent days, with 197 still detained. In total, over 2,900 people have been arrested, with more than 1,251 still behind bars.

Genser and Gutierrez conclude in their complaint:

The Venezuelan Government and the Maduro regime clearly have no regard for Mr. López's fundamental rights, evidenced by their consistent and ongoing violation of those rights. Without his lawyers to record the conditions of his arbitrary detention, Mr. López is in serious danger.

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