

**VENEZUELA GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES MAJOR NEW CAMPAIGN
DIRECTED AT IMPRISONED OPPOSITION LEADER LEOPOLDO LÓPEZ,
HIS WIFE LILIAN TINTORI, HIS FAMILY, AND HIS PARTY *VOLUNTAD
POPULAR***

*Minister of Interior Publicly Blames Lilian Tintori For Violence Across the Country,
Putting Her Life in Grave Danger*

Caracas – Over the past week the Government of Venezuela has begun a coordinated national campaign of intimidation and harassment with the public blaming of Lilian Tintori, wife of imprisoned Venezuelan opposition leader and prisoner of conscience Leopoldo López, for unrest occurring in different regions of the country. This campaign to scapegoat Tintori occurs during an explosive environment of massive shortages and violence through the country. It is a brazen attempt to give license to government supporters to target Tintori with violence during her travels and to intimidate her to abandon her relentless efforts to provide humanitarian aid to her fellow Venezuelans. Polls in June 2016 (*Venebarómetro*) show that 73.4% of Venezuelans reject Maduro’s government.

On Friday, July 8, the Venezuelan Minister of Interior, Gustavo Gonzalez, issued a statement on the government-run television channel VTV where he accused Tintori and her “Rescue Venezuela” campaign of being a “a façade of a failed subversive, violent act.”

In the statement, Gonzalez detailed the daily efforts of Tintori’s countrywide “Rescue Venezuela” campaign from June 28 to July 4. In his description of Tintori’s activities, he repeatedly accused her of working with *Voluntad Popular* members to incite violence in various regions throughout the country. In reality, Tintori was visiting the populations most affected by the current humanitarian crisis in the country.

These recent acts of intimidation against Tintori continue the government’s campaign to threaten her in an attempt to end her advocacy. Tintori often experiences harassment and degrading treatment from the prison guards of Ramo Verde Military Prison whenever she tries to visit her husband. The director of the prison, Colonel José Vilorio, regularly screams at and insults Tintori in front of her children, her husband, and other family members. He calls her a liar and threatens to deny her access to her husband. Periodically, Tintori is prevented from seeing López—most often after she participates in public acts of advocacy in support of human rights in Venezuela.

As Tintori has experienced an unprecedented level of governmental persecution in the past two weeks, López has also experienced an uptick in persecution in prison. On June 30 at 11:30pm, 10 armed, masked men forcibly entered López’s cell with pistols and assault rifles. They woke López and pointed a gun at his face and chest. They aggressively destroyed his belongings and stole his Bible, his prayer book, and his notes

for his upcoming appeal hearing on July 7. They also planted two cell phones in his cell. At that very moment, López wrote a letter to the Attorney General and Public Defender denouncing the two phones.

The next day, on Friday, July 1, López's mother was denied visitation, as were his wife and children for the entire weekend. On Thursday, July 7, López's appeal hearing was delayed again because of protests occurring between the prison and the courthouse that blocked López from being transferred. For the same hearing, López's international lawyers Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón and Javier Cremades were not allowed to enter the courthouse. And on Friday July 8, López's wife again was denied visitation. Thus, López has not received a visitor for 15 days and has been isolated for that time period.

These acts of persecution have also extended to López's political party, *Voluntad Popular*. Currently, 15 members of *Voluntad Popular* are imprisoned and 8 of these members were detained after the first visit of the former Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero in May 2016.

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