

Remarks of Lilian Tintori
National Press Club
July 21, 2014

My name is Lilian Tintori. And since February 19, 2014, my husband Leopoldo López has been wrongly imprisoned in Venezuela. I am here today to call on President Nicolas Maduro to release my husband and hundreds of other political prisoners in Venezuela. With Leo's trial scheduled to resume in Caracas later this week, I am also here to release a White Paper, which speaks truth to power and tells the world exactly what is happening in Venezuela with my husband's case and the broader challenges facing our country.

Leo is a politician – I am not. I am a loyal wife and devoted mother, who is now alone in raising our two young children. Because he has temporarily been silenced, I have had no choice but to speak out on his behalf.

And this is what I have to say. No one in the world should doubt why Leo is in prison. President Maduro is afraid of him. And he has great reason to be. Hugo Chavez and Nicolas Maduro have not delivered on their promises to our people and they have taken away our fundamental freedoms – our rights of free speech, freedom of association, freedom of the press, and freedom to vote for candidates of our choosing. But despite persecuting Leo and our family for almost 15 years, my husband has not yielded, he has not wavered, and he is not afraid. He has spoken out and criticized the Government. He has spoken about what needs to be done. He has provided hope to the Venezuelan people that we can do better. And he mobilized hundreds of thousands of people to take to the streets and advocate non-violently for the constitutional exit of President Maduro and for new, free, and fair democratic elections that would return our government to the people.

It is his success – and the forthcoming expiration of his wrongful disqualification from running for political office that scared President Maduro. A strong and powerful Government has nothing to fear from criticism. Only a weak and insecure government locks up people who speak their mind and brings the weight of an entire system on the shoulders of one man and his family.

To read the indictment against my husband is to enter a strange and unfamiliar world that is almost impossible for anyone to understand outside of Venezuela. The government actually has claimed, in writing, and over dozens of pages, that despite the fact that in all his speeches Leo advocates for constitutional and non-violent change in Venezuela, that he had sent powerful subliminal messages to his supporters to engage in acts of violence. If my husband had such superhero powers, wouldn't he send subliminal messages to the government to release him from prison or to President Maduro to resign?

I don't know who the Government of Venezuela believes it is going to persuade with these claims. Surely not the Venezuelan people nor the international community.

Leo's show trial in Venezuela is supposed to resume this week but let no one be fooled. There is no presumption of innocence or due process of law for a political prisoner in Venezuela. President Maduro decided to convict Leo the day they announced his arrest warrant. But what Maduro fails to understand or appreciate, because he stands for nothing but preserving his own power, is that every day Leo is in prison is making him stronger.

The President can imprison my husband's body in Ramo Verde but he can't imprison his mind. And he can endure because he stands for something much bigger than himself. Even though Leo is suffering through the cruelty of extended solitary confinement – five months and counting – he is getting stronger. He reads, writes, exercises, and prays in his cell. And every moment he spends in prison is only strengthening his resolve.

We will all survive – but to be honest it is very difficult for me and my children. It is hard being a single parent. It is challenging feeling unsafe in my own country. And it breaks my heart having to explain to my daughter after every visit why her Daddy can't come home – and how, in Venezuela, sometimes the heroes are in prison.

My husband needs the support of all countries around the world that stand for freedom to stand in solidarity with Leo and my family and our country and our people through this dark hour. We need a clear message sent to President Maduro and the Government of Venezuela that it cannot trample on the rights of its people with impunity.

Because my husband can't speak for himself, I wanted to conclude with an excerpt from remarks presented in a closed preliminary hearing before the Venezuelan court early last month. I believe that from these remarks, you will understand exactly the kind of man that Leo is, precisely why he has been imprisoned by President Maduro, and why the court made sure the courtroom was closed to outside observers. Leo stated the following:

I am in jail because I have denounced the Venezuelan State and its main responsible representatives for being corrupt, inefficient, repressive and anti-democratic. I am in jail for having denounced in person that there is no democracy in Venezuela, that the public authorities have been seized by a corrupted elite, inefficient and anti-democratic which has resulted in a deep social, economical and political crisis that all the Venezuelan people undergo today. I am in jail, for denouncing that in Venezuela we are living under a dictatorship. I am in jail for proposing a deep change, which must go through the substitution of those who are in charge of all the political authorities. I am in jail for demanding the resignation or substitution – through constitutional means – of Nicolás Maduro as President of Venezuela.

I am in jail for having called the Venezuelan people to go out to the streets to protest, exercising our historical and constitutional right to protest until we achieve a political change that guarantees the peace, wellbeing and the progress for the Venezuelan people. I am in jail for exposing ideas, opinions and proposals that today are shared by the majority of Venezuelans that from their outrage and patriotic heart ask for a deep change which shall allow setting out the route of our nation.

I am physically in jail, I am isolated with severe restriction to visits but neither today nor ever can they jail my deep conviction that we have the right to fight to conquer democracy and freedom for Venezuela. Thank God I am not alone in these ideas, in this conviction to fight. We are millions; we are that majority who are ready to fight for a change towards democracy in Venezuela. They might imprison me and thousand others but they may never imprison the fighting spirit that with the young people in the vanguard walk along the streets of the cities, the quarters and shantytowns of all Venezuela.

He concluded his remarks by saying:

I assume my responsibility for having denounced the Venezuelan State and government as corrupt, inefficient, repressive and anti-democratic.

I assume my responsibility in making a call to the streets to protest in a non-violent way.

I assume my responsibility in making a call to consolidate a route to political and constitutional change of the structure of the Venezuelan State.

I declare myself innocent from the charges made by the Office of the Public Prosecutor on having committed criminal actions like damages, fires, instigation and association to commit crimes.

I am innocent from the crimes charged against me and responsible for having call protests as an impulse for a political change in Venezuela.

I hereby deliver this testimony from my own handwriting and I confirm my denounce of having been prevented from my right to participate in all the phases of the process and being able to give my defense arguments.

In my condition as a prisoner of conscience.

Justice for all political prisoners and persecuted people. Strength and faith!

My family and I need your help and support. Thanks so much for being here and in your interest in freedom, democracy, and human rights for all people in Venezuela.