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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**LEOPOLDO LÓPEZ DEFENSE FILES COMPLAINT TO
UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON TORTURE**

Permanent Solitary Confinement Constitutes Psychological Torture of Venezuelan Opposition Leader

Geneva – Today, Jared Genser, international lawyer for imprisoned Venezuelan opposition leader Leopoldo López, filed a complaint against President Nicolás Maduro to Juan E. Méndez, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment, who was appointed to this position by the UN Human Rights Council. In his filing today, Mr. Genser observed:

Mr. López has been subjected to psychological torture over the past five months through permanent, enforced, and arbitrary solitary confinement up to 23-24 hours a day, including a three-month period without natural light, which damaged his eyes. He has also been punished on three occasions for purported offenses and denied all visitors for three two-week periods . . . He has never been provided confidential attorney-client communication or private telephone calls.

He further urged the Special Rapporteur to reach out urgently to the Government of Venezuela to investigate the situation and request it immediately change the conditions of his imprisonment. Mr. Méndez, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and a former political prisoner himself in Argentina, has been an outspoken critic of solitary confinement as a clear violation of international law:

Whatever the name, solitary confinement should be banned by States as a punishment or extortion technique . . . Solitary confinement is a harsh measure which is contrary to rehabilitation, the aim of the penitentiary system . . . Social isolation is one of the harmful elements of solitary confinement and its main objective. It reduces meaningful social contact to an absolute minimum . . . A significant number of individuals will experience serious health problems regardless of the specific conditions of time, place, and pre-existing personal factors . . . Considering the severe mental pain or suffering solitary confinement may cause, it can amount to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment when used as a punishment, during pretrial detention, [or] indefinitely. . .¹

In this case, ongoing and enforced solitary confinement is being used against Mr. López as punishment for his political activism, during pretrial detention, and has been imposed for over five months, with no sign it will ever end. Even worse, it has been imposed arbitrarily – no government official has been willing to name for Mr. López or his counsel who ordered that he be held in solitary confinement or for what reason. Mr. López’s arrest, indictment, and ongoing persecution is a direct result of his exercising his rights of freedom of opinion and expression and peaceful assembly.

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¹ UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Calls for Prohibition of Solitary Confinement, United Nations, Oct. 18, 2011, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11506&>.

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