

UN Human Rights Chief Urges Venezuela to Release Arbitrarily Detained Protestors and Politicians

GENEVA, 20 October 2014 – The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, expressed serious concern on Monday at the continued detention of Venezuelan opposition leader Leopoldo López, as well as more than 69 other people who were arrested in the context of public protests that took place across Venezuela over several months starting in February this year.

"The prolonged and arbitrary detention of political opponents and protestors in Venezuela is causing more and more concern internationally," High Commissioner Zeid said. "It is only exacerbating the tensions in the country."

According to information received by the UN Human Rights Office, over 3,300 people, including minors, were detained for brief periods between February and June, and more than 150 cases of ill-treatment, many of them torture, were reported. At least 43 people were killed during the protests, including one public prosecutor and nine members of the security forces. Journalists and human rights defenders have also reported threats, attacks and intimidation.

Last month, the Working Group on arbitrary detention stated its opinion that the detention of Leopoldo López, as well as that of former mayor of San Cristobal Daniel Ceballos, was arbitrary.

"I call on the Venezuelan authorities to act on the opinions of the Working Group and immediately release Mr. López and Mr. Ceballos, as well as all those detained for exercising their legitimate right to express themselves and protest peacefully," Zeid said. He also urged the Venezuelan authorities to ensure that due process was followed during all trials, in accordance with international standards.

The High Commissioner met Leopoldo López's wife, Lilian Tintori, in Geneva on Friday, and discussed the situation of all the detainees and their families. He deplored the continued reports of threats and intimidation directed at people working to defend human rights in Venezuela, and urged that they be allowed to pursue their work and speak up without fear for their safety. "My office is extremely concerned about the current situation, and we will continue to monitor it very closely," he added.

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