

**APPEAL OF VENEZUELAN OPPOSITION LEADER LEOPOLDO LÓPEZ
TO BEGIN ON JUNE 20, 2016**

Juan Carlos Gutiérrez: “This trial has a direct impact on the OAS discussions regarding a dialogue in Venezuela”

Caracas – After the Court of Appeals of Caracas accepted the appeal, the domestic lawyer for political leader and prisoner of conscience Leopoldo López, Juan Carlos Gutiérrez, reported that a public oral hearing will be held on June 20, 2016 at 10:00 am on the case against the national coordinator of *Voluntad Popular*. He affirmed that the reopening of this trial has significant influence on the debate that will take place at the Organization of American States (OAS) on the situation of Venezuela and the violation of human rights:

After that fateful judgment against Leopoldo López, in a trial marked by violations of fundamental rights, the defense presented an appeal. The appeals process was introduced on October 16, 2015, and had been paralyzed ever since. On Tuesday, we received information from the First Chamber of the Court of Appeals that the appeal filed by the defense has been admitted, bolstered by the solid and irrefutable arguments for the legitimacy of the appeal. That admissibility allows for the convening of an oral audience that is to be public and will be held on June 20th at 10:00am. The holding of an oral trial to rebut the arguments used to prosecute Leopoldo and the need for a fair sentencing are fundamental factors that will have a direct impact on the discussions that will take place at the Organization of American States.

Gutiérrez reported that both the arguments put forth by the defense in its request for the appeal and those put forth by the Public Prosecutor and Attorney General would be discussed. “In this hearing, the arguments of the defense on the legitimacy of the appeal will be discussed, as well as the points of the Public Prosecutor and the Attorney General, who have argued otherwise, and the remaining evidence from the lawyers of the students who have been detained. This is not so much a trial as it is a hearing wherein the supporting evidence and ultimately the flaws of this case, which make the judgment null and necessitate the immediate release of Leopoldo López, will be discussed.”

The lawyer explained how long the hearing should last and how long it should take for the Court of Appeals of Caracas to issue a ruling. “This kind of hearing should last between one and two sessions: it will begin on Monday, June 20th, and could be extended depending on the extent of the arguments put forth by the two sides, during which Leopoldo López has the clear right to appear and attend so as to express his thoughts and ideas, and on their legal arguments which must be assessed by the Court of Appeals. After that hearing, the Court of Appeals has a period of 10 days to issue a ruling, and that could be extended in light of the many arguments, parties and documents pertaining to this judicial process. That is to say, we could have a judgment by late July or late August, depending on how long the Court of Appeals of Caracas takes to issue its judgment.”

López's defense noted that the timing of the decision to accept the appeal on the trial of the political leader was interesting. "The appeal on Leopoldo López's case is admitted at the same time that there is this global debate, there's a debate in the United Nations, there's a debate in the Organization of American States linked to the lack of democracy in Venezuela, linked to the violation of human rights and to political prisoners. If the Government intends to show the international community that human rights are respected and that there is democracy, this is the perfect moment to release Leopoldo López and all political prisoners. The trial against Leopoldo López is an example of what the exercise of justice should never be in any country. There can be no political prisoners in a democracy."

On September 10, 2015, Leopoldo López was sentenced to 13 years, 9 months, 7 days and 12 hours in prison by judge Susana Barreiro, accused and condemned without any evidence for the 43 deaths that occurred during the 2014 protests. The trial was declared "arbitrary" by many international human rights organizations, including the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

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