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Leopoldo Lopez, the Freest Prisoner In the World

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Yoani Sanchez, Havana, 11 September 2015 -- I met him and it was impossible not to notice him. He stood out among everyone: young, with an impressive energy and an intelligence that suggested he would go far. Yesterday he was sentenced to 13 years and nine months in prison by a court as biased as it was malicious. On hearing the sentence I started to calculate how old his two children would be when he left prison, but I immediately stopped short. Leopold Lopez will not serve those years behind bars, I told myself, nor will he disappoint the first impression I had of him.

The authorities don't learn. They don't take into account that the bars magnify a political leader and the pain suffered in the cells hangs on his chest like a medal won on the bloodiest battlefield. Leopold will leave there strengthened, while on the other side, a fearful Nicolas Maduro, will not know what to do with the freest prisoner in the world. Every day that he spends behind bars, this Venezuelan will hang like a shameful weight from the dying remnants of the Chavez regime.

I also remember the moment I met Lilian Tintori. A woman who had to leap over her own fears to become the citizen who last night read a message from her husband after the unjust sentence. There was a firmness in her that had not yet emerged in the first exchange of phrases we shared in Madrid. However, the absurdity that she has experienced has emphasized her strength, brought forward her resolve.

The authoritarians know not what they do.

Leopoldo will return. Young, energetic and rewarded for his pain. Lilian is already here, with this determination that makes us ask ourselves, would we be willing to do the same for our family and for our country?