

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 11, 2015

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary
Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Jacob J. Lew
Secretary
Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Secretary Kerry and Secretary Lew:

We are writing to denounce the recent actions of Venezuela's corrupt and biased judicial system, which just gave pro-democracy leader Leopoldo Lopez an unjust sentence of 13 years and 9 months in prison for trumped up charges. We urge the State Department, in coordination with the Treasury Department, to take immediate action and sanction those individuals involved in the perpetration of this flagrant exploitation of the judicial system to the greatest extent possible under the framework of the Venezuela Defense Human Rights and Civil Society Act (Public Law No: 113-278).

We believe Mr. Lopez should be freed. Thus, we ask that, consistent with all applicable rules and regulations, your departments consider sanctioning the following authorities of the Venezuelan legal system directly involved in this decision, which is tantamount to human rights abuses against Leopoldo Lopez:

- Luisa Ortega Díaz – Attorney General of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
- General Wilman Hernandez Aquino – Head of Investigations of the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DIM)
- Susana Barreiros Rodríguez – Judge of the 28th Trial Circuit Court of Caracas
- Narda Sanabria Bernatte – Attorney of the Public Ministry of Venezuela
- Franklin Nieves Capace – Attorney of the Public Ministry of Venezuela

By rendering a politically motivated sentence of more than 13 years against Mr. López, this miscarriage of justice demonstrates that the Venezuelan court system lacks independence from, and subjugates its authorities to, Maduro and his regime. The court system is often employed to intimidate pro-democracy activists and to issue arbitrary detentions against peaceful demonstrators who have committed no crimes other than advocating for democratic principles, contrary to its obligations under the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

It is worth noting that the United States is not alone in its condemnation of Maduro's defenseless actions. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found López's detention arbitrary in October 2014 and demanded his immediate release. Similar statements have been echoed by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Committee Against Torture, the former Secretary-General of the Organization of American States José Miguel Insulza, and leaders from throughout the Americas, the European Union, Human Rights Watch, and the New York Times and Washington Post Editorial Boards.

We must help provide a voice to those whose rights continue to be neglected and we must take swift and decisive actions, such as imposing sanctions, to illustrate that we truly care about the well-being of the Venezuelan people and that we will stand side by side with them in their struggle for democracy.



Sincerely,
ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
Member of Congress

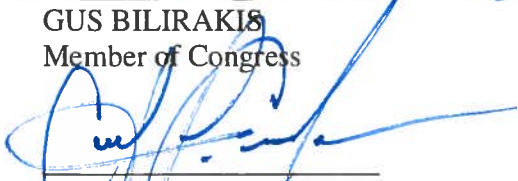

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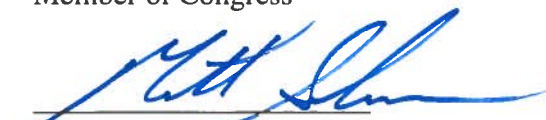

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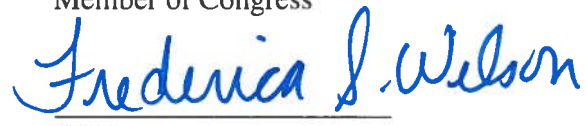

ALBIO SIRES
Member of Congress

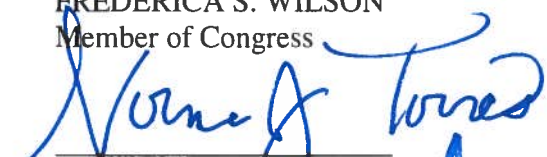

TED DEUTCH
Member of Congress

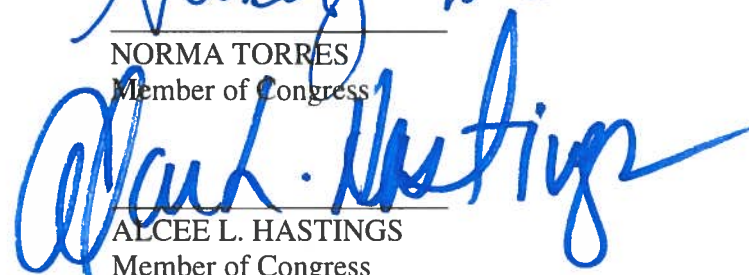

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