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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, May 16, 2017**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Michael Levitt**



## Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1310)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)):** Good afternoon.

Before we begin this afternoon, I just have a note to committee members. Because we've managed to get our guests here for the start of the committee, we are going to postpone the review of our study. I ask you to prepare any changes, suggestions, or edits, and have them ready for the next meeting. That would be great.

Before we begin, I want to explain that we're undertaking the third meeting of the subcommittee on the deteriorating situation in Venezuela.

We recently heard about the Venezuelan government's attempts to circumvent the national assembly, to undermine judicial independence, and to silence dissent by imprisoning government critics. The prolonged protests over the past month and the extreme violence and intimidation that have met protestors are especially troubling, particularly the 40 Venezuelans who have died during these protests, including minors.

The subcommittee has also heard that rampant corruption has led to the bankrupting of a resource-rich country, precipitating an acute economic, social, and humanitarian crisis that has affected the lives of over 30 million Venezuelans. In September 2015, Venezuelan opposition leader Leopoldo López was sentenced to almost 14 years on politically motivated charges, and has been held in a military prison in solitary confinement for almost 700 of his 1,100 days of detention so far.

In this context, I would like to welcome here today Lilian Tintori, Venezuelan democracy activist and the wife of imprisoned opposition leader Leopoldo López; Antonieta Mendoza de López, Mr. López's mother; Jared Genser, Mr. López's international counsel; and, of course, Irwin Cotler, an honoured member of this subcommittee in many years past and a frequent visitor here.

With that, Ms. Tintori, I would like to welcome you to make your remarks, and then we'll move to questions from members of the committee.

Thank you very much.

**Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC):** Chair, just before she begins, because I think there's a possibility that some

people in the audience may innocently break the rules, I remind them that there are no photos.

**The Chair:** Yes. Further to the rules of this committee, there will be no photography or video while we are in session, please.

Thank you.

Please, Ms. Tintori, you have the floor.

**Ms. Lilian Tintori (As an Individual):** Good afternoon, Chairman Levitt, distinguished members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, and ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you, Irwin Cotler, and thank you, Jared Genser.

My name is Lilian Tintori. I am honoured to be able to testify today.

As I join you here, at this very moment, hundreds of thousands of people in my country of Venezuela are protesting peacefully in the streets. As of today, there have been 46 days of protests in the streets. They are exercising their constitutional rights to challenge a repressive dictatorship and to protest the lack of food and medicine, the high rates of violence, and government persecution.

Our demands should be simple for any democracy to meet: the unconditional release of all political prisoners, the holding of general elections, the opening of the UN-run humanitarian channels, and respect for the national assembly. But we do not live in a democracy, and the Maduro regime is so afraid of its own citizens that it seeks to violently repress us.

For the past five weeks, I have been in the streets with these protestors and have experienced this repression first-hand. As we peacefully assemble, the government sends soldiers, military tanks, and helicopters to suffocate us with tear gas. The other day, when trying to stop our march for justice, the government tear-gassed an elementary school filled with schoolchildren, which ended up killing an elderly woman.

To further intimidate us, the government cowardly sends its armed gangs called *colectivos*, civil groups with arms, to shoot at us. Since the start of the protests on April 1, over 2,000 people have been arrested. More than 1,700 people have been wounded and, right now, over 40 people have died: today in the morning, one, and yesterday in the afternoon, two more.

There are currently over 180 political prisoners in Venezuela. As many of you may know, one of them is my husband, Leopoldo López, a leader of the opposition who has been wrongly detained for the past three years for calling for a change in our current government through peaceful democratic and constitutional means. He is serving 14 years in prison after a sham trial, which even the lead prosecutor admits was a farce.

Leopoldo is a prisoner of conscience. Though a civilian, Leopoldo is being kept in a military prison where he is routinely denied his legal right to see his family and lawyers. Just recently, he was held incommunicado for over a month: no phone, no newspaper, no communication.

● (1315)

When a prominent journalist tweeted a rumour that Leopoldo was poisoned and possibly dead, we could not confirm that because the military leaders who run the prison and the hospital refused to allow us entry.

I finally got to see Leopoldo last week and, thank God, he's all right. But we fear for his emotional and physical well-being.

With two young children, I spend many sleepless nights worrying about what might happen to their father. Manuela, my daughter, is seven. Leopoldo Santiago, my son, is four years old.

These soldiers know they are violating our human rights, but they do so under direct orders from the government, from the dictatorship. To shut down the protest, the government seeks to intimidate us with violence or arbitrary detention, but we will not be intimidated. We have too much at stake, and our love for freedom is greater than our fear.

Since the last time I testified before this subcommittee, on November 25, 2014, the situation in Venezuela has worsened dramatically. The Maduro regime has been ruling by emergency decrees in order to bypass the opposition-led national assembly. The supreme court rubber-stamps any action of the executive branch and in March attempted to dissolve the national assembly. We don't have a parliament in Venezuela right now. They backtracked on this attempt in the face of protests, but now the government seeks to develop a parallel citizens assembly or *constituyente* as a way to undermine the people's electoral voice. They want to block elections. They want to block people's vote.

I am concerned that as my country slips into a repressive dictatorship, it is also becoming a narco state. There is complete and total impunity in Venezuela, 99% impunity, which makes it a haven for narco traffickers.

Top government officials including the vice-president are linked to the drugs trade and thus have an incentive for us to become a failed state.

This systematic violation of human rights compounds the dire humanitarian situation of my country. Inflation, which is expected to reach 2,000% this year, has caused several shortages of food and medicine. Half of Venezuelan children do not get three meals a day, and over a million students have dropped out of school because of hunger. The average Venezuelan has lost 19 pounds in the past year. As too many people go hungry, hospitals are unable to treat curable

diseases. Infant and maternal mortality are skyrocketing as are malaria and Zika virus.

Doctors regularly turn patients away because there are no medicines to cure them.

● (1320)

Our desperation has led to over 115,000 people fleeing the country. Already the number of Venezuelan asylum seekers to Canada has doubled over the past year. As our condition worsens, we can expect an even bigger exodus.

On the international stage, Canada has become an international beacon for human rights. We are especially grateful for its work with other regional leaders, such as Mexico, Brazil, and the United States, to hold the Maduro regime to account in international forums such as the Organization of American States.

That said, now we need Canadian leadership to help ease my people's suffering. Maduro has expressed a willingness to allow the United Nations to administer its humanitarian aid in the country, and I believe that Canada can be the key player in ensuring that this humanitarian canal reaches those most vulnerable.

First, we need, and independence needs, a sentiment in the country, and then we need to develop a plan for delivery that ensures independence and efficacy. The sad truth is that in Venezuela we no longer have a government that serves the people. Instead, the government only increases our suffering. I fear the consequences of the implosion of the state for its 30 million people, and thus I ask for your help and for Canadian leadership.

Before you today, I represent the voice of the suffering Venezuelan. Please hear our call. We don't have time for democracy. We don't have time for a statement in one or two or three months. We need action. We need help. We are in an emergency. We are asking for an emergency debate. We are asking for a debate on the Venezuelan case as an emergency. Please help us. Strength and faith.

● (1325)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your impassioned testimony, Ms. Tintori. You've certainly created a vivid picture for this subcommittee.

We're going to go right to MP Sweet, who has the first question.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Thank you very much, Chair.

Ms. Tintori, the sympathies of all of our colleagues here, I'm certain, are with you and your family, with the suffering of Leopoldo López, particularly given his captors' continued intimidation of him in incarceration.

I'm certain Leopoldo would want us to see his life as a microcosm of everything that's happening in Venezuela. The reports that we hear are devastating—not only your testimony, but the reports we hear of physicians who can't treat patients. The numbers that you mentioned, of people losing 19 pounds in weight...it takes something like not being able to eat for 40 days during a year to lose that much weight. That is a crisis of tremendous proportions.

I want to ask—and it's possible that maybe Mr. Cotler or Mr. Genser might know this—whether our embassy on the ground is playing an observation role, so that we have Canadian officials who can give us some objective observation on what's happening there.

Also, I've heard reports that there's now been manipulation in the media. Opposition members are being shown as armed in protests, when they're not; it's being used for propaganda. Is that the case?

My third question is: I've heard also that military courts are actually being used to try civilians. Is that the case in Venezuela? Could you answer those questions, please?

**Ms. Lilian Tintori:** Okay. Yes, right now in Venezuela we don't have the rule of law. We don't have autonomous powers. That's why in 2014 Leopoldo López, my husband, asked for an election and protests in the streets to change that to prevent the humanitarian crisis that we have right now.

Right now in Venezuela we don't have the rule of law, but they repress us with guns and tanks. In the last four weeks we have had more than 2,000 detentions, and they go to military courts because Luisa Ortega, the prosecutor of Venezuela, says no, this is an attempted coup against the state, and that he can do more of the same.

Things are happening in Venezuela. One of the powers says no, this is a dictatorship, and right now the army goes to the military courts. That's unconstitutional. It is a human rights violation, because civil goes to civil courts and the military goes to military courts. We have a military dictatorship and a repressive dictatorship, and that's why they are using the military to detain people and to put more people in jail.

They are trying to block the protests. They try to put fear in the streets, but the Venezuelan people are going to be in the streets as we rescue our democracy. We can't stop.

• (1330)

**Mr. David Sweet:** After the attorney general then protested publicly, the civilian prosecutors followed suit, and you're saying that they're now moving this to the military courts, because civilian prosecutors refuse to deal with this. So the people of Venezuela are hearing their voices as well, then. Is that correct?

**Mrs. Antonieta de López (As an Individual):** That's correct, yes.

**Hon. Irwin Cotler (Founding Chair, Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights):** Just to your point on the Canadian embassy on the ground, just before coming to this meeting here today, we met with the two parliamentary secretaries to the foreign affairs minister, namely, Matt DeCoursey and Omar Alhabra.

They're saying that they're keeping a watching brief with respect to what is happening on the ground, and getting regular reports. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is equally engaged on the issue, and we met earlier with the Prime Minister on this matter. He was very responsive in appreciating what is happening now in Venezuela and in terms of what has to be done.

**Ms. Lilian Tintori:** Yes.

In Venezuela we have five powers. One of the powers is the—

**A Voice:** The attorney general.

**Ms. Lilian Tintori:** This one says no, it is a dictatorship. The moral power is lacking and so Tarek William Saab...and we're waiting for his voice, but his son of 26 years tweeted a video saying, "Father, stop. This is a dictatorship. Do your work. You are a human rights person in the government. What are you doing? They are killing young people in the streets and tomorrow it could be me."

The son of the moral power.

Things are happening in Venezuela. Right now is a good time to push for change, to really block the dictatorship, and to try to rescue democracy.

**Mr. David Sweet:** You asked for Canada's help as far as humanitarian aid is concerned, including leading a mission there for international partners for humanitarian aid. What else could Canada do?

**Mrs. Antonieta de López:** I think a future trip to Venezuela by a group of parliamentarians to see the situation on the ground would be very helpful. It should be as soon as possible, because we are in an emergency now. Also, I think it's good to share that we asked the Prime Minister to work hard on the four issues that Lilian just mentioned—calling for a general election, the release of political prisoners, respect for the national assembly, and a humanitarian channel. He was very compelling on this, and I think that Canadian voices, from different groups and audiences, are very important nowadays, especially with what's happening at the OAS level. There's going to be a meeting on May 31 with all the foreign affairs ministers to analyze Venezuela as a case before the UN General Assembly.

Yesterday was an important day, because there was a group that abstained at the UN. They used to vote against the democratic nations. Now they're abstaining. What we need is a last push to have them vote with the democratic countries of the region.

• (1335)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're now going to move to MP Fragiskatos.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.):** Thank you very much, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today. The testimony is incredibly compelling, to put it lightly.

The Chávez regime, and indeed the Maduro regime, have leaned on the idea that they alone could advance the interests of the Venezuelan poor, that they alone had the ability to do that, and their legitimacy, or perceived legitimacy, was based on that notion, which, as it has turned out, is quite false indeed.

You mentioned in your presentation food and medical shortages. I wonder if you could speak about the shortages, particularly by focusing on how they have impacted Venezuela's poor. Then also touch on what the opposition is offering to the poor of Venezuela in terms of an economic alternative to the current regime, an economic alternative that gives them hope for the future, concrete ideas in terms of how their prospects can be improved.

**Ms. Lilian Tintori:** That's a very good question. We have been in this fight 18 years, but for our families, for me, I have been fighting for the release of my husband for the last three years. But I try to help the poor people in Venezuela. We started a campaign called Rescue Venezuela. We go around the world to 11 cities and get food and medicine for our country. When we start sending this food and medicine to our country, the military blocks the food and the medicine at the airport. The army controls the airport, too. It controls everything. So many things have gone to my home, and I've started to go to the hospitals and to different foundations to give people the medicine and food. And do you know what? Maduro asks people with arms to go to the hospitals and take our boxes. All last year I've been travelling around our country helping people, and then Maduro goes and says to kidnap the box of medicine and food. So it's difficult.

In the last donation, I gave 40 big boxes of medical supplies to a very important hospital in the capital, the biggest one, to Dr. Miller. I gave these to Dr. Miller and told him they were from Mexico, from California, from Colombia. Two hours later, armed civil paramilitaries, *colectivos*, went into the hospital and took Dr. Miller to jail. Dr. Miller is in jail just for receiving our donations.

So we try, but we have a dictatorship. The politicians can't do politics. We don't have debate; we don't have a parliament; we don't have anybody, so it's very difficult for us.

But we have the view, the [*Inaudible—Editor*] right, a lot of things to rescue the economy, to develop oil, and work in petroleum in Venezuela. This year we're going to publish a book on oil and how we're going to rescue our economy—and we're going to do it. The thing is that today we are in a dictatorship and we want to vote for a new president, a new government, and new mayors.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I don't mean to interrupt you, but I want to make sure this is on the record.

If I understand you correctly, the shortages that we hear of are not only impacting the middle class and the more affluent classes, but all Venezuelans. Also, I think, perhaps it's fair to assume, this is having a disproportionately negative impact on the poor because they're already in a difficult position to begin with.

• (1340)

**Ms. Lilian Tintori:** Yes.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** That was my impression, since everything I have read leaned in that direction, but I wanted to make sure that was on the record.

**Ms. Lilian Tintori:** Seventy-three percent have lost weight. Seventy-three percent don't have three meals every day. The crisis goes to everybody. Right now, in Venezuela, Diego Arellano, 31 years, died. Another shot in protest today. One more. Fifty-one.

San Antonio de los Altos. All the kidnapped.... The last 15 died, while 51 with [*Witness speaks in Spanish*] ...guns, in [*Witness speaks in Spanish*] the head or chest.

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** Just on the specifics of your question, it's important to appreciate that 80% of Venezuelans live in poverty at this point. A million students have had to drop out of school because of hunger. There are skyrocketing rates of infant and maternal mortality. I can go on, but you can see a real humanitarian crisis, a

poverty crisis, and a country that is imploding because of their oppressive dictatorship.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Could you speak about paramilitaries? We hear and read about this now. How is the regime utilizing paramilitary organizations in its effort to maintain power?

**Ms. Lilian Tintori:** Yes, there are groups with long guns, and short guns, and with motorcycles. Maybe before, we had more. Now they are a minimum, but they are still there. Chávez gave guns to this group of people and started doing a politics of aggression.

We have a terrorist state. They [*Witness speaks in Spanish*].

They allow violence. It's the current state. They put guns in a lot of people's hands and in Venezuela, every 19 minutes a Venezuelan person dies of violence, kidnapping, or being shot for taking a bag of food or taking a pair of shoes. We have been in a very deep crisis of insecurity and that's why Maduro is now alone. He's alone around the world and alone in his dictatorship and not only has he put the army in the street to shut us up, but the *colectivos* or paramilitaries go around the protests and shoot. We have the videos. We have the pictures and we have everything that we have testified that is true.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you. We're now going to move to MP Hardcastle, please.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to all of you for coming. This is a very important issue for our committee to discuss because of the words that Lilian—if I may call you Lilian—used, “rescue our democracy”. The idea of rescuing a democracy is part of this committee's role. How do we see Canada? Where does Canada fit in with this?

Part of it for us is that we have to understand the past so that when we're rescuing a democracy we don't want to take it back to where it was before, in my respectful observation. You're trying to evolve, you're trying to build a democracy, and build something better than what has ever been in your history.

In all due respect, I cannot look on any point in the history of that beautiful country and not say, “I want to fight to get this back. I want to see improvement.”

What I'd like to hear from you is some of the intellectual argument we can use within the OAS, even, about enhancing and building your democracy. One thing I want to ask you about is this idea. It goes along with my colleague's question about paramilitary. The military role is very hard to understand in countries like ours because there isn't a military role in government or in our court system. How could we advocate or advance...? What do you think needs to happen? I ask because I'm assuming that those arguments were brought to the Maduro government. How did these protests and disagreements escalate into the volatility there now? We have to be able to figure out how we can help you. You're in this crisis and we have to help you come out of it stronger and better.

Help us understand what the role of the military court is now. There was a proposal that I have read about, about a constitutional military assembly that would include representation from the armed forces and workers. Is that issue right now something that we can help advocate for in the OAS? Maybe you see there's a more direct way we can do that.

As a committee we make recommendations, so we have to be able to be helpful and constructive.

Maybe Mr. Cotler will have some observations for us as well on how we can help move forward and gain a better, broader understanding of what this military role is right now, which obviously needs to be modified or maybe even expunged.

• (1345)

**Mrs. Antonieta de López:** I think one of the first questions is that since Chávez started ruling the country, he gave the military different roles. We have the army, we have the national guard, we have the air force, and we have the armada. He started giving the military management responsibilities in the government.

Nowadays when you go to see who holds the positions in the government, I think 80% come from the armed forces. That puts back the responsibility of the army and of the armed forces, because they are there to keep the integrity of the country, to keep peace, to follow the rules. Now they are compromising with the government, and what Lilian just talked about has been proven, namely that there is a lot of drug trafficking in Venezuela. Venezuela is now the path between Colombia and the rest of the world, and the military are completely involved in all of that.

It came about because of a distortion from what Chávez decided 18 years ago, and you can see that it took almost a whole generation. The way the generals are promoted...never have we had so many generals, and I think we have more generals than any democratic country in the hemisphere. I think that's one of the big problems we have with the military.

And what you were addressing about the constitution, the military...

*[Witness speaks in Spanish]*

**Ms. Lilian Tintori:** Your question is very important. I asked the same questions to Leopoldo, in jail. Why is our country like that? Why is there a mess like this? What happened? Leopoldo answered, "Lilian, it was 18 years with Chávez and they put in ministers." We met a lot of ministers today here, very important people, specialists in their themes. But in Venezuela, they put the military in the

ministries. They put military friends of Chávez into all positions. That's how they destroyed our country. That's why we don't have food; we don't have medicine. We have a narco state because there are *carteles militares* in Venezuela.

I asked the same question of Leopoldo to try to understand my country. It's a mess. It's difficult.

We have the Venezuelan constitution, which is rich in human rights. It's a very good constitution. They did that in the year 1999, and we want our constitution. We want that constitution. We don't need another one. The new constitution Maduro wants right now is illegal. The National Constituent Assembly was not consulted on with Venezuelans. The first sentence of article 347 explains very clearly that the people of Venezuela are the repository of the original constitutional power. This means that only Venezuelan voters grant, all throughout the electoral process, that the National Constituent Assembly could be convened. The proposal of the National Constituent Assembly illegally changed the rules to ensure a majority.

I'm going to explain that to you. The original power of the people is not now with the people. It's a group of Maduro's, so it's a fraud. Everybody rejects this new fraud of Maduro. It's a new *coup d'état*, and all the leaders of the continent say that it's worse, including groups of Maduro—Escarra. Yesterday people very near Maduro yesterday said, "No, this is not constitutional. You are crazy. No, we want our constitution, and we need to respect the constitution."

• (1350)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We are now going to move to MP Tabbara.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here. This is an ongoing situation and this committee has unanimously decided to study it further and give it more attention.

My question for you both is that Venezuelan officials have contended that elections are simply not a priority right now. They said they have more pressing issues to deal with. I think you would probably agree that good governance and a change in government is probably what the people are protesting for. They want a revamp of their country. They want their country back, and they don't want to have high prices for food, inflation, etc.

What's your opinion on the government saying that elections are not a priority for them right now?

**Mrs. Antonieta de López:** Why not?

**Ms. Lilian Tintori:** Because they are going to lose. They don't have the people.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** My question is that they keep putting that forward in the media, saying they are trying to do everything they can to try to avoid an election, and they haven't set a date right now. There were talks about a 2018 election, but they're doing things in their power to avoid that.

Can you elaborate on that?

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** If I might interject, I may be able to use your question and also answer Ms. Hardcastle's question at the same time.

We have to appreciate that we are meeting at a time of a repressive dictatorship in Venezuela and a state of emergency, a fundamental assault on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Therefore, what are the things that Canada can do and this parliamentary committee recommend?

Number one is free and fair elections, which 83% of Venezuelans want; and they want a change in government.

Number two is the restoration of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, specifically respect for the constitution, for the freely elected parliament, for the independence of the judiciary.

Number three is the release of political prisoners, including, in particular, Leopoldo López as the leader of the democratic opposition.

Number four is the provision of humanitarian assistance to put an end to the humanitarian crisis.

This is what has been put forward by Lilian Tintori and in representations made today with an all-party meeting of parliamentarians and the Prime Minister. These are the four specific requests. They would allow for the restoration of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and constitutionalism in Venezuela.

**Mr. Jared Genser (Legal Counsel, As an Individual):** In response to your question, if I could just mention 2018 and the timing, the reason why the OAS and the international community is calling for early elections is that the constitutionally permitted recall referendum—there's a process to recall the president gathering a certain number of votes—was blocked by Maduro; he refused to allow that to proceed. As a result, he unconstitutionally stopped a process that was created by the constitution when a certain number of signatures are gathered, and he refused to honour that signature gathering effort. This is why the international community is not focused on the date of the expiration of his term now, but is calling for early elections in 2017. It's because he has already unconstitutionally blocked the recall referendum, which would have been the right or the first best alternative to have him be gone.

• (1355)

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** To Ms. López, you mentioned the military and security forces. Do you see any fragmentation or divisions within the security forces at this point, or have they kind of been under Maduro's, being united as one entity?

**Mrs. Antonieta de López:** I'm going to answer you, just from the conversation I had with my son Leopoldo on Sunday. He was telling me that he has been in a military prison for the last three and a half years and has had the chance to talk to soldiers, majors, officials; they're the ones who have him in prison. His own perception and experience is that more than 50% or 60% of those military prisoners

want Maduro out, because they're against the dictatorship. I can give you a small example.

What's happening in the whole military armed forces.... We don't have information, so that's the reason I'm giving you valuable information of what my son is perceiving in prison. All of the top level is completely committed to Maduro, because they share in the corruption, they share in the drug trafficking, and they violate human rights with Maduro's consent. They're a very small group managing the country.

It seems that in the lower ranks there is starting to be a lot of division, as the people who really are Venezuelans and who really love their country don't agree with all the killings. They don't agree with all the brutal oppression against the Pacific Venezuelans, and they want to solve the food shortages, the torture, the health problems, the homicides and violence. As Lilian said, every 90 minutes there is a Venezuelan who dies because civilians have been armed by the government. They have been armed by Chávez since the beginning.

**Ms. Lilian Tintori:** They control everything. They control the media, they control the TV, the radio; and they control the airport; the court; the jail. The military jail is at the top of a mountain, but the whole mountain is a military zone, so we get in the lower part of the mountain and we start saying good morning to the army. The soldiers are armed with guns and they block us. We start saying hello all the way up to the hill. All the military say, "Continue fighting, continue fighting, say hello to Leopoldo, continue fighting, faith faith, continue fighting." That's all the military. But we get inside the jail and they have four military people who take Leopoldo...the customs. They are direct with Maduro and with [Inaudible—Editor], and they push us, they record all of our conjugal visits, intimate visits with my kids, with my mother-in-law. They record every visit and they take off our clothes every time we go into the jail. They strip search us inside the jail.

But all of the soldiers in the mountain military zone said, "Continue fighting."

**The Chair:** We have time for one last short question from MP Block.

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity. This is the second time I've been a visitor on this committee, and I'm very appreciative of the testimony I'm hearing today.

What I'm hearing is that you no longer have a government that serves your country, you're calling for action, and there is no longer time for diplomacy. Can I ask you which OAS states in particular must be pressured to take a stand on Maduro and the violence?

•(1400)

**Ms. Lilian Tintori:** We need the support of countries that right now are abstaining. In the last vote, talking about Venezuela, the General Secretary of OAS, Luis Almagro, had all the information about Venezuela and did not form a very good document of all our realities. In the last vote among all these countries, there were yes votes, no votes, and two abstentions. Yesterday in the OAS all these countries abstained. Only one, Nicaragua, said no with regard to talking about Venezuela.

We have an opportunity where all these countries, who before were *ciegos por la situación* and who said no, are now all here. Canada can help a lot by talking with these countries who come here, and by saying, yes, let's talk about Venezuela and put pressure on them to have elections, to have channels for food and medicine, to have respect for the national assembly, and to release all political prisoners.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We have one short point of clarification from MP Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet:** It's just a clarification, Chair. Ms. Tintori, in the last portion of her answer, was mentioning something that I think is important for the committee to know.

You were mentioning about being continually strip-searched when you went there. So they're using this as intimidation to stop you from having the courage to see your husband.

**Mrs. Antonieta de López:** Yes, that's correct.

It has been going on like that for the last two years and a half. The worst day—I think it was in January of 2016—was when I was stripped in front of my granddaughter Manuela. She just couldn't believe what she was participating in.

You know, for me especially, it's very, very hard to denounce all of these aggressions. They're very intimidating. They're very hard to manage. But Mr. Cotler, Jared, and everyone who has worked with us in human rights have told us that we have to inform on everything that's happening to us.

Once I was out of the little room where I was stripped, we made it public through international media. Then the attorney general, because of that—this was very interesting—took some *medidas culturales*, special measures, to protect us. The director of the prison, who was always the most aggressive one, couldn't get near us.

This is just so you understand how aggressive they are with Leopoldo's family. We go every single day. If they have to strip us 10 times, we'll be there to be stripped 10 times. We will always be there. They intimidate us because they think maybe it will stop us from going with the frequency that we will always go in.

**Ms. Lilian Tintori:** We did denounce that. The director of that jail, when he finished his term inside the jail where he tortured Leopoldo and our family, was given responsibility for the airport and the port in Caracas in Venezuela.

**A voice:** He was promoted.

**Ms. Lilian Tintori:** *Ellos premian a los torturadores:* they promote those in the army who torture Leopoldo, political prisoners, and our families.

**Mr. Jared Genser:** The same, by the way, goes for the judge in the case. The judge was also promoted after convicting Leopoldo in a ridiculous one-sided trial. She is now the federal public defender of the entire country. Having allowed 600 hours of testimony against Leopoldo and only three hours for the defence, giving him thirteen and a half years in prison, she was promoted and is now the public defender for the entire country.

•(1405)

**The Chair:** I want to thank all of you for being here today, especially Ms. López and Ms. Tintori.

With your testimony, we've been seized with this issue. All members of this subcommittee have been seized with the issue of the human rights abuses happening in Venezuela, the repression of democracy, and the plight of political prisoners, especially Leopoldo López, your husband.

I also want to acknowledge the presence here today of so many from the local Venezuelan community who have continually advocated for your husband, for political prisoners, and for human rights in Venezuela.

We are going to continue on this path. Know that we are going to have our voices behind you as well.

Thank you very much.

I now adjourn this meeting.





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