

national lawyers guild

"An organization of lawyers, law students, legal workers, and jailhouse lawyers... in the service of the people, to the end that human rights shall be regarded as more sacred than property interests." Preamble to the NLG Constitution

March 20, 2018

Honorable President Nicolás Maduro
Honorable Fiscal General Tarek William Saab
República de Venezuela

The National Lawyers Guild, the largest and oldest human rights bar association in the United States, has been a vocal supporter of the Bolivarian Project and its fraud-proof electoral process since we sent our first delegation to Venezuela in 2006. We have steadfastly opposed the longstanding drumbeat of illegal intervention by the United States in Venezuela, as well as the U.S.-supported attacks against Venezuela's sovereignty by Luis Almagro, in violation of his current role as Secretary General of the Organization of American States. We have strongly supported mediation efforts between the Venezuelan government and the non-violent segments of the opposition, and are well aware of the toxic nature of the extreme right-wing and anti-democratic opposition that has plagued the country since the birth of the Bolivarian Project.

However, in recent months we have become alarmed and dismayed by your government's disregard of international law and human rights in its increasing repression of dissenters long associated with the Bolivarian project, and your refusal to allow opposition candidates to run in the upcoming presidential election. We have participated as international election observers in municipal, provincial and national elections in Venezuela and have attested to the stellar electoral system that the country put in place nearly 20 years ago. Open elections with massive participation are critical to public participation in democratic processes, as your country has long recognized. Refusing to allow candidates to participate in elections runs contrary to the values of the Bolivarian project and the robust electoral system Venezuela has had for years.

We are particularly concerned over the recent arrest and detention of Miguel Rodriguez Torres on March 13, 2018, which appeared to occur without an arrest warrant and without official charges being brought against him. It is unclear whether Mr. Torres' right to a lawyer continues to be denied him and whether he has been removed to a prison where he would be in serious danger.

His treatment can only be characterized as a blatant violation of the basic principles of due process, as enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in addition to the Bolivarian Constitution, which has served as a global model for the protection of fundamental rights. The Bolivarian Project was founded and upheld on that Constitution, which continues to promote and protect the rule of law and fairness.

As difficult as conditions presented by the economic crisis and international sabotage may be, they certainly do not justify repression against non-violent dissenting voices.

In accordance with the principles of the Bolivarian revolution and the protections enshrined in your Constitution, we urge you to release Miguel Rodriguez Torres and encourage the inclusion of non-violent opposition candidates in all upcoming elections.

Best,

Natasha Lycia Ora Bannan
President, National Lawyers Guild

75 Years of Law for the People