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“Las deplorables violaciones de los Derechos Humanos en Cuba
y Venezuela”

Traducido por Olga Santiago

Kluivert Roa begged the police: “please, don’t kill me, don’t kill me.” The officer shot him in the head at a very short distance with a 12 –gauge shotgun which had plastic pellets and which caused a deadly injury to the brain. Kluivert was 14 years old. According to the witnesses, Kluivert was coming back from his classes and came across a youth demonstration, which was taking place in San Cristóbal, a city in the Southwest of Venezuela.

As a good Samaritan, Kluivert stopped to help another student who was injured while was taken by surprise by the Bolivarian National Police forces that forced him to get on his knees and place his hands on his head. It happened on February 24th of 2015.

This case, like many others, was known only by a few Venezuelan people. The fierce control that Nicolas Maduro’s regime has over the media, silences the truth and distorts the facts for his benefit.

Today, I come before this highly respected audience, and I, with all the power and responsibility, would like to make two statements which I do not have a slightest doubt about.

1. Human rights have been violated in Venezuela.

2. As a consequence, there is no freedom of speech in Venezuela.

I can add another statement to those two: this has been happening for at least 14 years and is getting worse every day. Venezuelan people do not have a right to be informed, as for example, the fact that 24,980 citizens died as a result of being victims of violence. We are the second country in the world with the highest rate of homicides with a ratio of 82 violent deaths per each 100 thousand residents. The government denies and blocks the information about illegal detentions.

Only briefly, though the networks and those few radio programs, which are surviving, one can make a reference to the fact that there are 74 political prisoners in Venezuela, that more than 2000 people are facing pending trials initiated against them just for the demonstrations in the last year, and that 3775 have been detained for demonstrations since 2014. During these trails, the right to defense and due legal process have been violated by means of tortures and other cruelties.

A report, highlighted by a non-government organization Foro Penal Venezuelano (The Venezuelan Penal Forum), records the use of electrical shocks, sexual assaults, lascivious acts, treats of violence, suffocation using plastic bags, multiple injuries, multiple trauma victims among other harm.

Because of the absence of freedom of speech, to inform and to stay informed have become difficult and dangerous in Venezuela.

The records and reports of local and international reporters whom the Venezuelan authorities go against, prosecute and block the completion of their work have increased and generated dozens of actions of international organizations, all mocked by the government.

The outrage towards journalists became routine. Their access to the sources is blocked, they are threatened, they are robbed of their equipment, they are humiliated, put to prison and then they are put through malicious physical abuse.

One example is Beatriz Lara, a reporter for El Aragüeño daily. On June 17 of 2015, she was handcuffed to a street light for a couple of hours in the middle of media coverage that upset the officials of the Centro de Investigaciones Penales y Criminalísticas (Penal of Forensic Investigation Corps) in the State of Aragua in the middle of the country. The journalist, together with a cameraman, was exposed in the street to harsh beatings accompanied by insults and kicking. As if such harassment was not enough, the journalist was taken to a private office where she was undressed saying that she allegedly had weapons in her

underwear. In order to prove that it was not the fact, they had her to crouch.

The judicial system of Venezuela is used to limit the freedom of speech. At the present moment, the executives of the three important means of communication, the newspapers “El Nacional”, Miguel Henrique Otero, “Tal cual”, Teodoro Petkoff, and the website “La Patilla”, Alberto Federico Ravell, are personally accused by the president of the National Assembly who, in addition to a criminal charge, also initiated a civil action that no media would be able to stand against relying on its own resources.

Previously, Carlos Genatios, columnist from the “Tal cual” daily, which after became a weekly due to the newspaper’s crisis, was sued for expressing his opinion, which also forced him to leave the country.

Attacks against journalists have no end. A sergeant from the National Bolivarian Guard with the last name García said: “All they are looking for is for the people to burn them,” encouraging attacks against journalists who report about the discomfort for hundreds of Venezuelans who formed an infinite line in front of zero products. It is very simple for the government: there is no record of any problem, outcome, and consequence of its awful administration.

In this regard, Maduro was very clear when he touched on the topic in a national broadcast that will prove that his government violates the human rights. He prohibited to use the name “La Tumba” for one of the torture centers and turned it into the Headquarters of the Bolivarian Intelligence Services, Sebin. It happened on March 10th of 2015.

Journalists are accused, pointed out by the officials for different crimes, let go off their jobs and face direct threats while carrying out any coverage of information which is inconvenient for the government.

The State Agency Conatel, which controls the telecommunications, puts together information to charge Twitter users and recently became responsible for pressuring and assaulting César Miguel Rondón, one of the few broadcasters on Venezuelan radio who remains on air with credibility of the listeners.

Neither could foreign journalists avoid being harmed by the harassment. On January 16th of 2015, the correspondent of Al Jazeera, Mónica Villamizar Villegas, was forced to leave Venezuela against her will. After this, the president of the National Assembly, Diosdado Cabello, accused her of being a US spy.

More recently, the correspondent for Univision, Francisco Urreiztieta, was detained for 4 hours together with his work team in a military checkpoint in the State of Zulia on the boarder with Colombia.

I have to remind that Venezuelan legislation does not extend the accreditation to foreign journalists to work. But not only reporters' teams have been attacked. The international media often becomes the subject to threats by the hierarchy of the regime just as it happened to CNN. Others have worse luck, just as in case of Colombian TV channel NTN24 which was taken off air "cable TV schedule" since February 12th of 2014, which is to disappear from Venezuelan spectrum.

However, this channel endured blockages of 400 URLs of its property, forcing it to change the server almost every day. The Venezuelan journalist Idania Chirinos, the host for the TV program "La Tarde" in one of her visits to Venezuela, was followed right to the plane for the flight Maiquetía- Bogotá two years ago; it was clearly a threat from the security services. She could not go back to the country.

Even here in Miami, the head of the daily newspaper El Venezolano, Oswaldo Muñoz, is a victim of continuous threats from the followers of the regime.

Websites, which are inconvenient for the government, are blocked and even comedians have difficulty to perform their presentations before the extreme sensibility of the government. Journalist Nelson Bocaranda, the iconic symbol of Venezuelan journalism covering the news about Chavez's illness for the first time and his website "runrunes.es", sabotaged on the permanent basis, he also became a victim of shameless threats.

A good part of all that has been said, that it was recorded by non-government organizations such as Foro Penal, civil associations such as Espacio Público, Inter-American Press Association and many others.

All these situations happen every day in Venezuela.

They happen in silence in my country because the mass media is knocked down to their knees by various ways of pressure brought by their own government in order to turn them into propaganda devices.

Hardly ever social media manages to create a small yet vital path of escape so that a segment of population could follow what is happening in the country. That is why social media and its users constitute danger for the government. As such, the government has apprehended Twitter users. At least 20 of them have been detained.

For example, Inés González, who has obtained a Doctorate in Chemistry from Akron University, US, was unlawfully deprived of her freedom with a rapid decline of her health.

After repeatedly filing requests to be admitted for a medical check, she was taken to the hospital. Before being transferred, she was beaten by six officials.

Doctors advised of an urgent need of total hysterectomy-removal surgery before endometriosis became severe. The court did not respond. Still imprisoned, with no trial nor treatment while her life is in danger.

In addition, the government finances teams to hack Twitter accounts whose users have credibility or an great number of followers (my account has been hacked two times with stealing my identity. The most recent happened on August 12th of 2015).

In her declarations in March 2015, Luisa Ortega Díaz, Attorney General of Republic of Venezuela, requested the regulation of social media, something that may soon be a governmental decision, henceforth obtaining the isolation and lack of communication of the Venezuelan society.

In many of these cases, much too many to count, based in the annual report of the Reporters without Borders from 2014 which concludes that Venezuela is the country with the most

journalists who have been threatened (134) just below Ukraine (215) for that year.

But, sources of information are also pursued. On September 11 of 2014, Angel Sarmiento, the president of Medical Association in the State of Aragua (central Venezuela) was unlawfully deprived of his freedom for his warnings regarding the sanitary conditions in the region.

Another doctor, Carlos Rosales, president of the Association of Clinics and Hospitals, was detained on February 5th, 2015, one day after of giving an interview in which he spoke about the lack of medical supplies.

Businessmen have also been arrested. On February 2nd, 2015, in one of the daily shortage crisis, the government ordered the arrest of Manuel Morales, executive of the only private food and products distribution chain in popular zones “Día a día”.

The implementation of these provisions remains illegal and Morales remains detained without any hope for justice. The entire procedure was illegal.

I would like to remember Lorenzo Mendoza, owner of the company Polar, the most important food manufacturer in Venezuela, has been constantly threatened of losing his freedom and of having his business confiscated. The regime, using all its power, maintains a fierce campaign against him.

This approach by Maduro's government against journalists, mass media, and businesses extends to the members of human rights organizations, professionals who help the underprivileged, and in general against all those who dare to dissent from a government that has been destroying the country and its morals before the eyes of the world while, under applause, simultaneously gaining reelection as a member of the United Nations Security Council, just as it happened on October 28th of this year.

Almost 60 human rights advocates have been harassed and pursued. On April 28th, 2015, Horacio Giusti, media director of the Foro Penal organization was intercepted by two individuals riding a motorcycle.

One of them got off, pressed him against the wall and upon learning of his profession he brutally beat him, causing serious injuries in his eye and jaw. A little over four months later, on October 1st, 2015, Marino Alvarado, a well-know activist who defends human rights was kidnaped and assaulted next to his 9 year-old son.

I would like to put forth the case of Marcelo Crovato, the human rights advocate who was detained on April 22nd, 2014, while providing legal assistance for neighbors in the city of Caracas whose residence was illegally raided.

As of today, his trial has not even started and Marcelo is unaware of what the charges are against him. He was confined in the prison Yare III next to highly dangerous criminals and where he twice tried to commit suicide. Finally, on February 25th, 2015 they placed him under the house arrest. As a consequence of unhealthy and inhumane prison conditions, his health has deteriorated. He is married and is the father of two children. His arbitrary detention has inflicted much harm to his family.

The violations of human rights in Venezuela have an element which cannot be overlooked: such unlawfulness is supported by Nicolás Maduro's high government officials and is executed by official armed groups and for the officials who act with complete impunity; such is the case that the unlawfulness continues being rewarded and welcomed by the regime leaders.

I would like to draw attention to one aspect that is fundamental for me and inevitably brings me despair and concern. This awful situation that we, Venezuelans, endure has been happening for more than 14 years, commencing after the deceased Hugo Chavez's third year in power.

I would like to talk briefly about my personal experience.

This October 27th marked 10 months since I entered the United States of America. I am one of more than hundred thousands of

Venezuelans who flee in terror every day without being able to understand how a government in Western civilization can violate human rights in second decade of XXI century with complicit passiveness of civilized world.

Legal prosecutions against me were announced by spokesmen of Chavez's government in 2001 after publication of media reports, results of my research which demonstrated acts of corruption from the members of armed forces which afterwards president Chavez named "Plan Bolívar 2000."

The first accusation which was filed against me in the court was of military nature. But it was not the only demand. It followed by a true reprimand of accusations in court or requests for investigation before the public prosecutor performed by either officials or military from the official party.

At that time, I was subject to attacks including placement of an explosive device in the premises of the daily newspaper "Así es la Noticia" (January 31st, 2002) which brought damages in the newspaper's headquarter where I worked as a director. It has never been established who was responsible for this, even when violent groups finances by the government took ownership and settled in front of my office every day throwing flying threats as an evident sign of harassment. This situation has been reported to international organizations. It was March 22nd, 2002, when

the Inter-American Commission on Human Right issued precautionary measures to help me and my colleagues.

But, I was far from feeling of being protected neither being sure that the government will respect these measures. The situation intensified even further. On December 12th, 2002, once again the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued protective measure in my favor. But demands, accusations, aggression and public remarks continued. I was accused of immense number of crimes.

Starting with violation of the right of honor of a military man (National Guard Deputy General Francisco Belisario Landis, April 10th, 2002), and finishing with being considered as “narco-journalist” through out the official news agencies.

The present president Nicolas Maduro also did his share with the president of the National Assembly by including me, together with representatives of other mass media and the church, in a verbal accusation of creating a plan to overthrow Chavez and wanting to assassinate working-class-inspired politicians.

They have also accused me of “treason against my country” for releasing a video, with another colleague of mine, which showed Venezuelan military troops socializing with the members of Colombian guerilla troops.

My lawyers were unable to respond to so many accusations. They knew that a new inquiry would suspend the benefit of my conditional release which was granted to me as the first sentence for defamation. And in fact, the 11th enforcement judge issued me a prison sentence on May 20th, 2005.

The refusal to accept me by the penitentiary directives appointed for my incarceration, claiming that my life was in danger, made the judge order that my residence would serve as my prison. I remained there until president Hugo Chavez declared on national broadcast that in that moment it was not convenient to have so many demands and actions against journalists.

My freedom was given back to me within a matter of minutes making it obvious that there is no division of authority in Venezuela and that the courts have been used in a special manner as an instrument of the executive power.

These occurrences started in 2001. And today, before you all, I cannot stop asking myself: "Would not Venezuela be better off if democratic governments, at least in this part of the world, would hear the alarming signs that come from Venezuela for at least 14 years, that the response to such danger to take measures to implement international agreements signed by you and our country?"

The main issue that I would like to get across to this highly respected House of Representatives is that this severe situation regarding violation of human rights has been continued and even worse, it has deepened and spread to the point that it has become a common thing in Venezuela together with the deterioration of the quality of life of its citizens facing disastrous management of public properties.

In Venezuela, there are systematic and generalized attacks against people dare to express ideas and thoughts of disagreement or critics towards the government. These are people who believe in democracy and seek to defend it and they become victims of ferocious attacks that affect their property, their reputation, their families, and their lives. Because everything is in danger when the voices are raised to speak against the regime.

The present government of Nicolas Maduro has promoted the creation of violent organized-crime groups that received training and weapons by means of which Maduro hopes to support his remaining in power together with the military sector, the object for privileges and benefits. He publically threatens the civilians to the point when he is ready to announce his refusal to surrender the power if he is defeated the electoral process.

Search for truth is prohibited in Venezuela. To exercise journalism is one true mission. Up until the point when I came here last December, my right to work has been under watch. I wrote regularly in a newspaper, directed a popular daily newspaper, I had a radio show and another one on television. All this was taken away from me. The means of pressure varied. Some of them were directly addressed to media owners, and in other cases, they were made against the marketers who sponsored my program.

And living here in the United States, the president of the National Assembly, Diosdado Cabello, a military man who carries himself as the head of the government and against whom serious allegations have been presented in regards to a possible connection to a drug cartel (investigated in the US), he accused me of conspiracy declaring it two months ago and ordering to break into my home where I lived in Caracas. Because of my decision to come here and protect myself, I have rented it out to one decent elderly woman.

I would like to specify that Diosdado Cabello since the state channel (that supposedly belongs to all Venezuelans) participates every week in the program "Con el mazo dando" (Those who help themselves), to destroy the reputation of many Venezuelans, including myself among many others.

It is a sure thing that this intervention here will unleash his rage that will be revealed in that program, and who know in what capacity. But fear cannot stop me. Diosdado Cabello's program has become a courtyard where everything is acceptable.

There, Cabello has turned private illegal conversations into public, almost always modified and manipulated, he has invented crimes, showed intimate pictures of those whom he considers to be enemies of the regime making direct attacks using language that suits more a leader of criminal gang.

Government, which each time becomes more radical no longer pays attention to the norms of sensor. It does not only tries to silence the media and journalists. At a present moment, it demands to lie. One cannot be informed about the real state of economy (the government hides the facts about inflation and supply shortage), no claims that figures are really changed and it is his responsibility which he shifts on others. An alleged "economic war" will be led by those to whom it is convenient the most, including the United States.

Everything is bad in Venezuela: health, education; instability causes havoc, corruption is shameless, and one cannot be informed about all this. Neither journalists can do their job, nor citizens have the ability to know the truth.

Everything happens under the prosecution against those who protest and especially against the oppositional leaders. You have already had a chance to know the horrors of suffering of political prisoners and their families.

Under these terrible consequences, Venezuela is approaching its elections to elect a new parliament on December 6. And, without any embarrassment, the regime leaders are refusing for the elections to be observed by the international community.

Maduro has claimed that a defeat will require a working-class action that will block the end of his “revolution.” In other words, Maduro, without a slightest shade of shame, is encouraging violence before the eyes of the entire world.

It has been less than a week when a photo of an 18 year-old student who aims to become a member of Bolivarian National Police, has become viral in the social media. This young girl, like any others, who should have dreams of a bright future, took a smiling selfie holding a grenade in one of her hands. She posted this picture on Facebook. This is the symbol of the regime. This is also how leaders of criminal gangs who kill people in my country tend to present themselves in social media.

With so many elements, so many signs, I ask: “How is it possible that Maduro’s regime can still be allowed to violate the law, the norms, and international agreements?”

Maduro supports his criminal gangs to commit crimes with impunity, other government and international entities are doing the same thing in the same manner. Due to the lack of action, we allow Maduro's regime to break the law and violate human rights.

Thank you very much.