

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 29, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

While there are many pressing challenges around the globe that require your attention, we urge you to use all of the diplomatic, political and economic tools at your disposal to address the ongoing attacks against human rights in Venezuela.

Starting in February of this year, the citizens of Venezuela took to the streets of their country to protest the alarming rates of crime and violence, soaring levels of inflation and economic hardship, and widespread scarcity of food and basic consumer goods that had come to characterize their daily reality.

Rather than address the legitimate concerns of its citizens, the Government of Venezuela responded with a shocking display of brutality and repression that was seen around the globe. Government security forces repeatedly deployed excessive force against protesters, including unlawful detentions, violent beatings, use of firearms and rubber bullets at point-blank range, documented cases of torture, and extrajudicial killings.

In its report released in May, Human Rights Watch found that Venezuelan security forces had engaged in systematic human rights violations that aimed “to punish people for their political views.” In many cases, the Venezuelan justice system was complicit in these abuses, imprisoning protesters for exercising their basic rights to free assembly.

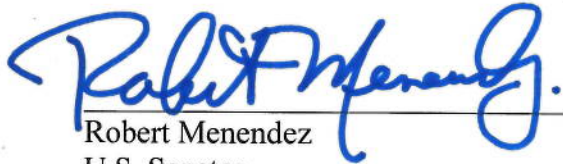
Although street protests have been less visible in recent months, the total number of demonstrations in the country now exceeds 6,000 in 2014 and more than 100 political prisoners remain in jail. The government has unlawfully removed opposition legislators and mayors from office. And, to date, not one Venezuelan government official or member of the security forces has been held accountable for the human rights abuses committed since the start of the year.

Additionally, last week, the Venezuelan government opened its show trial against opposition leader and prisoner of conscience, Leopoldo Lopez. After jailing him in a military prison for five months, Judge Susana Barreiro has refused to let Mr. Lopez and his attorney present any evidence in his defense. Such subversion of justice is hardly surprising, for as Mr. Lopez’s wife, Lilian Tintori, recently wrote in the *Washington Post*, “there is no presumption of innocence or due process of law for a political prisoner in Venezuela.”

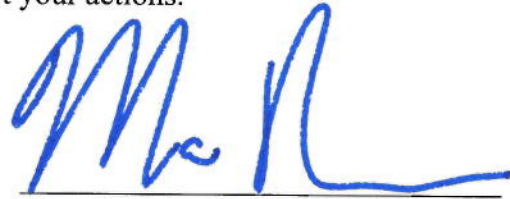
While South American leaders and the representatives of the Vatican sought to mediate dialogue between President Maduro, his allies, and the political opposition, such efforts were abandoned more than a month ago after they failed to produce any tangible results.

As the deterioration of democracy and the rule of law in Venezuela continue unabated, the U.S. must exercise leadership and send a strong signal in defense of human rights in the hemisphere. We urge you to use the existing authorities that the Administration has to levy targeted sanctions against individuals that have been complicit in human rights violations in Venezuela. We stand ready to support your actions.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
U.S. Senator



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Bill Nelson
U.S. Senator



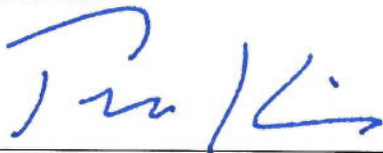
Ted Cruz
U.S. Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
U.S. Senator



Lamar Alexander
U.S. Senator



Tim Kaine
U.S. Senator



John McCain
U.S. Senator



Mark Kirk
U.S. Senator