

3 July 2015

By email

Dear Chair, Rapporteur on Reprisals, and Committee Secretary,

Venezuela: Intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders

I write regarding a case of intimidation and reprisal which merits your urgent attention as Chair and Rapporteur on reprisals for the Human Rights Committee.

On 1 July, the President of the National Assembly of Venezuela and Vice-President of the Socialist Party of Venezuela, Diosdado Cabello, appeared on State TV (Venezolana de Television) and, during his weekly address, mentioned International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) staff members Ben Leather and Eleanor Openshaw and Board member Gustavo Gallon as among those human rights defenders working to undermine the Venezuelan State.

The broadcast is available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4y1ARpxGSs>, with the relevant segment commencing at 2.05.30. A synopsis was also posted online and is attached, together with an unofficial translation.

The broadcast mentioned that ISHR staff facilitated a workshop for human rights defenders in Venezuela on engaging with UN human rights mechanisms, attendees of which have subsequently used those mechanisms to issue ‘lies’ about Venezuela. In particular the broadcast referred to some of the individuals and organisations participating in the 114th session of the Human Rights Committee. As you are aware, the State’s report on Venezuela’s implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) was reviewed in this session.

The incident is part of an ongoing campaign in Venezuela to intimidate, defame, stigmatise and undermine the work of defenders and their engagement with the international human rights system. Attached please find our previous statement on this issue.

The actions of the President of the National Assembly are in clear breach of international law. Under international law, governments must ensure that human rights defenders are allowed to pursue their legitimate activities without reprisals, threats, intimidation, harassment, or discrimination.

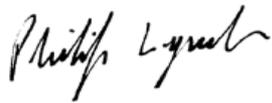
Furthermore, by becoming a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a State undertakes to cooperate with the Human Rights Committee in good faith and to exercise due diligence in doing so. In this regard we recall the new San José Guidelines on intimidation and reprisals which reiterate this duty. Defaming, stigmatising and undermining human rights defenders for seeking to cooperate or cooperating with the Human Rights Committee undermines the Committee’s work and constitutes impermissible intimidation and reprisal.

In light of the information above, we urge you, as Chair and Rapporteur on intimidation and reprisals, to follow up with the concerned State's representatives in Geneva and ensure that this case is fully and promptly investigated and effectively remedied in line with the San José Guidelines.

We are sending this letter with the consent of the other human rights defenders named and defamed in the broadcast.

We look forward to hearing as to what action you propose to take and would be pleased to provide you with any further information necessary.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Philip Lynch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Philip Lynch
Director