



Brussels, April 23th, 2015

SUBJECT: The case of the Venezuelan Penal Forum and the violation of human rights in Venezuela

Madam High Representative,

We are writing to you regarding the case of the Venezuelan Penal Forum, a non-governmental organization of human rights that has worked for over 10 years for the protection of victims of arbitrary arrests and violations of human rights in Venezuela, and in particular for European citizens residing in Venezuela.

The humanitarian work that it has run through its network of more than 100 lawyers across the country and more than 1000 human rights activists is remarkable. Only in 2014 and 2015, the Venezuelan Penal Forum has assisted more than 2500 detainees, mostly students, arrested for exercising their right to peaceful demonstration in Venezuela, as well as several victims of violations of human rights, including torture.

On the 17th March 2015, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States adopted the injunction 144-13 in favour of Alfredo Romero and other members of this NGO, and called for precautionary measures to help other human rights defenders.

We are very worried with the recurrent threats, unsubstantiated criminal investigations, assaults and harassment by stigmatizing speeches of senior civil servants against the Venezuelan Penal Forum and some of its members, as well as against other NGOs and human rights defenders in Venezuela. We are watching the situation of human rights defenders in Venezuela and very much we hope that their working space is respected and their moral and physical integrity safeguarded.

We, therefore, call your attention to the risks faced by human rights organizations in Venezuela, namely the Venezuelan Penal Forum. We encourage you to direct the EU

delegation in Caracas to engage and play a proactive role in supporting the human rights defenders in Venezuela namely by promoting an inclusive dialogue between the Venezuelan government and all the sectors of the Venezuelan society. We hope that within the framework of high level political dialogues between the EU and Venezuela, and taking in account that the EU is the 4th main trading partner of Venezuela, it should be made clear that the respect for human rights and the rule of law are essential elements for the way the EU engages with a partner such as Venezuela.

Sincerely,

Ana Gomes

Francisco José Millán Mon

Josef Weidenholzer

Luis de Grandes Pascual

Ramón Jáuregui Atondo