

dear friends,

as many of you might know, venezuela is going through a very difficult phase right now. i am lucky enough to say that - so far - my family, friends and i are fine. still, the country's situation is getting worse and worse, and since many of you have written me messages asking about what is going on, and since we don't know if the government is going to shut down the internet (they already did so in the state of táchira, which has been now completely militarised), i wanted to send you this short report on what has been happening.

on february 12th students all over the country went to the streets to demonstrate their disagreement and disappointment with the country's situation: insecurity / criminality rates rising every day (last year over 24.000 people were killed in the country), huge inflation (my salary one year ago was around worth around 1200US\$, nowadays, even if my salary in our currency increased 40%, it is only worth around 180US\$, yes... you are reading me right!), scarcity of basic goods, etc. they - my family and i went to demonstrate too - went to the streets to ask the government to do their job properly. on february the 12th we celebrate in venezuela the day of the youth, and therefore, the students chose that day to protest. at the same time, one of the political leaders of the opposition, leopoldo lopez, called the civil society to accompany the students during their protest. many thousands went to the streets and protested peacefully. we walked till the general attorney's office - the students wanted to hand in a document with their requests - and at 2pm we left. a couple of hours later, we heard - or read - through the social networks that there had been a violent confrontation between students and the police forces and that one student was killed, as well as one of the members of the bolivarian police corp, who - crazily - was a member of an armed collective. (let me make a short parentheses here: collectives are paramilitary groups armed by the government, who "keep order" and govern some parts of the slums in the cities of the country and who enjoy complete immunity... crazy, but true). ok. a couple of hours later in a different district, where the students gathered together, another young man was killed. many were imprisoned. they have reported to have been tortured, many even sexually abused.

that night the government kept their program: the celebration of the 200 anniversary of the battle of La Victoria and the day of the youth in the city of "La Victoria", around 40 mins away from caracas. during that celebration music was played as nothing had happened, and the government did so as there had been nothing important during the afternoon (how this is possible?...--) read below)

the president said that night or the day after that, i can't recall, that the political leader i mentioned before, leopoldo lopez, was guilty of everything that had happened, since he - in his opinion - encouraged people to go to the streets and incite them to act violently. for that, he was to be imprisoned. the president ignores the fact that there is video footage (neighbours, no tv channels) showing how the students were cornered by the police corps. this without taking into account HOW illegal it is that the state forces try to restrain a protest with REAL GUNS!....

you must consider that slowly but steady the government has shut down every single private communication media within the country. they have even ordered the cable operators in venezuela to shut down foreign tv-channels that were showing the protests and the killings. there are still some private tv and radio stations, but they act in an auto-censorship mode to be able to survive this dictatorship we are experiencing. the only news tv station - globovisión - which openly opposed the government during several years (and to be sincere, wasn't objective at all, since it took always position against everything the government did or did not... but, it was the only platform the political opposition had to inform the citizens about their plans, objectives and to accuse the government, when it did something out of the margins of law) was bought by government-near business people and after that experienced a severe editorial-line change. nowadays it is nearer to a state-owned (here government-controlled and manipulated) tv stations than to anything else. this media blockage affects the information flow, specially the flow of information to the less educated and to the lower classes, who do not use social media as often as the middle classes in the country. i can't explain the magnitude of the blockage and the manipulation of facts and information in venezuelan tv. imagine that, during the killings i mentioned above they

were airing cooking series.

more than one week has passed and people keep protesting, every single day. when the sun goes down, armed groups go out and try to scare and discourage the protesters. and they manage to do so. since february 12th, 10 people (mostly young people) have been killed during protests, many others (around 130) have been injured, and almost 300 have been kept in prison. i could send you several videos, but i do not want to make you see the awful things i have been seeing these last couple of days. you can find them in youtube if you really want to see them.

leopoldo lopez showed himself to "justice" and has been imprisoned since then. they haven't failed a judgement yet (well, they charged him, then uncharged him.. a very serious judicial system, as you might see). now, for many people within the opposition he is kind of a hero who confronted the "endless power" of the government. in my eyes, he made a movement based on personal goals. i think he is playing a role to gain popularity and turn into a stronger leader. but i confess, i don't really know. i am kind of lost about his intentions, and... i don't really care. i care about other more important things: the young people missing, the people being killed, and specially the fact that this whole thing seems to be getting out of control for the government.

the government has been transmitting several "cadenas" (every single tv channel and radio station in venezuela have to air this transmissions, and therefore they are called "chains") every day. they show manipulated footage about some buses or government offices affected by the protesters, and in which they menace the opposition constantly. they call us fascists and they say the opposition is trying to go through with a coup d'etat.... they seem to forget that coups are materialised by the military, which is completely under their power... they are repressing, not only the media, but the whole citizenship with the excuse that the protesters throw stones at the police, for example. they say the "collectives" are main part of the defence of the revolution. the cinism in every single communication is an insult to any venezuelan and to our (yours too) human rights system.

in the last couple of days, táchira (a state in the west of the country) has been militarised. the population of táchira has confronted the government strongly and the actions against them have been the strongest too. electricity, water and internet have been shut down in the state and now it is completely under military surveillance.

for me, the only quite sensible and prudent politician right now, but this is really a very subjective opinion, seems to be the latest candidate for the presidency from the side of the opposition, henrique capriles, who has called the population to act calmly, to be careful, but who has publicly confronted the president and the government and asked for respect, respect of the human rights, respect of the population. while doing this, he reinforces the need to include the least privileged ones in any political project, he reminds us of the need of creating a bigger and stronger majority to be able to confront the government. he seems to have learned from his experiences as a public servant (he has been a member of parliament, a major and a governor) and his speech and actions are not only directed to the middle class, but to every one in the country. i do believe that is the only way to go. we do need to learn from these last 15 years.

today a huge and peaceful demonstration took place in caracas (over 2.5km where filled with people), and several important protests took place in the rest of the country and in more than 100 cities around the world. people - we were there again - gathered together to demand the freedom of the imprisoned students/protesters, of leopoldo lópez, of the political prisoner ivan simonovis, as well as most importantly to demand the disarmament of the paramilitary groups acting in the country under a complete impunity. henrique capriles gave a consistent speech, set an agenda and asked the young protesters to stay out of the streets during nighttime, since this is the moment where armed groups and the national guard act violently against them. once again, he pled venezuelans to act peacefully and not to give in to the provocations from the government.

i am concerned, since the government doesn't seem to have control of the situation. they are using the force arbitrarily and they have created a monster: those armed collectives (paramilitary) are not to play with. furthermore, internally the government

seems to have differences and i do think that this could get worse (e.g. the president of the national assembly is a member of the military who is known to be a man without any fear of using power and violence, and he seems to be the one really in charge...).

i am concerned because the near future is very uncertain.

i am sure i am leaving many important information outside this small report... but... i hope to have given you a small insight in the country's situation. you all know me and know i have always opposed this government, because i think it is inefficient, because i think it doesn't have the best interest of the country and my lands-people in mind, because they are corrupt, and because they are mean. they are mean because they manipulate and they underestimate us, us as "the people" but specially they do underestimate the people who have voted for them, because they think they are "dumb" and won't realise what they have been doing. i am angry. but, you all know me well. and you all know that i do try very hard to be objective. i know you all believe me when i tell you that everything i say is not out of a personal interest, it is out of the interest for a better future for my country.

i came back around 2,5 years ago and now more than ever, i do not want to leave. if i was talking out of my interest, you know i wouldn't be here.

anyways, i do hope things get better (whatever that means).

i look forward to news from your side(s) of the world!

love,

m.