

Remarks by Henrique Sosa Machado accepting the 2014 Charles T. Manatt Democracy Award on behalf of Maria Corina Machado:

Distinguished guests,

It is a great honor for me to receive this prize on behalf of my mother, Congresswoman Maria Corina Machado, who was not permitted to stand in front of you today. Both as a her son and as a Venezuelan, I want to express my gratitude for this recognition, which is a testament not only to my mother's resolute commitment to obtaining freedom and democracy in our country, but also that of the Venezuelan people at large.

The fight for freedom in Venezuela has been a long one. As I know you are aware, during the last fifteen years Venezuelans have seen the demise of the rule of law and constitutional liberties in our society. Those who are in power have endeavored to take away from us our most basic rights. Everything from our freedom of expression and assembly, to our individual property.

And yet I think that there is something else, though not as explicit, that those in power have been trying to take away from us, and that is our hope. By hope, I mean the realization in each of our minds that if we come together as a society and fight united, we can attain a future for our country. If a society loses its hope, if it surrenders its pursuit of freedom, then the struggle becomes ever more difficult.

I think that this is perhaps one of the most dangerous conditions that a society can be in, and I fear that is exactly what is being done to the Venezuelan people.

This has been made clear with the government's reaction to the student's peaceful protests. Hundreds of Venezuelan students were taken into prison for engaging in the recent peaceful demonstrations and speaking out against oppression. Today, many who are still in prison await a free trial. Over forty Venezuelans were killed and some were even tortured: perhaps as an example of the awaiting consequences for the rest who dare to do the same.

This same resignation is being sought from the rest of our society. Hundreds of journalist have been convinced that the choosing of their words one day can determine whether or not they have a job the next morning. Four million public workers are forced to dress in a certain color in order to keep their jobs and their family's access to public benefits.

In the case of my mother, they stripped her of her seat in Congress; they have physically beaten her; and have threatened her with the worst thing that can be done to a mother, which is to be separated from her children.

Yet, there is some good news: Those in power could not have anticipated that the very system of coercion that has developed over the past 15 years in Venezuela also nurtured a generation of Venezuelans who have learned the value and importance of living in democracy. This group of Venezuelans whose unyielding commitment to bringing back freedom and justice to our country is casting hope in the midst of these arduous times. They have become the voice of those silenced, they have given courage to those in despair, and are now an inspiration to many others who dedicate themselves to building a better Venezuela. They are political leaders, yes, but also mothers, students, workers, artists, teachers, doctors, citizens of every generation and from all over the country, some living beyond our borders hoping to return someday to a democratic Venezuela.

In the last years, these individuals have been subject to all kinds of threats and adversities, and yet they have not yielded to these intimidations. Through their bravery and example, Venezuelans like my mother have cultivated in us their commitment to this cause, to these values and to these ideals. They have brought us together under a common purpose: a country where we are free to dream of a better future. And the fight that they put forth everyday makes it impossible for anyone to take away our hope and determination to construct this Venezuela.

Thank you.