

# Thor Halvorssen's Response (28 May 2010)

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## Introduction

What follows is a biographical sketch put together by Thor Halvorssen as a result of repeated requests from Norwegian media including specific requests from journalists at *Aftenposten*, *Dagsavisen*, *Dagbladet*, *Journalisten*, *Klassekampen*, and *Ny Tid* (with which Halvorssen has an ownership relationship). This biographical sketch also contains a factual response to the two Manifest Analyse reports, three newspaper articles, and three blog postings written by Magnus Marsdal and several of his associates of Manifest including Eirik Vold. The reports from Manifest can be found at their website. The newspaper articles in *Dagbladet* were published the week of April 26, 2010 and each article was signed by Thomas Ergo. In *Klassekampen* they can be found every week since April 26. The reports and articles have been about Thor Halvorssen personally, about his family, his career, his business interests, about the Oslo Freedom Forum, about his film company, and about the New York-based Human Rights Foundation.

## Personal Note from Thor Halvorsen

I am grateful to those who give me this opportunity to respond to the numerous opinion columns and reports by Manifest Analyse as well as the numerous newspaper and internet items that concern me. This text provides me with an occasion to settle any questions raised for several weeks and it also allows a chance for interested parties and my Norwegian friends and working partners to learn more about me, my background, my goals and my objectives, my family, and my work. I invite the readers of this document to become involved both with the Human Rights Foundation in New York (that focuses on human rights in Latin America) and with the Oslo Freedom Forum (that aims to create a global human rights platform). You will find that sometimes there is a lot of detail in what follows. I do this because I hope more information can serve those in the Norwegian media who wish to write about this subject. It will save them time, allow for more complete research, and it will also free me to focus my efforts on my usual human rights or film work.

The Oslo Freedom Forum is a place where human rights defenders and social entrepreneurs from around the world can network and exchange ideas - where extraordinary human rights advocates lacking international support and recognition are given a platform to share their work with a global audience – and where those with first-hand experience as survivors of human rights violations are able to share their insights with leaders who are shaping the world through journalism, business, philanthropy, and politics. More information is available at [www.oslofreedomforum.com](http://www.oslofreedomforum.com) and videos of our speakers are available at [www.youtube.com/oslofreedomforum](http://www.youtube.com/oslofreedomforum).

The Oslo Freedom Forum 2009 was a conference that put human rights on center stage, focusing mainly on the impact literature has on promoting noble purpose and inspiring millions into action. The 2009 conference included participation by Elie Wiesel, Greg Mortenson, Jung Chang, Palden Gyatso, and Václav Havel. Participants at the Oslo Freedom Forum 2010 included Uyghur leader Rebiya Kadeer, North Korean dissenter Kang Chol-Hwan, former FARC hostage Clara Rojas, and Sudanese reformer Lubna al-Hussein. World leaders like Poland's Lech Walesa, Malaysia's Anwar Ibrahim, and Estonia's Mart Laar presented, as did technology pioneers such as Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales, entrepreneur Peter Thiel, and WikiLeaks spokesman Julian Assange. Other notable speakers were Russian democracy advocate and chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov, abolitionist and explorer Benjamin Skinner, and Chechen lawyer Lidia Yusupova. Some participated by video, others have come two years in a row, but all of them are excited about the Oslo Freedom Forum. This is even reflected now in the 27 May issue of *The Economist* where the editors write that the Freedom Forum was “a spectacular human-rights festival... on its way to becoming a human-rights equivalent of the Davos economic forum.” The international media's response to the event has been overwhelmingly positive.

The evening reception on April 26 of this year was held in Oslo City Hall. We were honored to be hosted by the City which opened its arms and embraced some of the most

extraordinary human rights defenders living in the world today. Some were famous and had won international (and Norwegian!) prizes. Others were less known. Every one of them had a story to tell and they each deserved to be there. Deputy Mayor Aud Kvalbein gave a remarkable welcome. She stated that:

“This city hosts many conferences and meetings, but few of them concern principles as grand as *freedom*... freedom fighters are quite similar whatever their context: They dare speak out, they dare question the status quo, and they dare face forces that are physically much stronger than themselves.” As Elie Wiesel says: ‘Don’t give evil a second chance.’ He is saying both that something *must* be done, but perhaps more importantly that something *can* be done. There is hope. Oppression *can* be stopped, and it *must* be stopped.”

That morning, however, all was not well. Two articles (one news and one commentary) in *Dagbladet* had published similar stories. Both of them stated that three of the participants in the Oslo Freedom Forum were involved in and/or supported military coups in Latin America. I was concerned both because this was untrue and because something like this could damage the relationship with our Norwegian supporters (including Fritt Ord, Den Norske Helsingforskomité, Fredskorpset, Civita, Oslo Kommune, Amnesty International Norway, Human Rights House Foundation, and Utenriksdepartementet); our Norwegian endorsers (Nobelsfredssenter, Universitetet i Oslo, and also LIM (Likestilling. Integreting. Mangfold), Den Norske Forfatterforening and Oslosenteret for fred og menneskerettigheter); and our Norwegian friends and colleague—a set of relationships built to raise the profile of human rights; to create conversations and dialogue about human rights; to highlight major crisis areas; and to help Oslo establish itself as the world capital of human rights and help Norway along its path to become a human rights superpower.

I was very concerned about seeing the reputation of the conference, and the reputation of our Norwegian counterparts, harmed in this way. The accusations in *Dagbladet* (made by Magnus Marsdal and Eirik Vold as well as in a report by reporter Thomas Ergo quoting PRIO’s Wenche Hauge) were false and I knew this could be demonstrated. But the conference was starting and we did not want a sideshow. I went to *Dagbladet* and spoke to the managing editor and was interviewed by a young reporter. I challenged Hauge, Ergo, and Marsdal to a debate. I knew we had nothing to hide and I believed this would calm things down. I did not know their motivations until one of their writers, Eirik Vold, revealed that he and his colleagues are committed to the weakening of the Oslo Freedom Forum as a serious global Norwegian event about human rights: “tviler på at Freedom Forum har kommet for å bli. Det blir i så fall sannsynligvis i en redusert form, uten støtte fra anstendige og anerkjente menneskerettighetsorganisasjoner og andre institusjoner.”

I was unaware and unprepared for the attacks against me. I did not know they would become so personal, so *ad hominem*, and so nasty. I understand and am used to this when it comes to governments who violate human rights and attack individuals or the institutions they

represent—they tend to attack the messenger instead of addressing the message. Some friends in Norway have told me that they have never seen so much viciousness used against an outsider, let alone one who has come forward and never declined to answer questions or provide information.

What is surprising is that these attacks come from a group in Norway with access to enough information and research staff where they should be able to know the truth. However, they have chosen to provide only part of the picture or, in several documented instances of fabrication, to engage in behavior that is unethical for journalists. Instead of fighting the governments that violate human rights they have, instead, chosen to attack the human rights defenders. Regardless, I hope that good and constructive things come from this debate.

### **Some Answers**

Who am I? What do I do? Why do I do what I do?

Several members of the Norwegian media have decided to say, on my behalf, again and again, what I believe and who I am without asking me about the subject. For this reason let me begin by saying: I woke up to human rights as a cause when I was an adolescent. I couldn't understand apartheid in South Africa and thought it was terrible. I grew up in Venezuela where my own experience was that racism is not common and people of diverse backgrounds can live together in peace and without division. My best friends in school were two twin boys from Nigeria. I also had friends from Japan, Argentina, Australia, Holland, Norway, and Kenya. I didn't understand why the South African government would keep some people, because of the color of their skin, down beneath them. When I visited America, I was also struck by the history of racism. I knew little about America but I had read, seen movies, and experienced the racial divisions inside New York in the 1980s. I was sensitive to the subject. So, when my mother moved to England in 1989 I became an activist against apartheid. I participated in protests at Trafalgar Square against the South African embassy. I also devoted a lot of my time in school to making anti-apartheid art. By 15, I was voicing concern to my friends about corruption in Venezuela, social justice matters, solidarity, and the dictatorships in Latin America—especially the Chilean and Nicaraguan experience (my criticism of Pinochet remains to this day—even in the flagship conservative magazine in America: [\*National Review\*](#)). At 16, I met a Cuban refugee for the first time (in Budapest, Hungary) and I discovered that the Cuban Revolution was not what I had read it was. In my parents' house I had met many refugees from civil wars in Nicaragua, and El Salvador, but I had never gone into studying the politics of the proxy wars between the Soviet Union and America/Western Europe. I concluded that right-wing dictators like Pinochet and left-wing dictators like Castro could both violate human rights and do terrible things. Politics mattered little when principles were violated.

Shortly thereafter, I personally was touched by a human rights violation when my father, Thor Halvorssen Hellum, became a political prisoner in Venezuela. My father had been appointed by the (socialist) government of Venezuela as Ambassador against drugs. As Ambassador, he discovered Venezuelan president Carlos Andres Perez's corruption.

Specifically, his secret bank accounts with his new wife. My father had also been working against Pablo Escobar's partners in Venezuela and against the Italian Mafia (against whom he was able to obtain deportation procedures to Italy for the very notorious Cuntrera brothers). In 1993, my father was falsely accused of terrorism and was arrested and tortured. He was released only after Amnesty International and many other groups came to his defense. By then, I was fully into this human rights subject and it was only a matter of time before I was involved against Gulags in China and general human rights work. It seems that much of my life has often been a matter of responding to circumstances. Rather than some master plan, ambitions, or personal agenda, I have accidentally ended up doing the things I do, living where I live, and using the tools and resources I have used. The discovery (for me) of the incredible tolerance in the U.S. for people to live how they want to live and become who they want to become was essential for me to choose to start my career there. It is a magnificent place and I will forever be grateful for its existence. I worked mostly on freedom of speech matters and was a co-creator of a group called FIRE that focuses on freedom of speech (and defends people from across the political spectrum and receives contributions from the left and the right).

In August of 2004, my Venezuelan grandmother turned 80 and all of our family went to Venezuela to celebrate her birthday on August 15. The referendum against Chávez was taking place that same day. The general impression was that Chávez would lose the referendum and would have to resign. Even Bill and Hillary Clinton's top pollster and political strategist company, Penn and Schoen, predicted that Chávez would lose by 20%. Instead, by some form of electoral magic, the results were the exact opposite and Chávez won by that amount. Most people suspected foul play. I was exhausted because, the day before, I had not been allowed to vote. My name had been erased from the voting rolls. Many people suspected the results were fraudulent.

I have written an article about all of this for the media and it was published in [August of 2004 in the Wall Street Journal](#). I enclose it here. What happened was that, at the protest, my mother was shot and almost killed by the government of Venezuela. She was peacefully protesting, and was shot. This is what caused me to launch the Human Rights Foundation, and, with the help of many kind Norwegian friends and supporters (and especially the City of Oslo) the Oslo Freedom Forum four years later.

I have not regretted for an instant the fact that human rights have taken so much of my life's time. Ever since my father had been in prison I knew what it meant to the family of someone who is suffering tyranny when someone from an NGO says "We will help you, you are not alone anymore." It is like waving a magic wand. At the same time, I have a career in filmmaking but it competes heavily with my interests in human rights. It has also led to new opportunities.

My other main duty at present is that of being the patron of the [On Own Feet](#) children's movement. This group, known as Centipede Children in the Czech Republic, has a mission where hundreds of thousands of children over the last two decades have raised money to build

schools and hospitals in war-torn countries. I am very proud of my patronage of this movement—their first patron was my human rights colleague Vaclav Havel.

So, what do I believe? I wrote the mission of the Human Rights Foundation. It encapsulates what I believe. The definition of human rights I use is based on the founding ideals of the human rights movement, especially those represented in the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) which was signed by more than one hundred countries including Norway, Venezuela, and by the United States. I believe that all human beings are entitled, at the very minimum, to:

- o The right to speak freely
- o The right to worship in the manner of their choice
- o The right to freely associate with those of like mind
- o The right to acquire and dispose of property
- o The right to leave and enter their countries
- o The right to equal treatment and due process under law
- o The right to be able to participate in the government of their countries
- o Freedom from arbitrary detainment or exile
- o Freedom from slavery and torture
- o Freedom from interference and coercion in matters of conscience

I do not support nor condone violence. I have devoted my entire adult life to the discussion of human freedom, civil liberties, freedom of speech, and human rights.

## Response to Manifest's Accusations

What follows now is the defense of my own person, of the Oslo Freedom Forum, and of the choices we made and who we invited to attend. This is a response to the accusations that begun with Manifest and have subsequently been repeated by *Klassekampen*, Thomas Ergo of *Dagbladet*, and several online characters.

### What Manifest Got Right

They state that *Verdens Gang* and numerous other media have praised the Oslo Freedom Forum as having the potential of creating the Davos of human rights in Oslo. Manifest also states that world-renowned individuals came to Oslo to participate. Manifest also has pointed out that Oslo Freedom Forum has the endorsement, cooperation, support, and even financing from Norway's human rights establishment. These are elements of Manifest's report about the Oslo Freedom Forum that are absolutely correct.

### Regarding My Mother's Family

For reasons unknown to me, Manifest has a strong interest in my family—their investigation goes back more than 250 years into my background to a time when Norway was under Danish rule. I tend to judge people as individuals and on the basis of what they have done and what they believe—not on the basis of their ancestors or what they were doing several hundred years ago. That is the promise of a new society based on individual rights and away from feudal titles and elite privileges.

I am proud of my family and their devotion, going back several hundred years, to freedom from colonialism, freedom from fascism, freedom from Nazism and promotion of human rights. My mother Hilda Mendoza is the daughter of Eduardo Mendoza who, as Manifest points out, is the great-great-grandson of Venezuela's first president (in 1810): Cristobal Mendoza—who fought against Spanish colonialism and spent his fortune on securing independence. Not mentioned by Manifest is that my grandfather was an agricultural engineer who served in Venezuela's first socialist government (of left-socialist president Romulo Betancourt—the architect of democracy in Venezuela who stood against fascist dictator Marcos Perez Jimenez who was overthrown in a coup d'état). Not mentioned by Manifest is that my mother and her sister are the closest living relatives of Simón Bolívar—the supposed inspiration for Hugo Chávez's "Bolivarian Revolution." I believe our dead relative would disagree completely with the policies of Chávez and how he has used his image to advance an agenda of class division, financial corruption, arms-purchases, and hate speech. Simón Bolívar was a liberal—in the tradition of Voltaire, Adam Smith, and Montesquieu—but that is a discussion for another time and another place.

Manifest has now written two reports where they mention my family but not once do they mention that my mother, a child psychologist (who describes herself as an environmentalist and social democrat), who lives in London, was almost shot to death by members of President Chávez's security force. None of the shooters have been brought to justice yet the video of them shooting my mother is very clear. It was captured and broadcast live on television. Manifest has

now brought my mother and my father into the picture. I respond with my own pictures here. I enclose the photos of two of the shooters below during the moments when they did this. These are the facts that Manifest does not write about in any of its reports

**The man who shot my mother (all of these pictures and live video of the shooting can be found on the internet):**



**The same man at the funeral of a senior Venezuelan government official:**



### **Regarding My Father's Family**

On my father's side I descend from Øystein Halvorsen who served King Olav V of Norway and was rewarded with the St. Olav Order. In April of 1940, as the Fredriksstad Blad

reports, he was the Consul General of Norway in Venezuela and stood up to the Nazis and saved part of Norway's merchant fleet from falling into the hands of the Quisling government by single-handedly radioing instructions to Norway's fleet in the Atlantic. A delegation of Nazi diplomats visited my grandfather's office and told him that the Quisling government would find his mother (my great-grandmother) in Fredrikstad and harm her. He stood his ground and defended Norway. And for this he received the Order of St. Olav in 1947.

Why would Manifest say my grandfather was successful in business but not point out his part in the success of Norway's fight against Quisling and the Nazis? Why only part of the story? On the side of my grandmother, Randi Hellum, I still have cousins in Norway that even include University of Oslo professor Nils Christie (who is the son of my grandmother's sister) Again, this is not convenient in a portrayal of me as an "extreme right-wing" ideologue that comes from an ultra-elite background of the rich and famous. I saw my relative, Nils Christie, recently and he personally took me to some of the places where my relatives worked and mentioned how hard they struggled. I am a person with different experiences from most Norwegians. There is nothing wrong with being born with a family that achieved material success through hard work. I didn't choose where I was born or who my parents are. But I did choose what I would do with the opportunities I was provided.

Manifest says my father, Thor Halvorssen Hellum, "engasjerte seg på ytre høyre fløy" but provides nothing more except the statement. They don't mention that his *only* government service was as employee under the socialist-left government of Carlos Andres Perez, a president who was a member of the Socialist International. In his second turn of public service my father was appointed to serve as Ambassador against drug-trafficking. As such, and mentioned elsewhere in this response, he was a target of Pablo Escobar and even uncovered president Perez's secret bank accounts containing stolen money. Manifest says that my father worked "for" the CIA. However, the source listed by Manifest in their second report (Pennsylvania Gazette, 1994) doesn't say that. It says my father worked "with" the CIA. It also talks about my father's hard work. But Magnus Marsdal and his colleagues twist the original and write that he was some kind of American spy. Yes, of course he worked closely with all sorts of intelligence agencies in his work, including Japanese secret police, German intelligence, Norwegian intelligence, the British MI5, and yes, the American CIA (as does the government of Jens Stoltenberg). My father paid a heavy price and ended up as a political prisoner. Amnesty International took his case and he was freed after 74 days in prison. Why doesn't Manifest mention this? All of these stories have been reported in credible places which are as politically different as *The New York Times* (2008), *Wall Street Journal* (1994) and Britain's *GQ* magazine (1994). Why not one word about the injustice suffered by my father? None of this is mentioned by Manifest. Why?

It is interesting to note that in several parts of Manifest's reports they link to articles and sources that don't actually support the allegations they make. This is a serious lapse in ethics for journalists and researchers.

## **Right Wing Film Producer?**

Manifest says I am a “right-wing” film producer. I doubt that the staff of Manifest has ever seen any of the films I have made. One with Quentin Tarantino and Lucy Liu about the Hungarian revolution against dictatorship, One about the Estonian revolution against dictatorship, One based on a Kurt Vonnegut (the most famous American novelist—a left-wing socialist) story about the fight against a futuristic dictatorship. One about the use of freedom of speech against dictatorship in Romania and Czech Republic. One about enslavement of black children perpetrated by millionaires in the Caribbean. One about freedom of speech at America’s universities. Do any of these seem like the films of a “right-wing” film producer? Anyone can see the films where I am credited as “producer.” Those, and only those films, are the ones I am responsible for. I am proud of all of them. They have won awards, been shown on French, German, Italian, and even on Robert Redford’s Sundance Channel. Anyone in the Norwegian media wanting a copy should just ask me and I will gladly supply them with information on how to obtain a copy. I have also founded a film company (Moving Picture Institute) that does not belong to me (it is a public charity focused on providing opportunities to new filmmakers) and it allows new filmmakers to make films. I am not involved with most of these films and I am no more responsible for their content than the publisher of *Aftenposten* is responsible for the views of the columnists published daily in that newspaper. I am committed to freedom of speech and want to help filmmakers who come with a perspective that is challenging and fresh.

**And, what is “right-wing?”** It is a term used to catalogue people and brand them. Like “racist” or “Stalinist” or “bigot” or “Fascist” or “coconut”? An individual’s life, their beliefs, and their work cannot be reduced to a simple term. It may work for those who want to shut down debate. I have never professed myself as being on the right or the left. I refer to myself as a Classical Liberal or just a Liberal. That is the broadest and easiest way to describe me. I think it is a great philosophy and the one that can do the most to help alleviate poverty, suffering, and bring about the most happiness and, most importantly, the most individual freedom but this is a discussion for another place. In Norway most political people make a big point out of the fact that they think there is a huge difference between having “liberal” and “liberalistic” views. “Liberal” is ok, but “liberalistic” is extreme and dangerous. *Klassekampen*, for instance, defined me as extreme “liberalistic” in one page while I actually state in another that I am, in fact, Liberal.

## **Pat Robertson and “VI BØR DREPE CHÁVEZ”**

I have never met Pat Robertson. And I don’t share his perspectives on things such as religion, politics, sexuality, or finance. Robertson’s television channel producer invited me on his show to discuss the shooting of my mother by the government of Hugo Chávez. I have appeared as a guest in dozens of media shows ranging from the far-left *Pacifica Radio* in New York to the pan-Arab *al-Jazeera*, from *Fox* to *CNN*, *BBC*, Christian television, and *NRK*. *Of course*, I will accept an invitation from *ABC Family* television (owners of that channel) which shows

Robertson's program to almost one million viewers in America. His viewership is more than *CNN* at primetime. I believe in more dialogue, not less. And I wanted to tell the story of my mother. Manifest and *Klassekampen* both begin the heading of the section where they mention my appearance on Pat Robertson with the sensational phrase “**VI BØR DREPE CHÁVEZ.**” Marsdal then writes that I “support” Robertson. And claims that I “defended” Robertson.

This is demonstrably untrue.

Manifest is willing to write and repeat this despite knowing that in the interview with Robertson I twice reject Robertson and tell him that I am against his position on Chávez—not in his favor. I say, at the beginning of my intervention, that I “categorically” reject the idea of assassination and say that this is wrong. Robertson acknowledges my opposition and then challenges me with the question of what I would do instead. On the same show I repeat that I think that is lowering to the level of Chávez (who in 1992 ordered the assassination of the democratically-elected president of Venezuela and his family—a stubborn fact always ignored by Manifest's writers). So, in the television clip [I say I am against the assassination of Hugo Chávez](#). But, in his report, why does Magnus Marsdal write the opposite?

What Manifest and *Klassekampen* have published *is not a matter of twisting the truth or spinning or having a different perspective*. To say something is black when it is white... this is a serious breach of journalistic ethics. Unfortunately for Manifest, I have had the entire clip of the video on my facebook page for more than one year. You can review the entire clip and see with stunning accuracy that Manifest has suggested I have murder in my heart and in my mind when, in fact, I was defending Chávez against Pat Robertson's suggestion that he should be killed. Sarah Sørheim of *Klassekampen* mentioned this in a story on May 16 that she had seen the clip and that it was factual that Manifest was wrong. On a discussion with Shabana Rehman Gaarder on Facebook Eirik Vold writes with utter certainty: “Halvorssen forsvarte uttalelsene og sa at Robertson var blitt missforstått. Og så fortsatte han å frekventere programmet til Robertson som også har sagt at jordskjelvet på Haiti var guds straff mot slavene på Haiti fordi de gjorde en pakt med djevelen da de frigjorde seg fra de franske slaveeierne.” Anyone reading this wouldn't know otherwise and would assume that researcher Vold, with years of journalistic and activist experience, and who is taken seriously by a newspaper like *Dagbladet*, would not write something misleading. But this is also false. I have never again been a guest on Pat Robertson's show. Not on Haiti and not on anything else.

## **Conclusion**

I am very lucky to have been born to my wonderful parents and grandparents. I love them very much and I am thankful for any opportunity to speak about them. I am proud of them and I would never exchange them for any others. All of the factual information here is contained in Wikipedia articles, encyclopedias, biographical books, and thousands of internet sources but it

was not convenient to publish the full picture because it would conflict with the image of me and of the Oslo Freedom Forum that is trying to be portrayed by Manifest.

The truth about me versus Manifest's fraud: I began working on human rights as a teenager. My father served in two socialist governments in Venezuela and his father risked his own mother's safety to fight Quisling from Venezuela. My mother, a child psychologist, was shot by the Chávez security forces; her father was a cabinet minister in the most respected democratic socialist government in all of Venezuela's history. Her relatives founded the country and spent their fortunes defeating colonialism and Spanish imperialism. My films are about human rights and individual liberty. I am a liberal human rights activist who lives in the U.S. And, finally, Manifest's Marsdal and Vold published a story in *Klassekampen* that states that I support Pat Robertson's idea of killing Chávez, but the video evidence reveals exactly the opposite.

## **Money, HRF, and Other Matters**

### **Funding of the Oslo Freedom Forum**

Manifest may be unaware that the donors to the Oslo Freedom Forum are listed on the Oslo Freedom Forum website: [www.oslofreedomforum.com](http://www.oslofreedomforum.com). They are there for anyone who wishes to click on "supporters." Our funding is in accord with reporting laws in Norway and we provide a financial report to the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to Oslo Kommune, our partner groups, and the foundations that have supported us in Norway. There is nothing hidden.

### **Funding of the Human Rights Foundation**

The Human Rights Foundation is located in New York, and consequently, it must live under the laws of the U.S. Treasury and must report the list of all of its funders to the government to ensure there is no criminal funding. We are happy to list on our website any foundation or individual that wishes to be listed. However, some individuals and foundations want to make their donations anonymously, which is common in the U.S. Whether Harvard University, the Center for American Progress, the Jimmy Carter Center, or Cornell Medical Center in New York: they do not list all of their funding publicly. They may list a handful of foundations or individuals but only with their permission. If they do it, they risk losing their funding. HRF is following the same practice.

Any donation or grant accepted by HRF is done with a categorical understanding that the foundation is free to research and investigate regardless of where such investigations may lead or what conclusions HRF may reach. We encourage funding from anyone who cares about human freedom and we do not discriminate in accepting donations. If an individual or foundation has

contributed to HRF's work, this does not mean HRF necessarily endorses said individual's or foundation's views or opinions. In plain language: We are grateful, privileged, and proud that we receive support; it means our mission and work are being endorsed. This does not, however, mean we endorse the views of those who support us. If Manifest's leader sent us a check tomorrow for NOK 10,000 we would cash it and use his money and send him a thank you letter. This would NOT necessarily mean we agree with his views on human rights. We are publicly supported by many individuals and like most grant-receiving service organizations; we do not publish the names of our donors. However, we would like to repeat why this is so: Some funders do not wish to be known due to fear of retaliation, others do not wish to be known because they do not want to be approached by other groups or organizations soliciting for donations, and still others do not wish to be known because they may, ultimately, disagree with the decisions and public statements of HRF. We do, however, offer any donor the possibility of being recognized on our website and in our publications if they choose to be. This is not difficult to understand, especially in a competitive environment like the United States where 70,000 NGOs compete for funding.

The contributions of some of our funders, such as the John Templeton Foundation, the Sarah Scaife Foundation, and the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, are listed publicly. These are enormous foundations that have granted hundreds of millions of dollars to causes that range from universities like Harvard, hospitals, museums, political groups, and so on. In *Klassekampen* it has been published that some of our funders subsidize political and ideological causes. This doesn't mean we agree, for example, with their funding decisions or their perspectives. In the same way that if Fritt Ord or the Norwegian Foreign Ministry gives us funding this doesn't mean that we agree with the Foreign Ministry's or Fritt Ord's positions. And in the same way, we don't expect all recipients of Fritt Ord funding to agree with all of the decisions of funding made by Fritt Ord's board of directors. And vice versa: We do not expect Fritt Ord or the Foreign Ministry of Norway to agree with the opinions of those organizations and events that they support.

That said, and inspired by Norwegian transparency, we will send a special message to all of our funders sometime this autumn requesting that they allow us to list them as supporters. Hopefully, we can do this and, what seems to be the only factual gripe—privacy of our donors—can cease to be an issue. To us it makes no difference at all if we list or not: funders do not tell us what to do and they do not influence our conclusions. We do receive support from one government: the Norwegian government. But they do not tell us what to do.

### **With regard to my personal finances**

I do not live in Norway and I do not need to file taxes in Norway and publish my income. I strongly believe in financial privacy and I believe it is wrong to force individuals to compare each other and create an internet subculture of comparison of this sort. It isn't "transparency" to know the amount of money your neighbor's 19-year-old child owns or the amount of money

belonging to the 90-year-old widow you see every day on the tram—it is an intrusion into their privacy and I hope one day this practice ends in Norway. I believe it is abominable. The government needs to be subjected to scrutiny but individual privacy does matter and a person's business should be between them and the tax authorities and should not involve everyone else. That said I receive my income mostly from film. I don't have any money from the "U.S. military industry" (or the government). And if I did have money from the military I would spend it all on human rights organizations that promote peace.

### **Freedom House Funding and the Oslo Freedom Forum**

Manifest states, in both of their reports, that Oslo Freedom Forum received funding from Freedom House. Manifest then writes several pages of their reports criticizing Freedom House as some kind of front for the U.S. government or for Western intelligence agencies. The only thing the Oslo Freedom Forum received from Freedom House is an endorsement they sent by email. We were glad to include them because they are part of the world's diversity of human rights groups and publish very well known and respected reports on human rights including several Indexes on Freedom used by Norway's human rights establishment. And we are thankful for their endorsement. But not one krone has been received from Freedom House by the Oslo Freedom Forum. We have no current working relationship with them. That said, and as a result of their visit to the Oslo Freedom Forum, we hope to build a cooperation agreement with them in the future of some kind. Hopefully we can share reports and information about human rights violations.

### **Regarding Alek Boyd**

Manifest writes that "HRFs representant i Storbritannia, Aleksander Boyd, har blitt kritisert for å ta til orde for å styrte Venezuelas folkevalgte president med vold. Blant formuleringene som har vakt oppsikt, er disse: «I wish I could fly over Caracas slums throwing the dead bodies of the criminals that have destroyed my country»." Alek Boyd is not a current employee of the Human Rights Foundation. He is accused of writing comments in his personal blog where he says he wants to carry out violence against politicians in Venezuela. He is supposed to have written this in March of 2004. The Human Rights Foundation was not created until 2005. He worked for us in 2008 and part of 2009. We knew of his comments before we hired Boyd and asked him about these comments and he stated, plainly, that it was an entry in his dream diary that was online. Boyd published a six-paragraph public apology for this on the website where he was blogging at that time. He concluded: "[I] profusely apologize for any grievances caused to any party." Clearly he expressed himself in an inappropriate manner and he knew this. And I am sure that the readers of this text have often regretted things they have said or thought.

Of all of the activities of the Human Rights Foundation since our founding in 2005 Manifest's reports have now published this one instance, only one, of a person we hired in 2008,

saying something in 2004, that is not appropriate. A person who does not work for us anymore and who did not attend this year's Oslo Freedom Forum. Manifest has looked very hard for any comments any of my other colleagues may have made and, in my case, they even invented that I wanted to encourage violence against President Chávez on Robertson's show. These accusations about Alek Boyd, which have no relevance to the Oslo Freedom Forum, HRF, or me, are mentioned in every report and every article by Manifest on this subject. In America we have a phrase for this behavior: desperately grasping at straws.

### **Other Criticism**

There are a handful of other single-instances of criticism such as that we don't criticize Christians. One speaker, former United Nations Assistant Secretary General Diego Arria, did an entire presentation on his struggle to bring to justice Christian extremists from the Balkans. Manifest also must have missed the platform we gave to Kasha Jacqueline, a lesbian rights activist in Uganda fighting against the Christian-driven legislation to make homosexuality punishable with life imprisonment. Kasha was so popular that we asked her to stay and deliver a second speech on the public day. We were also accused of not criticizing America. This is untrue and various speakers, as can be seen on our YouTube menu of speeches, criticized the United States. One speaker, Julian Assange, went so far as to compare the signage used by the U.S. military in Guantanamo with the Nazi signage in Auschwitz and concluded that the U.S. forces were less truthful than the Nazis. Manifest also repeats a totally discredited accusation about how an independent organization in Bolivia—which was modeled with HRF in mind—was accused by political media of being coup-makers—the story of coup-making by human rights campaigners is an old one and it is reminiscent of the criticism suffered by Amnesty International in Africa and Asia in the 80s and early 90s.

### ***Ny Tid***

I am one of the shareholders of a Norwegian magazine that was about to become bankrupt. For rescuing *Ny Tid* I am criticized—mostly by people who have never met me and whose only experience of me is that they have read caricatures of who I am written by Manifest and its media friends. Those who criticize me for spending my own private money to help save a crucial element of Norwegian press—where were they when *Ny Tid* was going bankrupt? Why no tears when *Ny Tid* was on its way out? Why didn't they sacrifice what they have earned to help save the legacy of Sigurd Evensmo? I have no intention of imposing any kind of editorial control on the staff of *Ny Tid*. I believe in the publication's importance as part of Norway's dialogue. As *Ny Tid*'s editor in chief has said in the Norwegian press, “Vi har ulik bakgrunn, men det er noe som er viktigere enn det. Kampen for menneskerettigheter er hevet over ideologiske motsetninger.”

## **Conclusion**

Oslo Freedom Forum has public finances in Norway. Human Rights Foundation's funding has a reason for being private but will hopefully be publicly available soon. I make money with films. We have no money or anything other than an endorsement from Freedom House. Alek Boyd, an employee who started in 2008, made an inappropriate remark (in a blog) in 2004. The content of the Oslo Freedom Forum was a lot more neutral and balanced than Manifest claims, and, *Ny Tid*, a part of Norwegian history was saved from bankruptcy and will remain free from editorial interference.

## **ACCUSATION OF PRESENTING COUP SUPPORTERS**

Manifest states that three speakers at the Oslo Freedom Forum are active supporters of military coups against democratically-elected leaders in Latin America. Armando Valladares; Marcel Granier; and Leopoldo López. The accusation against the third person, Leopoldo López, is the one that is most repeated and done with the most detail. The first two accusations have lost weight in the past month and don't seem to be repeated by Manifest anymore. They are all addressed here.

### **Quotation by Nobel Peace Center's Bente Erichsen with Regard to Our Supposed Support of Coup-Makers**

Used in one of Manifest's reports and most articles critical of the Oslo Freedom Forum is a quotation by the respected head of the Nobel Peace Center Bente Erichsen's which appeared on April 26 in *Dagbladet* and became a central part of their attack against the Oslo Freedom Forum. The newspaper prints that she said: "Det er synd at det kan sås tvil om noen av deltakernes politiske holdninger. Det svekker hele arrangementet" and also "De blir dermed renvasket av arrangørens vignetter. Det synes jeg er problematisk. Jeg håper derfor det er anledning til å stille spørsmål, etter at de har talt. Det står det nemlig ingenting om i programmet." On April 27 I exchanged emails and text messages with Ms. Erichsen. And she stated she had no intention of withdrawing the Peace Center's endorsement nor did she think there was a problem.

### **Armando Valladares and Honduras**

Armando Valladares is a poet who spent 22 years in a Cuban prison. He was Amnesty International's first political prisoner ever adopted from Cuba. He was freed only after the (socialist) prime minister of France, François Mitterand, intervened on Valladares's behalf. Valladares has been an ally of human rights across the world and especially in Cuba. In 2009, a crisis erupted in Honduras between the judicial branch, the legislative branch, and the executive branch of Honduras over President Manuel Zelaya's intention to change the constitution to allow

for his re-election (it states in the constitution of Honduras that it is criminal to do this). Instead of proceeding through the courts, the military of Honduras forcibly removed the president in a coup d'état. Valladares was the chairman of the board of the organization I preside, Human Rights Foundation, at the time. HRF was the *first* NGO to condemn the coup and to ask for the immediate expulsion of Honduras from the OAS. I must emphasize this again: The Human Rights Foundation was the very first NGO to condemn the coup (well before Manifest did) and to ask for the expulsion of Honduras from the democratic body of the Americas (the Organization of American States) and the immediate restoration of Manuel Zelaya to the presidency. Surprisingly, neither *Klassekampen* nor Manifest praise us for doing so, but they do write: "OAS utviste Honduras på grunn av kuppet og nektet å anerkjenne kuppregimets Roberto Micheletti som legitim president. FN vedtok en resolusjon som krevde gjeninnsettelse av president Zelaya."

The Supreme Court of Honduras, however, considered the actions of the Honduran military to have been legal and constitutional and ruled in their favor saying they were acting with the authorization of a lower court. Valladares disagreed with the position of HRF (a position we still hold) about whether this was a coup. Instead, Valladares considered Honduras's Supreme Court to be the ruling authority on the subject. He is not alone in taking this position and in recognizing the new, democratically-elected, government of Honduras (which is equally recognized by the Norwegian government). Reasonable people can disagree. Some Norwegian media have made the incredible accusation that Valladares participated in this military adventure. This is not possible. He was in Italy at the time, on the Island of Ischia, receiving the International Journalism prize for Human Rights (the Ischia prize, this year, went to *The Guardian's* Timothy Garton Ash). I spoke to Valladares on the telephone at the time. Manifest and Thomas Ergo have written that Roberto Michelletti of Honduras has given Valladares a medal. This is untrue. Valladares received an award from the foreign ministry of Honduras, not from the coup president.

As far as HRF is concerned, the truth of the matter is that the military of Honduras behaved illegally and that president Zelaya also behaved illegally. Our 300-page report on the subject can be found here: [http://www.thehrf.org/HRF\\_TheFactsAndTheLaw\\_Honduras2009.pdf](http://www.thehrf.org/HRF_TheFactsAndTheLaw_Honduras2009.pdf)

HRF has a new chairman: Vaclav Havel. We invited Valladares back to Oslo Freedom Forum this year to speak about Cuba in light of the death (by Hunger strike) of Cuban political prisoner Orlando Zapata Tamayo. Even though Valladares and HRF disagree on Honduras we do not disqualify or punish him for having a different point of view. Debate is a good thing.

### **The Resignation of Chávez on 11 April, 2002 and the Coup D'état by Pedro Carmona**

It is impossible, in one text, to describe the versions in the literally hundreds of thousands of pages written about what happened in Venezuela in April of 2002. Six facts: More than one million peaceful protestors marched toward the presidential palace on 11 April, 2002. Radio

orders to shoot were given by president Chávez. 23 people were killed. The government of Chávez asked for the president's resignation and he gave it. This was announced on television by his minister of defense (now his ambassador in Portugal). The Chavez cabinet then resigned. After the resignation a civilian-military junta seized power illegally. The single best book on the subject is "The Silence and the Scorpion: The Coup Against Chávez and the Making of Modern Venezuela" by historian Brian A. Nelson and published by the Nation Institute (<http://www.nationinstitute.org/>) which can be described as a left-of-center institute.

### **Marcel Granier and Venezuela**

Marcel Granier is a journalist. He is General Manager of RCTV. He is accused by Manifest of being a part of the military coup against Hugo Chávez. Manifest mentions one of their sources about RCTV and about Marcel Granier is Andres Izarra, a former RCTV employee. Manifest describes him in their report as "a former journalist for *CNN*." What they only disclose in a small footnote is that Izarra has been the Minister of information and communication for the Chávez government-a cabinet level position. Manifest also does not mention that, beyond his propaganda duties for the Chávez government, Izarra is currently the head of TeleSur the Chávez-backed news television service (which competes with RCTV) and serves the Chávez party (PSUV) as its top-level media manager.

Manifest states that "Under selve kuppet hevdet Graniers RCTV at den folkevalgte presidenten var gått av frivillig, mens sannheten var at han var bortført av militæret.." This is false. This claim is not made by Granier. It is made by the Supreme Judicial Court of the government of Hugo Chávez and it is made by Chávez's own military cabinet. It is, however, not a convenient truth. Chávez *did* resign. The video of his defense minister making the announcement of his resignation is something the Chávez government wants to forget happened. And please note, the man making the announcement is still serving the Chávez government. What is definitely true is that after Chávez resigned, RCTV opened its television studio to the military who served Chávez inasmuch as they asked to be put on television to convince their colleagues not to begin a civil war in order to hold onto power. Opening up the airwaves is not a crime. RCTV made no incitement to violence. RCTV and all other media in Venezuela were asked by the de facto government of Venezuela to attend a meeting at the Venezuelan government's presidential palace. Marcel Granier went to the palace and the meeting was then canceled. That is his only presence in the presidential palace in April of 2002.

RCTV is an independent, privately-owned television channel. It can choose what stories it wishes to cover and what stories it wishes to emphasize. It should be able to criticize the president without being accused of "coup-plotting." In the same way that *Klassekampen* can print Bjørgulv Braanen saying that I am an "ytterliggående liberalist" while *Aftenposten* has printed that I am a Liberal. Because *Klassekampen* has a different perspective than *Aftenposten* does not mean that it should be shut down. In the same way that if *Klassekampen* criticizes the

government of Jens Stoltenberg, that doesn't mean they are "coup-plotting." When *The New York Times* criticizes Barack Obama that does not mean they are "coup-plotting."

Granier was invited to speak once at the Oslo Freedom Forum about the shutdown of RCTV. RCTV was shut down arbitrarily and due to the orders of Hugo Chávez. However, given the attacks by Thomas Ergo and Magnus Marsdal in *Dagbladet* and later repeated in *Klassekampen* (and since then repeated frequently by numerous commentators who are ignorant of the truth and keep parroting what they read), and the resulting intense public interest in Granier's story, we asked Granier to stay in Oslo and make himself available to answer any questions from the Norwegian media and public. He prepared a new speech specifically to address the story behind RCTV and Chávez's treatment of the media. The result was a very polemic speech which can be seen here: <http://tiny.cc/3tk88>

Granier made himself available to the Norwegian media and was interviewed by various international media. The allegations that he is a "coup plotter," as he points out in his speech, are as absurd as the allegations made by Hugo Chávez that King Juan Carlos of Spain is a coup plotter, that Twitter is a terrorist tool, or that the Spanish prime minister is a coup plotter. As Granier points out, anyone who disagrees with the Venezuelan government is a "coup plotter." The only accusation of any significance made by Manifest is that RCTV did not support Hugo Chávez. As explained by Granier in his video, RCTV disagrees strongly with the Chávez government. Dissent, disagreement, and even opposition to a government is not a crime in a democratic society.

## **Leopoldo López**

Much has been said about the fact that López's mother is the sister of my mother. This bears no relationship whatsoever to his involvement in the Oslo Freedom Forum. My contact with him is professional and I will not discriminate against him simply for being a relative. I have never hidden his family relationship to me and all of the Norwegian NGO's that participated with the Oslo Freedom Forum were made aware of this. His involvement in the Forum, as the most visible international figure in the Venezuelan movement for human rights, was the obvious and only reason he was included. And, as mentioned above, he was invited to come back simply for the purpose of speaking on the "public day."

Leopoldo López is a Harvard university graduate who returned to Venezuela after his education and ran for the office of Mayor of Chacao-Caracas and won. He was elected in a landslide victory in 2000. He was reelected in 2004 with 81% of the vote. Leopoldo López is, today, the most popular politician in Venezuela. He is the most recognized face in the opposition and polling data shows he has the highest favorability rating. He is the first politician ever to poll higher than Chávez in a one-to-one presidential election. This is the reason why, without a trial, without a hearing, without a chance to present evidence, without a chance to confront his accuser, Leopoldo López was disqualified by the Chávez government from running in any

election from 2008 until 2014. The reason they give is not handling the budget of his municipality properly. This is very similar to the disqualifications that occur in Iran against members of the opposition.

**Manifest's Accusation of corruption inside the Venezuelan oil company:** Manifest makes the accusation that López received an illegal U.S. \$2.5 Million (NOK: 15 Million) from Venezuela's oil company for political purposes. This is factually untrue. He was accused of receiving \$40,000 (NOK 240,000) and it was a donation (the same way Hydro, for example, gave NOK 750,000 to [Amnesty International last year](#)). The donation was not made to López or to his political party. There was a donation approved by the Board of Directors of PDVSA and was handed to an NGO that worked on matters of local justice called "Primero Justicia." This project eventually, several years later, became a political party (which at this time has nothing whatsoever to do with Leopoldo López). Why does Manifest inflate the number by 60 times? \$2.5M sounds a lot more impressive than \$40,000. But facts are facts. Anyone involved in human rights knows that accusations without evidence are common. It is extraordinary that Manifest quotes (and links to) the López entry on Wikipedia but they missed entire sections such as the fact that [The Washington Post](#) (the one responsible for bringing down the Nixon presidency) has reported that "the charges against López, never tested in court, are a blatantly bogus concoction." Let me emphasize: "a blatantly bogus concoction." [The Associated Press](#) reported that the use of the charges to disqualify López "is a tactic critics say Chávez uses to put his opponents' political ambitions on indefinite hold." The Organization of American States [cited the case](#) against López as one of the "factors that contribute to the weakening of the rule of law and democracy in Venezuela." According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "his real offense is that he poses an electoral threat as he builds a social democratic alternative to [Chávez]" According to the *Times* article, Chávez critics say all government dissidents are being targeted, but "López seems to be the object of a full-out campaign." The [Economist](#) observed that López is the "main apparent target" of the "decision by the auditor-general to ban hundreds of candidates from standing in the state and municipal elections for alleged corruption, even though none has been convicted by the courts." *The Wall Street Journal* [noted](#) that the ban "has elicited comparisons to moves by Iran's government preventing opposition politicians from running in elections in that country" and singles López out as "a popular opposition politician who polls say would have a good chance at becoming the mayor of Caracas, one of the most important posts in the country."

José Miguel Vivanco who directs the Latin America section of Human Rights Watch "described political discrimination as a defining feature of Mr. Chávez's presidency," [mentioning López](#) in the *New York Times* and the "measure that disqualifies candidates from running for public office because of legal claims against them."

Why would Manifest not mention that Human Rights Watch, one of the world's largest and most respected human rights voices, has published a report and not mentioned one word about López as a supposed "coup maker?" Other than the never-ending accusations by the Chávez government there is no credible foreign entity that repeats these accusations. And López

has never been tried or convicted of coup-making. Calling him a “coup-maker” in an article by Thomas Ergo in *Dagbladet* doesn’t make it reality. And although Wenche Hauge of PRIO has said she believes this is all “mainly right,” the Norwegian government’s ambassador to Venezuela, Ambassador Bjørnar S. Utheim—who actually lived in Venezuela during the coup—met me at the Oslo Freedom Forum and told me that he knows the truth – that López is not a coup-maker - and is willing to discuss with the media what happened.

As a leader of an alternative movement to Chávez, López has experienced several violent attacks: the *Los Angeles Times* says he has been shot at and was held hostage in February 2006 by armed thugs at a university where he was speaking and his bodyguard was shot while sitting in the passenger seat of the car where López normally sits. According to the *LA Times* “the killing of his bodyguard was meant to send a message.” According to Jackson Diehl, writing for the *Washington Post*, in June 2008, after López returned from a visit to Washington, D.C., he was detained and assaulted by the state intelligence service. This is all from Wikipedia. The definition on López has links. Lots of them.

How did Manifest miss all of this in their research when they quote from the exact same sources? Or were they just interested in portraying López as a coup-maker? Manifest fails to mention that “In June 2008, López made his case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in Washington, D.C.; in July, the Commission agreed to hear his case. The verdict is pending. The more political influence López has in Venezuela—because of his popular support among all sectors of society—the stronger the attacks will be from the Chávez government.

### **The Arrest of Ramon Rodriguez Chacin**

Leopoldo López has written an article, sent for publication to *Dagbladet* in response to six reports and two editorials. Here is the text in English:

By Leopoldo López, Activist and Founder, Voluntad Popular

In this newspaper’s news and editorial page I was repeatedly accused of being a “coup-maker” and of not deserving a speaking role at the Oslo Freedom Forum. I was never contacted by any Norwegian journalist nor was I asked for a comment. In a culture that upholds due process and the presumption of innocence, I was declared guilty on the basis of the accusations of one journalist who writes in this newspaper, Thomas Ergo, a commentator from PRIO who I have never heard of, and Magnus Marsdal heads a think-tank that, to my surprise, is funded by trade-unions. They have written and spoken about me as if they know me and my work and they never allowed me to respond. I take this opportunity to defend myself against the accusations that I was involved in a military coup d’état and that I illegally arrested the Venezuelan minister of justice.

Throughout 2001 and the beginning of 2002 there were hundreds of peaceful demonstrations in the streets of Venezuela asking for the resignation of Hugo Chávez for his policies, his attacks on the trade unions, his political prisoners, his autocratic style, his military spending, his attacks on independent media, his intention to be president for several decades, and numerous other reasons that make him unpopular with a large sector of the country that is disillusioned with his unfulfilled promises.

On the 11 of April of 2002, President Chávez knew that more than one million peaceful demonstrators (I was one of them) were headed to the presidential palace to ask for his resignation. He ordered the demonstrators shot. 23 people were killed that day. I knew several of those killed. They were my friends.

Because of what happened, his own cabinet asked for his resignation. Chávez's defense minister, General Lucas Rincon, announced the resignation on that same day, April 11, in a televised news broadcast (which is easily found on YouTube). On the 12th of April there was much chaos. The president's allies (one of them, Francisco Arias Cardenas, is a government minister today) said on television that although president Chávez ordered the killings, the minister of justice, Ramon Rodriguez Chacin, was involved as well. Rodriguez Chacin, was trapped in an apartment after being identified by one of his neighbors. Hundreds of people had arrived and began chanting that he (like Chávez) be held responsible for the shooting of innocent civilians.

The trapped minister called the police and requested my presence. Law enforcement in municipalities in Venezuela is unlike policing in Norway—the Mayor is in charge of the administration of the local police. I arrived there and was able to calm the crowd. I entered the apartment and spent several hours with Rodriguez Chacin. I promised him that the crowd would not harm him. I knew there was a chance that a lynch mob might form and break their way into that apartment – he could be physically harmed. A judge and a district attorney then issued a judicial warrant ordering his arrest in light of the killings that had occurred the day before. At that moment I had the legal obligation to approve the local police's detention of the justice minister and hand him over to the judicial authorities.

The vacuum of power left by the resignation of Chávez led to the creation of a de facto government, headed by trade federation leader Pedro Carmona—who removed me, and all other elected officials, from our posts the moment he took power. Once Chávez returned to power on April 13, I was reinstated as Mayor and Venezuela's national parliament opened up investigations about Carmona's coup d'état. An exhaustive criminal investigation into my own actions at the justice minister's apartment lasted 5 years. It found that I had not committed any crime and that my behavior was fully within the law inasmuch as the policemen of my district were following a court order.

Although not even a criminal investigation carried out by the Chávez government could remove me from the political scene or stop my political movement, since then, I have been the object of attacks that include 3 attempted assassinations, kidnappings, innumerable physical attacks, constant harassment in the government press, and political disqualification preventing me from running for office. Why? Because in the year 2008, with poll numbers at 70%, I was slated to win the position of Mayor of Caracas, which is considered the springboard to Venezuela's presidency. Because of this I was disqualified from running for election until 2014. The government of Venezuela fears that they do not have the monopoly of support from the country's poorest people. They behave, using disqualification, like the government of Iran.

In August of 2008, in an open session of Venezuela's highest judicial court, the court chose to violate their own constitution stating that, without trial or sentence, my political disqualification was legal. I was put out of the political game. This happened exactly 10 years after a very similar session that lifted the disqualification against Hugo Chávez for having carried out a bloody coup d'état in 1992 where 200 innocent people were killed

It is interesting that my Norwegian critics seem to know more about what happened in Venezuela in 2002 than we know, who were there. At the same time the historical facts about Chávez do not seem to bother them. So let me just remind you that it was the man who governs Venezuela today who led a violent coup in 1992 that led to deaths in 200 families. And it is the same man who in February of 1992, ordered the murder of the democratically-elected president of Venezuela, Carlos Andres Perez, and his entire family.

The Inter-American Commission for Human Rights has concluded that my human rights have been violated and required that the Venezuelan state reverse its disqualification of me. It is legally obligated to do so. In

light of the Venezuelan government's lack of compliance, the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights sued the government of Venezuela in the Inter-American Court in December of 2009. The trial is only now beginning. The reason the government of Venezuela refuses to allow me the chance to run is because I am a threat to their hold on power. In Oslo I was able to meet Anwar Ibrahim who, as I write this, is on a political trial in Malaysia for the same reason: he poses an electoral threat to the current government and prime minister there. In Oslo I received encouragement from many of my colleagues there and some of them, like Lech Walesa, have agreed to work with me to bring more attention to the death of democracy in Venezuela.

I have never favored a different alternative to one that involves voting, democracy, and the people. That is what I am devoted to and what I do in politics and civic work. I have never been involved in a coup d'état. And that is why the government of Venezuela has to come up with different excuses to persecute me.

Interestingly enough, Raul Baduel, the general described as the "Hero of 11 April" due to his military operation that returned Chávez to power on April 13th, is today a prisoner of the regime. He became an official enemy of the revolution when he disagreed with the Venezuelan president's desire to rule until the year 2030. He was sentenced, just two weeks ago, to 7 years and 6 months in prison. General Baduel describes Venezuela today as a "fiction of democracy." The very people in Norway who praised Baduel and his actions in 2002. Where are they today? Where is the Norwegian committee for his liberation as a political prisoner of the Chávez government?

A Truth Commission was recently established in Honduras to address the coup d'état that occurred there and to resolve the murder of civilians and journalists. How is it that they can already have a Truth Commission, after only one year, and in Venezuela it has been 8 years and there is no truth commission about the deaths of the 23 people? There is, to this day, no clear answer as to what happened on April 11, 2002. Dozens of government sharpshooters, identified on television, are still free. Why does the Venezuelan government refuse to allow for a truth commission? Perhaps Norway's human rights establishment can play a vital role in making this happen so that the wounds in Venezuela can be healed. I promise my full and complete cooperation.

My political path is clear: I respect the constitution, I will campaign on solidarity with the needy, and I will use the peaceful tools of social organizing, so that Venezuelans can unite. We believe in a broad, plural, and diverse nation that respects the rights of all and tolerates differences of opinion. We believe in overcoming poverty through peace and democracy not through dictatorship, division, and censorship. In visiting your country I have been impressed by the great willingness of so many people to discuss Venezuela with me. I invite you to become involved. [www.facebook.com/Leopoldo López](http://www.facebook.com/Leopoldo_López) [www.twitter.com/leopoldoLópez](http://www.twitter.com/leopoldoLópez)

## **Venezuelan Coverage of López at the Oslo Freedom Forum**

Manifest claims there is more coverage of the Oslo Freedom Forum in Venezuela than in Norway. It also claims we are trying to "wash" López's record. López, as can be shown plainly above, doesn't need a stage in Oslo to project his reputation, he has the worlds media from right (*Economist*) to left (the *Guardian*) doing it for him. An article from *Klassekampen* saying nice things about López or a nice word from the Nobel Peace Center isn't going to make much of a difference in Venezuela or to the electorate of Venezuela. López agreed to come back to the Oslo Freedom Forum in 2010 to speak only on the public day. We were told by so many people that [his speech last year](#) was good and that we should invite him again this year to give a public speech. We did this with three other speakers from last year. One of them, a Buddhist monk, could not leave India because of flight delays due to volcanic ash. And next year, we will invite several speakers from the last two years to give public speeches. The suggestion that we created

the Oslo Freedom Forum, spent millions, had an entire staff devote 24 months to fundraise, coordinate, plan travel, bring 80 speakers over two years—all so we can watch a short speech by López and try to get Amnesty International in Norway, the Foreign Ministry, and Mr. Bondevik to “wash” Leopoldo López is far-fetched. And, as written above, unnecessary, and untrue. As [published in VG](#): “Over halvparten av innleiderne på årets Oslo Freedom Forum blir ansett som kriminelle i hjemlandet. Konferansen som åpnet i Oslo mandag formiddag, består av deltakere som den sudanske aktivisten Lubna al-Hussein, som ble fengslet for å ha gått med bukser, det kinesiske uighur-folkets eksilleder Rebiya Kadeer og den nordkoreanske avhopperen Kang Chol-hwan.”

## Conclusion

On one side is the *Economist*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *BBC*, the *Los Angeles Times*, Human Rights Watch, the European Parliament, the voters of Venezuela (twice!), and a court that found that López’s handling of the minister of justice case was proper—on the other side are Wenche Hauge of PRIO, *Klassekampen*’s editor, and Manifest. I will let readers look at the links, read López’s own views, the hundreds of videos about this subject online, and they will reach their own conclusions. But it does, once more, prompt this question: why does Manifest want to denigrate the Oslo Freedom Forum so much? Why have they devoted weeks attacking me personally? Perhaps it is important to re-read Eirik Vold’s comment about a discredited Oslo Freedom Forum with no support and no NGO partners: “tviler på at Freedom Forum har kommet for å bli. Det blir i så fall sannsynligvis i en redusert form, uten støtte fra anstendige og anerkjente menneskerettighetsorganisasjoner og andre institusjoner.”

## My Telephone Habits

Magnus Marsdal has accused me of telephone harassment for having made one telephone call to him, Wenche Hauge, and Thomas Ergo on 26 April. Marsdal’s accusations against me and the Oslo Freedom Forum were published on 26 April in *Dagbladet* in two almost identical articles (one written by Marsdal and one by staff writer Thomas Ergo). I went to *Dagbladet* that day to invite Marsdal, Ergo, and Wenche Hauge (quoted in the article) to a public debate. I thought it would be very rude to have them read this in the newspaper the next day. We finished the first day of the Oslo Freedom Forum very late—almost at midnight. I spent one hour trying to find Marsdal’s contact information and finally obtained it from a friend of his. As a courtesy, I called him and he expressed no problem with the call. In fact, he accepted my invitation to debate. Ergo was not asleep when I called and he told me this and gave me an alternate telephone number to call him in the future. Marsdal has my telephone number and instead of calling me he continues to write his reports instead of meeting me in a public debate. This is why with this document I choose to respond to every one of his and Manifest’s accusations and lay them to rest. I do this not for him but for anyone who reads Manifest who wishes to learn what the story actually is. If he does not want his mobile telephone to ring at night he should lower the ringer

volume. It is what I do when I do not wish to be disturbed. With regard to Hauge: I did wake her up and I immediately apologize to her on that call.

### **A Note About PRIO**

PRIO partnered with the Oslo Freedom Forum. Working with Kristian B. Harpviken we were able to put together an event co-hosted with the University of Oslo involving Chechen lawyer Lidia Yusupova and former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations Diego Arria. Mr. Harpviken has already indicated that he wishes to discuss similar collaboration with Oslo Freedom Forum 2011. The leadership of PRIO does know the controversy discussed in this response and does not get involved in the comments of its scholars. Most importantly, the leadership of PRIO congratulated us on a very successful event “with flying colors.” As for the University of Oslo, its Rektor published a blog on 1 May where he gives a remarkable endorsement to our program and its impact.

## **CONCLUSION**

I believe in Norway, in its future, and in Oslo as the possible world capital for human rights. I have come to Norway 20 times in the last two years and I will continue to visit. I will try my best to establish the Oslo Freedom Forum as a permanent event every year. We hope to include as many people as possible from the Norwegian public at next year’s events and we invite suggestions (and especially financial contributions). As I told [Shabana Rehman Gaarder in \*Aftenposten\*](#). While the U.S., Russia, Iran, Venezuela, China, North Korea, all keep talking about nuclear superpowers, I believe that Norway can be a superpower for human rights and a force for change in the world.

I expect future accusations (new ones) now that the attacks above have fallen apart with the proven manipulation of video, written sources, and facts. I have taken this opportunity to publicly respond to the accusations against me because it allows people to get to know what motivates me to become involved in human rights. I will continue to operate openly and am always ready to address any questions about our activities.

—Thor Halvorssen, 28 May, 2010  
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