

Emilio Azcárraga Jean
September 28, 2017
Woodrow Wilson Awards
Introduction for Lorenzo Mendoza

Ladies and Gentlemen, it's a great honor to stand before you tonight to speak about Lorenzo Mendoza.

Lorenzo's company, Empresas Polar, has faced enormous challenges to produce the food —from corn flour for arepas, to pasta— that so many Venezuelans rely on.

There have been power outages, shortages of raw materials, price controls, runaway inflation and threats of government expropriation.

Sometimes unable to secure dollars from the government to import barley or tuna, factories occasionally sit idle.

Yet Lorenzo refuses to give up on his company.

The Venezuelan president has had harsh words for Lorenzo, accusing him of intentionally causing the country's food shortages.

He has suggested that Lorenzo is engaged in "an economic war" to topple the government.

Yet Lorenzo refuses to give up on Venezuela.

Empresas Polar has endured hundreds of surprise government inspections in recent years.

Managers are threatened with arrest if they don't promptly comply with information requests.

With food increasingly scarce in Venezuela, Polar employees — many of whom Lorenzo greets by first name — have lost weight. On average Lorenzo's workers are down two uniform sizes.

Government agents have even been deployed, threateningly, outside of Lorenzo's home in Caracas.

Yet Lorenzo refuses to give up on his people.

Lorenzo's unflinching courage and persistence in the face of tremendous travails and intense harassment are very inspiring.

In his own words, Lorenzo has said:

“Mi patria es mi todo.” / “My country is everything to me.”

Lorenzo leads by example. His steadfastness during recent crises in Venezuela are an example to us all.

I'm proud to call Lorenzo Mendoza my friend.

Congratulations, Lorenzo, on this recognition. It's well-deserved.