

# INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION NEWS

## Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

*NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations*

Promoting human rights by protecting those who defend them

## DAY OF THE ENDANGERED LAWYER: 24 JANUARY 2021

The struggle to protect  
Azerbaijani lawyers



Each year on January 24th lawyers worldwide commemorate the Day of the Endangered Lawyer (DOEL). This year, the focus is on politically-motivated disbarments of human rights lawyers in Azerbaijan.

LRWC invites its members to hear from lawyers from Azerbaijan in an online [seminar](#) on 21 January 2021. Speakers include Azerbaijani lawyers Shahla Humbatova and Emin Abbasov, and Jessica Gavron, the legal director of the European Human Rights Advocacy Centre. Moderated by Marina Brilman, international human rights adviser to The Law Society of England and Wales, the speakers will discuss challenges faced by lawyers in Azerbaijan,

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including restrictions on bar admission, disciplinary proceedings including disbarment, restrictions on freedom of expression, and cases of Azeri lawyers before the European Court of Human Rights. The seminar is organized by the Law Society of England and Wales and Lawyers for Lawyers. DOEL coalition members continue to raise concern about lawyers in past years' countries of concern, which have included [Pakistan](#) (2020), [Turkey](#) (2019), [Egypt](#) (2018), [China](#) (2017), [Honduras](#) (2016), and the [Philippines](#) (2015).

## In memoriam: Joe Arvay, O.C, Q.C. (1949-2020)



LRWC is saddened by the passing of Canadian lawyer Mr. Joe Arvay on 7 December 2020. [Joe Arvay](#) was a giant in Canada's civil rights and human rights community and was recognized for his contributions by being invested as an Officer in the Order of Canada. Joe Arvay was counsel on many important constitutional and human rights cases decided by the Supreme Court of Canada, including cases involving freedom of expression.

LRWC's [newsletter](#) (pdf) in October 2010 noted a case argued by Joe Arvey and LRWC Director Clive Ansley in the BC Court of Appeal, *Vancouver v. Zhang et al.* The case struck down the section of the City Bylaw regulating the use of streets on which the City had based its 2006 decision to force Falun Gong practitioners to remove the protest structure supporting their continuous 24-hour vigil in front of the Chinese Consulate-General.

With Joe Arvay's passing, the burden now falls upon the rest of the civil rights and human rights legal community to take up worthwhile causes and advocate for the civil and human rights to which all of us are entitled.

## COUNTRIES OF CONCERN

### AZERBAIJAN

#### International petition details persecution of independent lawyers in Azerbaijan

The persecution of independent lawyers in Azerbaijan is the subject of an international [petition](#) led by the Day of the Endangered Lawyer Foundation and endorsed by numerous lawyers' organizations around the world, including LRWC. The petition details harassment, criminal prosecution, and disbarment of lawyers by the Azerbaijan authorities. The oppression of lawyers is intended to restrict lawyers' ability to take on cases involving human rights violations. See Day of the Endangered Lawyer above for details of a 21 January 2021 seminar.

## JOIN LRWC

LRWC is a committee of lawyers and other human rights defenders who promote human rights, the rule of law, and protection of human rights defenders through advocacy, research and education. Please consider becoming a member of LRWC for \$50/year (\$15 students), and help support our work.

Visit <https://www.lrwc.org/join/>

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I'd like to donate to  
Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

## CANADA

**Update: U of T reviewer resigns over public doubt about independence of review of International Human Rights Program hiring process**



Image Credit: Joe Daniels

Controversy has continued to follow the University of Toronto's Faculty of Law (U of T Law) over the Law Dean's revocation of a hiring committee decision to appoint international human rights scholar, Dr. Valentina Azarova, as director of the U of T Law's International Human Rights Program. LRWC was among those who [wrote](#) to the Dean in September 2020 expressing concern about allegations that the Faculty of Law rescinded an accepted offer to Dr. Azarova after external pressure from a donor, Federal Tax Court judge and U of T law alumnus David Spiro. The judge had reportedly expressed concern about Dr. Azarova's research on international human rights and international humanitarian law related to Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories. Justice Spiro's conduct is the subject of complaints to the Canadian Judicial Council.

LRWC expressed concern about the potential violation of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and other international law that guarantees freedom of expression for all advocates defending or promoting international human rights. LRWC called on the University of Toronto to conduct an independent, external, and public review.

On 14 October 2020, U of T appointed Professor Bonnie Patterson, former President of Trent University, to conduct an impartial [review](#) of the hiring process.

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) raised [concerns](#) (pdf) about overly narrow terms of reference of the review and lack of independence of the reviewer because of her appointment by administrators whose conduct was the subject of complaints. Later in October, the terms of reference of the review were [changed](#) to stipulate that the report be submitted to U of T's President Meric Gertler. In a rare move the CAUT also passed a motion of censure against the University of Toronto on 30 November, 2020.

However, in early December 2020, Professor Patterson resigned from the inquiry because of "[public doubts](#) about the impartiality and credibility of the review." On 7 December 2020, President Gertler announced that former Supreme Court Justice Thomas Cromwell would continue the review and make findings in January 2021, which will be made public. LRWC will continue to monitor this situation as the findings from the review process are released.

### **Investigate the sudden death of Baloch activist Karima Baloch in Toronto**



Credit: Wikipedia/Patrika News

The body of a prominent Baloch activist and human rights defender, Ms. Karima Baloch, was discovered in Toronto, Canada, on 21 December 2020 after she had been reported missing a day earlier.



Ms. Baloch, 37, had fled Pakistan in 2015 and was granted asylum in Canada after threats to her life. She was a vocal activist for Pakistan's persecuted Baloch minority community. Family reported that prior to her death she had received death threats. Toronto Police have stated they do not suspect foul play. LRWC issued a brief [statement](#) calling on Canadian authorities to ensure an immediate, thorough, and transparent investigation into her death, followed by prosecution of any suspected perpetrator(s) identified by the investigation.

## CHINA

### UN General Assembly elects China to Human Rights Council amid global alarm about grave rights violations



In 2020, there was increased intensity in global calls by [civil society](#), UN [human rights bodies](#), and [dozens of States](#) urging China to comply with its human rights obligations. These appeals did not stop the UN General Assembly from electing China to the UN Human Rights Council for a three-year term (2021-2023). On 6 October 2020, a cross-regional joint statement by [39 countries](#) at the General Assembly's Third Committee session expressed grave concern about the human rights situation in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

The statement recalled an “exceptional letter of concern” by UN Special Procedures mandate holders in June 2020 that called on China to respect human rights, particularly in Xinjiang and Tibet. China was also a member of the Human Rights Council from 2016 to 2019, during which time LRWC [insisted](#) that China should cooperate with UN Treaty Bodies and Human Rights Council Special Procedures and comply with its obligations as a member of the Council to “uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights” as required by GA Resolution 60/251. In 2018, LRWC [called](#) on the Council to take joint action to recommend that the General Assembly “adopt election reform, nominee pledges and effective procedures for monitoring and suspension of members necessary to ensure that Council membership complies with Resolution 60/251.”

The election of China was noted by Human Rights Watch (HRW) to be “[grudging](#),” as China received the lowest total number of votes for States elected to the 47-member Council. However, HRW's China Director Sophie Richardson pointed out that while China's return to the Council is “no doubt problematic,” membership in the Council “has consequences, not least heightened scrutiny of their own human rights records.”



## Worldwide call for release of the Hong Kong 12: Joint Statement with 90 signatories



LRWC was among 90 groups worldwide that issued a 21 October 2020 [call for the release](#) of 12 activists from Hong Kong held in incommunicado detention in mainland China, including three activists who were under 18 years old at the time of their arrest. The 12 were intercepted by China's Coast Guard on 23 August 2020 while attempting to escape Hong Kong. They were detained on charges of "illegal border crossing" and organizing an illicit border crossing and faced sentences of up to seven years in jail. Lawyers appointed by their families have been denied visits to the detainees. The letter also called on governments around the world to take urgent action to press China's authorities to release the Hong Kong 12 and to ensure the right to peaceful rights advocacy by people of Hong Kong.

A trial of 10 of the 12 detained activists commenced on 28 December 2020. [BBC](#) reported on 30 December that all ten were convicted after unfair trials and given jail sentences ranging from seven months to three years. The two detained juveniles were handed over to Hong Kong police. Concerns about unfair trials include lack of counsel of choice, as authorities appointed lawyers, and counsel hired by families of the 12 were denied access to their clients.

### Chinese authorities place human rights lawyer Chang Weiping under "residential surveillance"

On 9 November 2020, six international lawyers' groups called for the release of Chinese human

rights lawyer Chang Weiping, who was detained in China on 22 October 2020 on grounds that he allegedly "endangered national security." He was detained without a notice of detention required by China's domestic law. His license to practice law had been suspended in January 2020. He has not been allowed access to meet his lawyers, and authorities have not revealed his whereabouts. The detention is believed to be in retaliation for speaking out about being subjected to torture and ill-treatment during a previous period of detention. It was reported that on 26 October 2020, Chang Weiping's father and defence lawyers sought and were denied permission to meet Chang Weiping in order to obtain the information needed to apply for his release on bail.



Chang Weiping

On 16 December, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor, issued a [statement](#) expressing "dismay at the treatment of human rights defenders and lawyers in China, saying they continue to be charged, detained, disappeared and tortured five years after the start of a crackdown on the profession under the guise of national security concerns." "Since the so-called '709 crackdown' began on 9 July 2015, the profession of human rights lawyer has been effectively criminalised in China," said Mary Lawlor. Ms. Lawlor's statement was endorsed by members of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.

## COLOMBIA



Reinaldo Villalba Vargas

### **“The year massacres returned to Colombia”**

The year 2020 has been described as “the year massacres returned to Colombia” with a “terrifying surge in massacres and assassinations.” According to one news [report](#), this was the highest number of assassinated human rights defenders and community leaders since 2011, referencing at least 375 people murdered in 90 massacres and the continued killing of guerilla (FARC) members who demobilized in 2017 following the historic 2016 peace agreement.

### **Surveillance and Threats against lawyers and other defenders**

Throughout 2020, LRWC [intervened](#) with other lawyers’ and human rights groups regarding the dangers for Colombian lawyers. In February 2020, LRWC responded to serious threats against human rights lawyer Adil Meléndez Marquez, and noted deficiencies in the protection scheme put in place for him by Colombia’s National Protection Unit, including the withdrawal altogether of specific protective measures. Other interventions highlighted concern about challenges for access to justice and the heightened risks for lawyers presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby restrictions confining them to their homes led to an increase in threats and harassment.

LRWC also joined with other international organizations to communicate its serious concern about alleged illegal surveillance by the Colombian state of at least 130 individuals, including lawyers

from José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers Collective (CAJAR) and the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP). These reports covered the period of February to December 2019 and echo events from previous years under former President Álvaro Uribe Vélez.

In September 2020, LRWC and other groups again expressed their grave concern about multiple threats received by Colombian lawyer, Reinaldo Villalba Vargas, and his CAJAR colleagues, apparently due to his high profile legal representation of Colombian Senator Iván Cepeda Castro.

### **CAJAR’s 2013 Petition proceeds to Inter-American Court of Human Rights: Update**

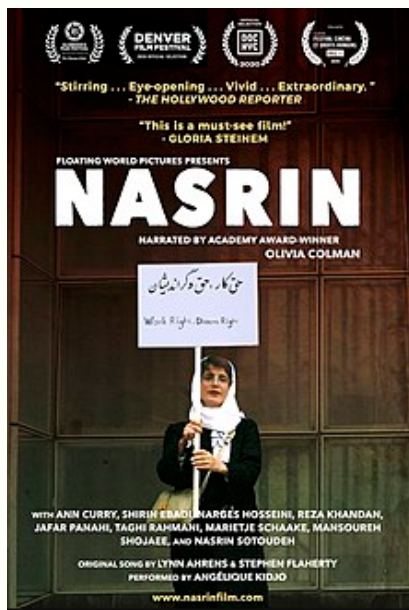
LRWC observed with interest developments concerning CAJAR’s petition filed in 2006 before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR or Commission) further to a succession of attacks, threats, surveillance, acts of intimidation and harassment of CAJAR’s members from the 1990s to the present related to their human rights defence activities. Lawyers Without Borders Canada and LRWC filed an [amicus brief](#) in support of CAJAR’s petition in 2013.

In a press release dated 28 December 2020, the IACHR reported further on taking the case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR). The IACHR refers cases to the Inter-American Court when the state fails to abide by the Commission’s recommendations or the case is of particular importance. The IACHR issued its merits report on the petition in May 2019, and the case was then formally referred to the IACtHR in July 2020. The IACHR’s report addressed the fact that the Colombian state was determined to have carried out illegal and “arbitrary intelligence work.” The report pointed to “stigmatizing pronouncements” by senior state officials, linking CAJAR members with the guerillas, as the basis for concluding that these actions actively

contributed to the materialization of violence and constituted an open and serious breach of the state's duty to protect. The IACHR's conclusion considered these actions, along with the state's deficient protection measures, evaluated in the context of impunity and the failure to clarify the facts and identify those responsible through serious and exhaustive investigation. The IACHR underlined the tremendous insecurity and well-founded fear created for the lawyers and their families, which had in several cases led to CAJAR members going into exile. The merits report also set out an extensive set of recommendations to the state. LRWC will be monitoring the Court's proceedings with interest.

## IRAN

### Human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh sent back to prison



Iranian women's rights lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh, is among numerous jailed human rights advocates in Iran. Ms. Sotoudeh has defended women facing criminal charges for removing their head coverings in public to protest Iran's compulsory hijab laws. As a result of her advocacy she was herself arrested and imprisoned in June 2018.

On 13 March 2019, LRWC wrote a [letter](#) objecting to her imprisonment after two unfair trials in absentia on 30 December 2018 and 9 March 2019.

She is now serving a sentence of 38 years and 148 lashes based on [spurious charges](#) including "assembly and collusion against national security," "propaganda against the state," "encouraging corruption and prostitution," and "appearing at the judiciary without Islamic hijab."

On 7 November 2020, Ms. Sotoudeh was [released temporarily](#) on medical grounds. After her release, it was confirmed that she had contracted COVID-19 in prison. Nevertheless, authorities send her back to prison on 1 December 2020.

On 4 December 2020, LRWC was among 26 organizations of lawyers in more than 14 countries led by The Law Society of England and Wales and the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute to issue a [joint statement](#) concerning the continued persecution of Nasrin Sotoudeh and other human rights lawyers in Iran persecuted for lawfully carrying out their professional duties. LRWC also co-sponsored with 10 other organizations a [seminar](#) on the case of Ms. Sotoudeh organized by the Law Society of England and Wales and the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute. Film clips of the recently released film NASRIN were shown and discussed by panellists. Read [more](#) on Nasrin Sotoudeh.

## SAUDI ARABIA

### Saudi Arabia fails in its bid for election to the UN Human Rights Council

In October 2020, Saudi Arabia's bid for membership on the UN Human Rights Council was [unsuccessful](#). In what Human Rights Watch called a "stunning rebuke," Saudi Arabia failed to get the minimum number of votes required to gain a seat. There was a concerted [campaign](#) by several human rights organizations calling on States not to vote for Saudi Arabia.



## Women's human rights defender Loujain Al-Hathloul remains in prison



Saudi Arabia continues to persecute human rights defenders. On 17 December 2020, LRWC wrote a letter to Saudi Arabia expressing grave concern about the safety and well-being of Ms. Loujain Al-Hathloul, a human rights defender currently imprisoned in Saudi Arabia's Dhahban prison. In reprisal for her peaceful advocacy against the driving ban and male guardianship system, Saudi Arabia subjected her to unlawful detention, illegitimate criminal charges and conviction and sentencing in an unfair trial. She was arrested in March 2018 for driving in Saudi Arabia, released after two months, and rearrested in May 2018 only a few weeks before Saudi Arabia lifted the ban on female drivers on 24 June 2018.

Reports indicate that, while arbitrarily detained, Ms. Al-Hathloul was subjected to sexual harassment, torture and other ill-treatment. LRWC's letter points out that the charges against Ms. Al-Hathloul are illegitimate. The charges fail to comply with the principle of legality and other applicable international standards. The Specialized Criminal Court, ostensibly created to handle terrorism prosecutions and used to prosecute human rights defenders, has been found by UN Special Procedures to be insufficiently independent to ensure a fair trial. The Specialized Criminal Court is also not a court of competent jurisdiction in that there is no publicly accessible law setting it up or specifying its jurisdiction.

On 28 December 2020, the Specialized Criminal Court convicted Ms. Hathloul and sentenced her to five years and eight months imprisonment. Part of her sentence was suspended and part was backdated to the time of her arrest, which means she is now scheduled to be released in March 2021. Her complaints of torture were dismissed by a Saudi Arabian court as "invalid."

## Hundreds of imprisoned defenders

Hundreds of defenders have been arbitrarily convicted, jailed, ill-treated, and subjected to torture in Saudi Arabia. LRWC continues to monitor the situations of several defenders, including lawyer [Waleed Abu al-Khair Raif Badawi](#), a blogger who was sentenced in 2014 to 10 years in prison, a 10-year travel ban, and 1,000 lashes of which 50 lashes were been meted out in 2016. [Samar Badawi](#), the former wife of Abu al-Khair and sister of Raif Badawi has been unlawfully detained in Saudi Arabia since July 2018.

## THAILAND

### Thailand's SLAPP suits against defenders: One acquittal and one case dropped: Update



In Thailand people who report human rights abuses are regularly subjected to criminal defamation charges. In October 2020 LRWC noted welcome developments in [two of Thailand's well-known cases](#) of Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation (SLAPP).

On 27 October 2020, Thailand's Appeal Court overturned a two-year prison sentence against labour rights journalist Ms. Suchanee (Cloitre) Rungmuanporn. The Thammakaset Co. Ltd (Thammakaset) poultry company had filed criminal defamation charges against Ms. Suchanee in March 2018 after she posted information on Twitter about Thammakaset's labour rights violations. LRWC had submitted a joint [amicus brief](#) in this case with the International Commission of Jurists in April 2020.

**EU should require Thailand's commitment to human rights including ILO treaties and anti-SLAPP law prior to restarting EU-Thailand trade negotiations**



As a member of the Thailand [Seafood Working Group](#), LRWC signed a [joint letter](#) to the European Commission urging that the European Union (EU) require Thailand to make commitments to human rights prior to starting trade negotiations. The joint letter pointed out that “EU engagement has been very effective in prompting legal and regulatory reform; in particular, the “yellow card” warning brought about significant reforms to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in Thailand.”

The joint letter asked for commitments to ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Core Convention 87 (Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise) and 98 (Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining),

amendments to labour laws, and protection of workers and civil society advocates who are often “charged with criminal and civil offences, typically defamation, to intimidate and silence those who report or publicise labour abuses.” The letter recommended that the EU require Thailand to decriminalise defamation and enact SLAPP legislation “to ensure that workers and human rights defenders are not subjected to criminal or civil liability for exercising rights to freedom of expression and speaking out about labour rights abuse.”

## TURKEY

**Lawyers Levent Pişkin, Cahit Kırkçak and Ayşe Batumlu acquitted**



LRWC continues to [research and report](#) on systematic arbitrary detention and other serious human rights violations against lawyers and human rights defenders in Turkey. LRWC welcomed rare good news that on 18 November 2020 a Turkish court [acquitted eleven people](#), including lawyers Levent Pişkin, Cahit Kırkçak, and Ayşe Batumlu, of false charges of membership in a terrorist organization and terror propaganda. Levent Pişkin had been named in a joint submission to the UN Human Rights Council for Turkey's Universal Period Review by the Law Society of England and Wales, Lawyers for Lawyers, and LRWC. The report raised concerns about Turkey's pattern of judicial harassment of jurists.

## Effective investigation lacking five years after extrajudicial killing of lawyer Tahir Elçi



LRWC is among several international human rights organizations monitoring the prosecution of police officers allegedly involved in the killing of human rights lawyer Tahir Elçi in November 2015. LRWC signed a [joint statement](#) expressing concern about Turkey's continued failure to fulfil its international legal obligations to carry out a prompt, effective, impartial, and independent investigation into Mr. Elçi's shooting death and ensure a fair trial of police officers accused of the killing.

## UNITED STATES

### Interim report of impartial monitors of the trial of human rights lawyer Steven Donziger



LRWC's Executive Director, Catherine Morris, has been serving as co-chair of an independent team to

monitor the trial of *United States v. Steven Donziger* in United States (US) Federal Court, South New York Trial Division. Other members of the monitoring group include team co-chair Ambassador Stephen Rapp, US Ambassador-at-Large (ret.), who headed the Office of Global Criminal Justice in the US State Department from 2009-2015; Ms. Nykeeba Brown, JD, LLM, New York; and Prof. Etienne C. Toussaint, Faculty of Law, University of the District of Columbia.

Steven Donziger, a human rights lawyer in New York, has reportedly been subjected to ongoing judicial and administrative harassment, including lack of due process and arbitrary detention. He has been under house arrest without trial since July 2019. He has also been disbarred in New York State. The monitoring team is observing international human rights issues involved in the case, including the right to liberty; the right to a fair hearing before a competent, independent, and impartial tribunal; the right to defend oneself or through legal counsel of choice; equality of arms; the presumption of innocence; the right to a public hearing (public attendance), all in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The case of Mr. Donziger is being monitored as part of a developing initiative to establish international monitoring panels to evaluate trials in the US. Each team member is monitoring the proceedings in their personal capacity and has committed to perform the work in an independent and impartial manner without instructions from any person, group, or organization. The trial is scheduled to begin 19 January 2021 in New York. On 27 October, the monitoring group published a [report of a pre-trial hearing](#) held 5 October 2020. LRWC issued a [briefing note](#) on the situation of Ms. Donziger in July 2020.



## VIETNAM

### Justice for the People of Dong Tam



In October 2020, LRWC joined with dozens of human rights groups, academics and others in a [joint letter](#) to Vietnam's Prime Minister raising grave concerns about the trial of the citizens of Dong Tam, which was held in Vietnam from 7-14 September 2020. The trial is the latest development in an ongoing dispute between the residents of Dong Tam and the Vietnamese government regarding the expropriation of land for governmental and military use.

The dispute culminated in a mass raid by the government on Dong Tam on 9 January 2020. A reported 3,000 security personnel turned up to disperse the villagers and protect the construction of a wall to annex the land in dispute. During this raid, several villagers were injured, and Le Dinh Kinh, a village elder, was killed. According to the Vietnamese security ministry, three police officers were also killed during the raid. Subsequently, twenty-nine Dong Tam villagers were arrested, detained, and charged in connection with the deaths of these three officers.

The 29 accused were all tried at the same time during a two-day trial (shortened from a proposed 10-day trial). All the Dong Tam villagers were found guilty, and their sentences ranged from the death penalty, life imprisonment, 2 to 18 years in prison, and probation. Based on the reports LRWC reviewed, the Dong Tam trial failed to meet international standards. The trial failed to respect the rights of the accused and their lawyers. Defense lawyers had no access to their clients until indictment, and thereafter only in the presence of prison guards, violating the principle of lawyer-client confidentiality.

Case files were not provided to defense lawyers until a few days before the trial. Of the 29 defendants, 19 alleged they were tortured in order to obtain forced confessions. Some defense lawyers were subjected to harassment inside and outside the Hanoi court. Family members, independent reports and foreign journalists were denied access to the proceedings.

Some defendants with the most severe sentences, including death penalty, life imprisonment, or lengthy prison sentences, decided to appeal. The joint letter appealed to the Prime Minister to ensure full respect of the rights of the accused and their lawyers before, during, and after the appeal proceedings, in compliance with the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* to which Vietnam acceded in 1982.

## UNITED NATIONS



LRWC volunteers are preparing for interventions at the 46th session of the UN Human Rights Council, 22 February 2021 to 19 March 2021. While the session is to be held in Geneva, LRWC plans to participate by means of video interventions. The 46th session is scheduled to include interactive dialogues with UN Special Procedures mandate holders whose work is related to issues of concern to LRWC, including protection of human rights defenders, human rights abuses related to anti-terrorism initiatives, torture and ill-treatment, systemic racism and police violence, as well as interactive dialogues focused on particular countries, including Colombia, Iran, Myanmar, South Sudan, and the United States.

## UN Guidance Note on Protection and Promotion of Civic Space



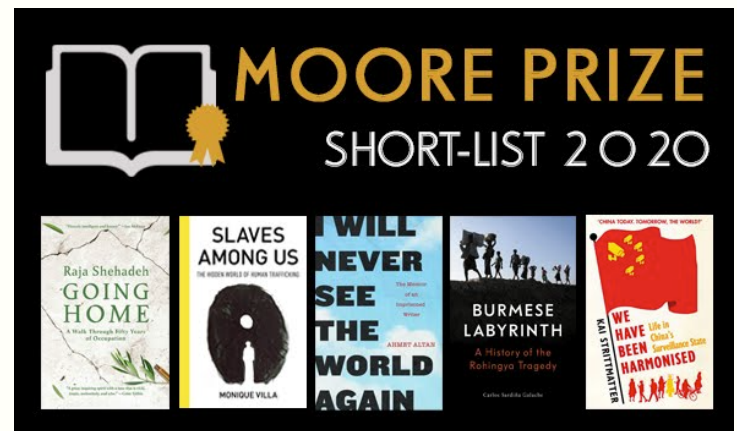
Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada welcomed the recent launch of a [UN Guidance Note on Protection and Promotion of Civic Space](#). The Guidance Note affirms the role and responsibility of all UN bodies and agencies in supporting civil society participation, protection of civil society actors from threats and attacks, and promotion of an enabling environment for their work at the national and international levels. The Guidance Note was developed after advocacy and in consultation with civil society actors. See more on [Role of the United Nations in protecting and promoting civic space](#).

## NGO access to the UN in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic

LRWC joined a 30 November 2020 [statement](#) to the UN General Assembly made by the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) on behalf of more than 100 NGOs. The statement reminded the General Assembly of the [Secretary General's February 2020 affirmation](#) that the UN "depends on the active engagement of civil society actors" and the importance of actively countering narratives "that seek to discredit and undermine civil society...." and pointed to the need to enhance "[NGO access](#) to and participation in the United Nations System."

## AWARDS

Moore Prize 2020 for writing on human rights: Winning title announced



The 2020 [Moore Prize](#) for books featuring human rights themes was awarded on 11 January 2021 to Raja Shehadeh for his 2019 book, [Going Home: A walk through fifty years of occupation](#) (Profile books, 2019). The author is the founder of the human rights organization Al Haq, established in 1979 by a group of Palestinian lawyers to address human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The Moore Prize 2020 jury included LRWC's Executive Director, Catherine Morris, BBC journalist Jonathan Head, and Brazilian author and human rights defender Djamila Ribeiro. Jury members were appointed to act in their personal capacities.

A short-list of books was announced on 10 December 2020 and includes: Monique Villa, *Slaves among Us: The Hidden World of Human Trafficking* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2019); Ahmet Altan, trans. Yasemin Congar, *I Will Never See the World Again: The Memoir of an Imprisoned Writer* (Other Press, 2019); Carlos Sardiña Galache, *The Burmese Labyrinth: A History of the Rohingya Tragedy* (Verso Books, 2020); Kai Strittmatter, trans. Ruth Martin, *We Have Been Harmonized: Life in China's Surveillance State* (Old Street Publishing, 2019). The Moore Prize is sponsored by the Christopher G. Moore Foundation. Mr. Moore is a Canadian author residing in Thailand.

## LRWC IN THE NEWS

LRWC calls out potential breach of international law in U of T staff recruitment process, *Law Times* (14 October 2020). See more above under “Canada.”

Lawyers’ Rights Watch report summarizes its interventions at UN to protect practitioners. *The Canadian Lawyer* (6 November 2020).

## PUBLICATIONS BY LRWC VOLUNTEERS

The following articles were written by LRWC volunteers between October and December 2020:

Catherine Morris, “Canadian pro bono lawyers amplify the calls for justice worldwide: 30th anniversary of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers,” [Slaw.ca](#) (27 October 2020). Republished by LRWC.

Catherine Morris, “Lawyers in Danger: Threats to Advocates Worldwide.” [The Advocate](#) 78(6) (November 2020): 867-73. Republished by LRWC

Catherine Morris, “Doing the Two-Step on Uneven Platforms: Successes and Setbacks of Human Rights Advocacy,” [Slaw.ca](#) (30 December 2020). Republished by LRWC

Marjorie Cohn, “After Trump Blocked UN Inquiry of Racist Violence, NGOs Are Conducting Their Own.” [Truthout](#) (24 December 2020). Republished by [LRWC](#).

Marjorie Cohn, “Assange Extradition Denial Indicts US Prison System But Imperils Journalism,” [Truthout](#) (5 January 2020).

Catherine Morris, “Defending Defenders: The Right to Know Rights.” [The Advocate](#) 79(1)(January 2021): 65-68. Republished by [LRWC](#).

## EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

**Coming up: 21 January 2021: Day of the Endangered Lawyer: The struggle to protect Azerbaijani lawyers.** Online Seminar. See details and [registration information](#).

**Save the date: 25 February 2021: The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: What is it? How can it be used for human rights advocacy?** Webinar speakers to include Catherine Morris. Other speakers to be confirmed. See [more information](#).

**Inaugural webinar held 10 December 2020: International Human Rights Day: An overview of the UN Human Rights System.** LRWC featured its first webinar of a series on international human rights systems. The inaugural [webinar](#) featured Marcia Kran, a member of the UN Human Rights Committee, Catherine Morris, LRWC Executive Director, and Harini Sivalingum, LRWC director.

## WORKING PRO BONO WITH LRWC

**Working pro bono for LRWC October to December 2020**

A big thank you to all LRWC volunteers, including Clive Ansley, Hanna Bokhari, Marjorie Cohn, Gail Davidson, Joey Doyle, Rai Friedman, Marcia Kran (guest speaker), Josh Lam, Helen Lau, Justin Lee, Gavin Magrath, Catherine Morris, Heather Neun, Erin Riley, Brian Samuelson, Paul Scambler, Harini Sivalingam, Peggy Stanier, Melissa Tessler.

**Working in cooperation with other organizations**

Through joint advocacy between October and December 2020, LRWC worked in cooperation with hundreds of other organizations around the world.



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