

# 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

## ANNUAL REPORT 2020

*1 January to 31 December 2020*

### OUR MISSION

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC) is a committee of lawyers dedicated to promoting the rule of law and human rights internationally by:

- Providing support to lawyers and other human rights defenders whose rights, freedoms, or independence are threatened as a result of their human rights advocacy.
- Conducting legal research and producing legal analyses of national and international laws and standards relevant to advocacy rights, the integrity of legal systems, fair trial rights and the rule of law.
- Working in cooperation with other human rights organizations.
- Engaging in legal education.

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC) and Lawyers' Rights Watch (Legal Research) Canada are non-profit societies incorporated under the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act. Lawyers' Rights Watch (Legal Research) Canada is a charitable organization in Canada, No 86056 3139 RR0001.

LRWC's work is supported by [memberships and donations](#) from individuals and private foundations. To ensure independence and to avoid conflicts of interest, LRWC does not accept donations from governments or business enterprises.

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## LRWC CONSTITUTIONS

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### LAWYERS' RIGHTS WATCH CANADA

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- To provide support internationally to lawyers and other human rights defenders whose rights, freedoms, or independence are threatened as a result of their human rights advocacy,
- To promote and protect the rights of lawyers and other human rights defenders to engage in independent advocacy.
- To preserve and enhance the rule of law.
- To encourage governments and other institutions to respect fair trial rights including the right of lawyers to engage in independent advocacy.
- To encourage ratification, implementation and enforcement of international human rights treaties that impact legal advocacy rights, the integrity of legal systems and fair trial rights.
- To encourage the constitutional and legislative amendments necessary for conformity with international human rights standards relevant to lawyers, judges and human rights defenders; the integrity of legal systems; and fair trial rights.
- To provide research, education and public analyses with respect to the above.
- To work with other human rights organizations to achieve these purposes.

### LAWYERS' RIGHTS WATCH (LEGAL RESEARCH) CANADA

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- To do legal research on jurisprudence, national laws and international laws and standards related to the integrity of legal systems and the right of lawyers and other human rights defenders to engage in independent advocacy.
- To make such research available to the public.
- To provide public legal education on the above topics.

## LRWC EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS IN 2020

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**Gail Davidson**  
Founding Executive Director,  
2000 to May 2020



**Catherine Morris**  
Transitional Executive Director,  
Appointed June 2020

## HIGHLIGHTS OF 2020

### TWENTY YEARS 2000-2020: HONOURING OUR FOUNDER GAIL DAVIDSON



Gail Davidson speaks at a rally in Vancouver on threats to the rule of law posed by Canada's 2015 anti-terrorism legislation (Bill C-51)

Gail Davidson founded LRWC in 2000 to promote global compliance with international human rights law and provide support to advocates at risk, believing that lawyers “who practice law in safe environments such as Canada owe a duty to those who risk not only their freedom but also their lives in order to protect their clients’ rights.” Other founding Directors were Paul D. Copeland, David W. Gibbons QC, Tami Friesen, Michael Jackson QC, Sarah Khan, Stephen Owen QC, Howard Rubin QC, and Willian Schabas.

Two decades later, LRWC is now one of Canada’s leading international human rights organizations and has held special consultative status with the United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 2005.

Under Gail Davidson’s direction, LRWC volunteers have advocated for lawyers and human rights defenders at risk in many countries around the world.

Gail Davidson’s leadership has also resulted in LRWC’s publication of books, briefs, and reports on international law on human rights of individuals and duties of States in relation to advocacy rights, the rule of law, and the integrity of legal systems, including guides on international human rights law regarding:

- international human rights education,
- legal aid,
- the presumption of innocence,
- pre-trial release,
- representation, and
- participation in public affairs by engaging in criticism, opposition, and dissent.

Most recently, she spearheaded the publication of *Attacking Defenders: The Criminalization of Human Rights Advocacy*, by LRWC member Lois Leslie with a Foreword by Michel Forst, the 2014-April 2020 UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders.

Gail Davidson has authored, co-authored and edited hundreds of communications about international human rights and humanitarian law including amicus briefs to international, regional and domestic tribunals and reports to UN bodies. Ms. Davidson has received the University of British Columbia Great Trekker Award, a Courage in Law Award from the University of British Columbia Indigenous Law Students’ Association. She was appointed as the Grace MacInnis visiting scholar by the Simon Fraser University Institute of Humanities. Gail Davidson retired as LRWC Executive Director effective June 2020. The Board of Directors appointed 20-year LRWC volunteer, Catherine Morris, as a transitional pro bono Executive Director effective 1 June 2020. Gail Davidson continues to serve on the Board of Directors.

## 2020 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

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### Catherine Morris

The year 2020 tested the resolve of human rights advocates around the world. Public health measures to suppress the spread of COVID-19 led to globalized donning of masks, physical distancing, and other restrictions. There was far less effort to protect international human rights. In 2020 a parallel pandemic of international human rights violations was revealed along with obvious and grave effects of historic, systemic racism, injustices, and inequalities faced by marginalized peoples and individuals. In too many cases, COVID-19 measures have neglected human rights or have been used as a pretence to curtail rights and freedoms.

While positive developments in human rights protection by States and corporations were few and far between in 2020, popular resistance to injustice was dramatic. Examples include Hong Kong protests against China's violations, protests against Canadian government crackdowns against Indigenous land rights defenders, protests against racist police violence throughout the United States (US), and protests against election fraud in Belarus.

The gap between international human rights law and practices on the ground seems wider than ever, with fewer resources to address violations. Dedicated human rights advocates, including LRWC volunteers, continued to step into these breaches to defend human rights through documentation, legal research, educational seminars, letters, and statements, seeking compliance with international human rights law and standards. LRWC's interventions throughout 2020 addressed threats to human rights defenders, independence of the legal profession, integrity of legal systems, and the rule of law. LRWC interventions are summarized in the section below under "Countries of Concern."

LRWC intervened to address violations against those upholding Indigenous Peoples' rights, land rights or environmental rights (e.g. Canada, Colombia, Thailand). LRWC volunteers resisted the continued shrinkage of space for dissent as governments created or abused laws to delegitimize or criminalize human rights advocacy and to threaten freedoms or even the lives of those who engage in peaceful dissent (Cambodia, Canada, Hong Kong SAR, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Thailand, US). LRWC spoke out about violations by corporations (e.g. Thailand; Zoom Inc. [see China]). LRWC joined global advocacy against draconian COVID-19 emergency laws or discriminatory application of public health measures (e.g. Cambodia, Canada, China, Colombia). In some cases, LRWC addressed COVID-19 prisoner releases that excluded human rights advocates (e.g. Iran, Turkey).

LRWC also worked to stem impunity as powerful States and corporations either engaged in or remained silent in the face of atrocity crimes against religious and ethnic minorities, along with those advocating for their protection (e.g. China, Myanmar). LRWC noted active attempts to weaken international human rights law and bodies (e.g. China).

The year 2020 has posed an urgent challenge to human rights defenders and those who support their efforts. Without our members and support from donors, LRWC cannot do the work we do. LRWC thanks you sincerely for being part of our human rights community.

*Catherine Morris, BA, JD, LL.M., has been an active volunteer with LRWC for two decades. She serves as LRWC's Main Representative at the UN Human Rights Council. She has taught graduate level courses in international human rights and conflict studies at universities in Canada Southeast Asia and Europe. She is internationally recognized for her work and publications in the fields of international human rights, peacebuilding, and dispute resolution.*

## LRWC ADVOCACY IN 2020

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### WELCOME DEVELOPMENTS

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In 2020, LRWC welcomed the following positive developments in situations involving persecuted human rights lawyers or defenders for whom LRWC advocated.

- **February 2020: Esra Uymaz Saral, Turkey:** Pregnant lawyer Ms. Esra Uymaz Saral was arrested on 10 January 2020 and ordered into pre-trial detention. She was released on 13 February 2020. She sent a note to LRWC saying “We can't thank you enough for your support and solidarity.” Read more below under Turkey.
- **April 2020: Wang Quanzhang, China:** Lawyer Mr. Wang Quanzhang was released after five years of unlawful imprisonment. Read more below under China.
- **June 2020: Nabeel Rajab, Bahrain:** President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, Mr. Nabeel Rajab was freed after four years in prison. Read more below under Bahrain.
- **June 2020: Global action to combat racism and crackdowns against peaceful protest:** Global advocacy, including participation by LRWC, resulted in a UN Human Rights Council resolution to address systemic racism and police violence against people of African descent around the world. Read more below under USA.
- **June 2020: Nan Win and Sutharee Wannasiri, Thailand.** Criminal defamation cases against human rights defenders Ms. Sutharee Wannasiri and Mr. Nan Win were dismissed. Read more below under Thailand.
- **July 2020: The UN Human Rights Committee published a new General Comment on the right of peaceful assembly.** LRWC contributed to the Committee’s deliberations with a 26-page submission including recommendations on the draft General Comment. Read more below under UN bodies.
- **October 2020: Suchanee (Cloitre) Rungmuanporn, Thailand:** An appeal court overturned a two-year prison sentence against labour rights journalist Ms. Cloitre Rungmuanporn. Read more below under Thailand.
- **November 2020: Nasrin Sotoudeh, Iran:** Women’s human rights lawyer Ms. Nasrin Sotoudeh was temporarily released from prison. While this brief respite from arbitrary detention was welcome, she was ordered back to prison on 1 December 2020. Read more below under Iran.
- **December 2020: Loujain Al-Hathloul, Saudi Arabia:** On 28 December, women’s rights defender Loujain Al-Hathloul was sentenced to nearly six years in prison on specious charges following an unfair trial – after spending more than three years in pretrial detention including torture and ill-treatment. Global advocacy is credited with the court’s decision to suspend part of the sentence to allow release early in 2021. See more below under Saudi Arabia.

## COUNTRIES OF CONCERN: LRWC INTERVENTIONS

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In 2020 LRWC members intervened in situations of human rights violations in 21 countries. LRWC wrote, contributed to, or endorsed more than 60 letters or statements in 2020 as well as more than a dozen written or oral interventions in United Nations (UN) bodies. The letters and statements are available on LRWC's website in the relevant [country sections](#).

In June 2020, LRWC established five countries of particular concern during 2020-2021 (in alphabetical order):

- **China**, where human rights lawyers and defenders are routinely arbitrarily imprisoned and tortured.
- **Colombia**, where human rights lawyers are often targeted and threatened, and in 2020 at least 375 people, including human rights defenders and community leaders, were murdered in 90 massacres.
- **The Philippines**, where dozens of lawyers have been extrajudicially killed since 2016.
- **Saudi Arabia**, where human rights defenders, particularly women's rights defenders, are routinely arbitrarily imprisoned and tortured.
- **Turkey**, where hundreds of lawyers have been arbitrarily detained – more lawyers are imprisoned in Turkey than in any other country.

LRWC members intervened to uphold the rule of law and peaceful defence of human rights, and to counter:

- Creation or abuse of laws and legal proceedings to criminalize and punish lawful human rights advocacy;
- Harassment, arbitrary detention, and illegitimate charges against human rights lawyers and defenders;
- Unlawful use of force against human rights defenders, including peaceful protesters defending human rights;
- Torture, murder and enforced disappearances of lawyers and defenders;
- Impunity for violations against human rights defenders in the context of war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide.

### *INTERVENTIONS SERVE LRWC'S MANDATES FOR ADVOCACY, RESEARCH, AND EDUCATION*

LRWC advocacy generally begins with research on facts and international human rights law and standards, identification of violations and required remedies. Letters or statements are then developed to articulate facts, law and recommendations to reverse or remediate violations.

Letters and statements may also serve as the foundation for reports, legal briefs, amicus briefs, and written or oral statements to the UN Human Rights Council and UN Treaty Bodies. LRWC interventions build international solidarity with human rights defenders around the world through sharing of information, joint advocacy or contributions to global campaigns in individual cases or towards changes in laws or policies. Letters and statements serve LRWC's educational mandate by engaging volunteers in supervised research and writing and by setting out well-referenced summaries of relevant international law obligations for lawyers, human rights defenders, public officials, and international bodies.

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## **AZERBAIJAN: *SUSPENSION AND DISBARMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYERS***

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On January 24<sup>th</sup> each year, the legal community around the world, including Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, honours the courage and commitment of lawyers on the frontlines of efforts to promote human rights and to uphold the rule of law. On 16 June 2020, a coalition of international lawyers' organizations and bar associations, led by The Day of the Endangered Lawyer Foundation, selected Azerbaijan as the country of focus for 2021. During the latter part of 2020, the coalition gathered reports and prepared a petition to be launched in time for 24 January 2021.

In Azerbaijan there are serious concerns about independence of the legal profession, including reported political biases in the bar admission process. Human rights lawyers have been suspended or disbarred and only a handful of lawyers are permitted to defend people's rights in Azerbaijan's courts.

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## **BELARUS: *CRACKDOWNS AGAINST PEACEFUL PROTESTORS***

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In August 2020, the contested results of the Belarus presidential election of 9 August 2020 resulted in weeks of protests. The long-ruling President Alexander Lukashenko, who claimed victory despite allegations of election fraud, severely cracked down on peaceful protestors including several lawyers. Thousands of peaceful protestors were arrested and tortured or ill-treated in custody. Many of those detained were denied access to lawyers.

On 18 August 2020 LRWC joined the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales in seeking a UN investigation into the mass arrests, calling for access to lawyers and release of those arbitrarily detained as well as a halt to the excessive use of force by authorities. LRWC continues to monitor the situation of Belarus with other human rights organizations.

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## **BURUNDI: *CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY***

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In 2016, the UN Human Rights Council established an independent Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, Africa, to investigate human rights violations since 2015. Over the years, the Commission of Inquiry has documented severe and widespread human rights violations and crimes against humanity. Violations include arbitrary arrests and detentions of those perceived to be against the Government, beatings, theft of property belonging to members of opposition parties and human rights defenders in exile, and forced closure of civil society organisations and media outlets.

On 21 August 2020, ahead of the September/October 2020 session of the UN Human Rights Council, LRWC joined 43 African and other international non-governmental organizations in a letter to Council members and observer States to advocate renewal of the Commission of Inquiry's mandate until September 2021.



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## **CAMBODIA: NO SPACE FOR DISSENT**

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LRWC has monitored the situation of human rights lawyers and defenders in Cambodia since 2007. Cambodia has failed to fulfil the numerous UN human rights treaties it has ratified and which are recognized in its Constitution. Cambodia's judiciary and legal profession have long been controlled by the government. Human rights lawyers and defenders are at constant risk of judicial harassment and arbitrary detention. Human rights in Cambodia dramatically deteriorated during its 2018 election. The long-ruling Cambodia People's Party (CPP) banned the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) and detained its leader, Kem Sokha. The CPP thus secured all seats in the National Assembly in an unfair election. In 2020, human rights in Cambodia continued to deteriorate. LRWC actions on Cambodia included the following:

- **13 May 2020:** Joint intervention with 60 civil society organizations, primarily from Cambodia, seeking substantial amendments to Cambodia's May 2020 State of Emergency Law to ensure its compliance with Cambodia's human rights obligations. While the law ostensibly was passed to protect public health during the COVID-19 pandemic, it gives the government excessive powers to restrict fundamental freedoms and poses a serious threat to human rights.
- **9 July 2020:** Joint intervention with 30 Cambodian and international organizations urging a Commission of Inquiry into the 2016 extrajudicial killing of human rights defender Kem Ley (photo).
- **1 October 2020:** LRWC oral video statement at the UN Human Rights Council emphasizing that human rights "will remain unfulfilled until Cambodia establishes genuine independence and integrity of the judiciary, legal profession, and other institutions in line with international law" and calling for the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Cambodia.

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## **CAMEROON: THREATS TO ANGLOPHONE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

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LRWC has monitored the situation in Cameroon since 2012. The intimidation of human rights lawyers and defenders in Cameroon is associated with the country's internal armed conflict, including violations against civilian populations by government and non-state actors that may amount to crimes against humanity.



- **9 June 2020:** LRWC led the drafting of a joint letter of academic bodies and individuals seeking reinstatement of human rights lawyer Felix Agbor Nkongho (photo right) to his position as a law lecturer at the University of Bue after he was arbitrarily dismissed as part of an apparent pattern of harassment for his advocacy for protection of the rights of Cameroon's Anglophone minority. On 11 June 2020 an English language newspaper in Cameroon featured an article on the joint letter.
- **26 June 2020:** LRWC endorsed a global challenge for a COVID-19 cease fire in Cameroon launched by the Global Campaign for Peace & Justice in Cameroon.



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## CANADA: THREATS TO INDIGENOUS LAND RIGHTS DEFENDERS

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Several situations in Canada led to LRWC interventions in 2020 regarding Indigenous land rights defenders and Canada's obligations at home and abroad concerning rights of human rights educators and advocates:

- **9 January 2020:** LRWC called on Canada to ban the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia and cancel the fulfilment of the \$15 billion contract for delivery of Light Armed Vehicles. Saudi Arabia is one of the parties involved in alleged war crimes in the armed conflict in Yemen, in which numerous human rights defenders have been targeted. See more in the entry below on Yemen.
- **March 2020:** Release of a 16-page legal brief on *Canada's international human rights law obligations to suspend construction of the Coastal GasLink Pipeline and stop use of force against the Wet'suwet'en*. Written by LRWC's Gail Davidson and Heather Neun, the brief discusses recommendations to Canada by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) to suspend construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline through Wet'suwet'en territory and stop displacement and use of force by the RCMP against peaceful land rights protestors. The report also discusses Canada's obligations to guarantee rights to property, equality and non-discrimination for Indigenous Peoples in the Inter-American human rights system. The report was widely circulated by Indigenous Peoples' rights advocates.
- **April 2020:** LRWC was one of hundreds of organizations and individuals from across Canada signing a letter calling for strengthened human rights oversight of Canadian government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The letter called for establishment of "independent human rights oversight committees made up of First Nations, Métis and Inuit representatives from both rural and remote Indigenous communities and urban centres, impacted communities, frontline service providers, human rights advocates, labour representatives, academics and other experts."
- **July 2020:** LRWC joined a group of 77 human rights organizations and advocates in a letter calling on the Canadian government to ban the use of facial recognition surveillance by federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies, which may affect privacy rights of dissidents and human rights defenders.
- **September 2020:** LRWC wrote a letter to the University of Toronto Faculty of Law LRWC raising concerns about allegations that a decision to hire international human rights scholar, Dr. Valentina Azarova, was rescinded after external pressure from a donor to the University who expressed concern about Dr. Azarova's research on international human rights and international humanitarian law related to Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories. LRWC expressed concern about 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 continued to monitor this situation during 2020.
- **December 2020:** LRWC issued a statement calling on Canadian authorities to ensure an immediate, thorough, and transparent investigation into the death of Ms. Karima Baloch. Ms. Baloch was a rights activist for Pakistan's persecuted Baloch minority community. Her body was discovered in Toronto, Canada on 21 December 2020. While Toronto Police stated they did not suspect foul play, her family reported that she had received death threats prior to her death.



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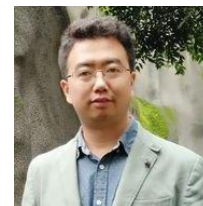
## CHINA: ELECTION TO THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL DESPITE ATROCITY CRIMES

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China's human rights violations continued to be a major concern to LRWC in 2020. Increased worldwide attention was galvanized by China's 2019-2020 crackdowns against human rights defenders and peaceful protestors calling for democracy in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (Hong Kong SAR), and allegations of crimes against humanity and genocide in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Of particular concern has been China's influence on international bodies, including the UN Human Rights Council, to which it was elected by the UN General Assembly in October 2020. LRWC's letters and statements included the following concerns about situations in mainland China:

- **10 January 2020:** Letter requesting immediate disclosure of the whereabouts of several lawyers and activists subjected to incommunicado arbitrary detention in unknown locations (enforced disappearance), including Ding Jiaxi (lawyer, photo top left), Huang Zhiqiang (lawyer), Zhang Zhongshun, Dai Zhenya, Li Yingjun, and Wei Xiaobing.
- **4 April 2020:** Joint statement calling for removal of restrictions on Chinese human rights lawyer Wang Quanzhang, who was released on 5 April 2020 after years of arbitrary detention but then held in further quarantine ostensibly due to COVID-19. His communication with the outside world during that time was unreasonably and unlawfully restricted. He was returned to his family on 27 April.
- **10 July 2020:** Joint oral statement to the Human Rights Council with several other NGOs calling for freedom of expression in China and calling attention to criminalization of lawyers for speaking out on human rights.
- **13 July 2020:** Oral video statement at the UN Human Rights Council calling attention to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UN *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers* with examples of concerns in several countries, including China's continued repression of lawyers.
- **17 July 2020:** Letter to Zoom Communications Inc. criticizing its suspension of the accounts of human rights activists in the US and Hong Kong at the request of China and calling on Zoom to respect freedom of expression for the users of its services. LRWC continued to monitor Zoom's actions in 2020.
- **11 September 2020:** Joint open letter with more than 300 civil society groups to the UN Secretary General, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and UN member states calling for an international mechanism to address human rights violations by China.
- **18 September 2020:** Oral video statement to the Human Rights Council calling attention to the arbitrary detention of several Hong Kong defenders.
- **21 October 2020:** Endorsement of the joint statement of 90 groups calling for release of 12 activists from Hong Kong held in incommunicado detention in mainland China, including three activists under 18 years old at the time of their arrest. The letter also called on governments around the world to take urgent action to press China to release the Hong Kong 12 and to respect and ensure the freedom of Hong Kong residents to engage in peaceful human rights advocacy.
- **9 November 2020:** Joint statement with six international lawyers' groups calling for the release of Chinese human rights lawyer Chang Weiping (photo right), detained incommunicado in China without access to lawyers on grounds that he allegedly "endangered national security." The detention is believed to be in retaliation for his speaking out about being subjected to torture and ill-treatment during a previous period of detention.



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## HONG KONG SAR: DRAMATIC DETERIORATION OF RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

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- In 2020, LRWC's advocacy focussed attention on China's brutal crackdown in Hong Kong SAR to silence pro-democracy activists and stifle popular opposition to increased control by Beijing. China's violations of international human rights law obligations in Hong Kong SAR have included severe violations of the right of peaceful protest and arbitrary detention of human rights defenders. **February 2020:** Joint letter with 19 other NGOs from Africa, North America, Asia, Europe and the UK seeking release of and withdrawal of charges against civil rights observers who were clearly marked at the protests as observers and were peacefully recording and monitoring protests in Hong Kong SAR in November 2019 and January 2020.
- **12 May 2020:** Letter calling on the government of Hong Kong SAR to drop charges against 15 pro-democracy leaders arrested in violation of Hong Kong's international human rights law obligations.
- **27 May 2020:** Letter to the government of Hong Kong SAR reiterating a December 2019 request for an independent expert investigation of evidence of excessive or unlawful use of force by police against peaceful protesters and journalists in light of a report by the UN Human Rights Committee that a previous investigation had lacked sufficient capacity and independence. In late December 2019, the Private Secretary to Carrie Lam, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong SAR, had written a seven-page response to LRWC's December 2019 letter and accompanying press releases in Chinese and English.

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## COLOMBIA: "THE YEAR MASSACRES RETURNED...."

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The year 2020 has been described as "the year massacres returned to Colombia" with the highest number of assassinated human rights defenders and community leaders since 2011. At least 375 people were murdered in 90 massacres. During 2020, LRWC intervened with other lawyers' and human rights groups regarding dangers for Colombian lawyers.



- **9 February 2020:** LRWC letter responding to serious threats against human rights lawyer Adil Meléndez Marquez, noting deficiencies and withdrawals of protection measures put in place for him by Colombia's National Protection Unit.
- **14 July 2020:** LRWC oral video statement at the UN Human Rights Council calling attention to the risks to Colombia's human rights lawyers, who are inadequately protected from attacks.
- **21 July 2020:** Joint letter from international organisations spearheaded by the Colombian Caravana expressing serious concern about the situation of lawyers in Colombia confined to their homes during COVID-19, worsening harassment and threats against lawyers and their families.
- **24 July 2020:** Joint statement of organizations concerned about allegations of illegal surveillance by Colombia against at least 130 individuals, including human rights lawyers and defenders.
- **3 September 2020:** Joint letter led by The Law Society of England and Wales and the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales expressing concern about threats against lawyer, Reinaldo Villalba Vargas (photo right), and his legal team from the Jose Alvear Restrepo Collective.

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## IRAN: ENDANGERED WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYERS

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LRWC has monitored the situation of lawyers in Iran since 2003. Lawyers have long been persecuted for taking stands on human rights. In 2020, hundreds of human rights lawyers were reportedly in prison in Iran on terrorism-related charges apparently aimed at deterring other lawyers from representing dissidents. In 2020, the situation of Iran's women's human rights defenders came to the fore.

Several women lawyers suffered ongoing persecution for defending the human rights of women, including advocacy to end the compulsory wearing of head coverings. LRWC wrote letters or issued statements seeking release of several arbitrarily detained human rights lawyers. Nasrin Sotoudeh (photo left) is serving a sentence of 38 years in prison plus 148 lashes on charges of “inciting corruption and prostitution,” “openly committing a sinful act by appearing in public without a hijab,” and “disrupting public order” as a result of her human rights advocacy. Mr. Amirsalar Davoodi is serving a sentence of 29 years of imprisonment on national security charges for establishing a group on the messaging application Telegram where he criticised actions of Iranian authorities and judiciary, including for the detention of Nasrin Sotoudeh and other lawyers.

In 2020, the health of prisoners in Iran was also a subject of grave concern as human rights lawyers and defenders were excluded from temporary release of thousands of prisoners to alleviate health risks of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Davoodi reportedly contracted COVID-19 in Evin Prison. On 7 November 2020, Ms. Sotoudeh was released temporarily on medical grounds after considerable international advocacy. After her release, it was confirmed that she had contracted COVID-19 in prison. Despite health concerns, authorities sent her back to prison on 1 December 2020. LRWC intervened in 2020 as follows:



- **18 September 2020:** Joint statement with Lawyers for Lawyers and The Law Society of England and Wales, seeking release of Nasrin Sotoudeh from prison on medical grounds.
- **4 December 2020:** Joint statement with 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 (IBAHRI) deploring persecution of Nasrin Sotoudeh and other human rights lawyers in Iran persecuted for lawfully carrying out their professional duties.
- **4 December 2020:** Online seminar on the case of Nasrin Sotoudeh organized by the Law Society of England and Wales and the IBAHRI, with film clips discussion of the film *NASRIN*, released in 2020. LRWC was one of 10 co-sponsoring organizations.

**Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada**

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

*To all our members and donors*

*Thank you for being part of LRWC's community*

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## MYANMAR: DANGERS FOR LAWYERS & GENOCIDE AGAINST THE ROHINGYA

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LRWC's advocacy on Myanmar (Burma) since 2000 has focussed on the rule of law and integrity of legal systems. Since 2015, in addition to advocacy for individual lawyers under threat, LRWC has increased its emphasis on advocacy to address the lack of capacity of Myanmar's legal system to address entrenched impunity of Myanmar's military (called the Tatmadaw), particularly its crimes against humanity targeting ethnic minorities, including Rohingya people. In 2017, impunity for the Tatmadaw's massive expulsion of Rohingya led to global outrage. LRWC's numerous interventions over several years have included letters, statements, briefing

notes, public presentations in Vancouver and Ottawa, and oral statements to the UN Human Rights Council. In 2020, LRWC interventions included:

- **29 June 2020:** LRWC published the report of an online roundtable held 21 May 2020. The Roundtable was hosted by the Honourable Marilou McPhedran, Independent Senator, Parliament of Canada, the University of Victoria's Faculty of Law and Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives (CAPI), and the University of Ottawa's Human Rights Research and Education Centre. Convened by LRWC's Catherine Morris in her capacity as CAPI Research Associate, the round table brought together dozens of experts from around the world to consider the role of Canada in seeking justice for the Rohingya in the context of proceedings brought by The Gambia against Myanmar in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) under the Genocide Convention. Speakers and participants included academics, practitioners, current and former UN and Canadian officials, and civil society representatives.
- **July 2020:** LRWC joined with Lawyers for Lawyers in a submission to the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Myanmar taking place in early 2021. The submission focussed on Myanmar's harassment of lawyers and lack of consistent progress towards independence of the legal profession during the review period of 2016-2020. Lawyers have been subjected to death threats, surveillance, and physical attacks, including the 2017 shooting death of a lawyer, U Ko Ni (photo), which has never been impartially investigated according to UN standards for investigation of unlawful deaths.
- **14 July 2020:** LRWC and Lawyers for Lawyers made a joint oral video statement to the UN Human Rights Council on highlighting concerns about independence of the legal profession and the need for protection of lawyers in Myanmar in accordance with the UN *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers*.
- **22 September 2020:** LRWC made an oral video statement to the UN Human Rights Council reiterating concerns raised during the June session of the Council about ongoing impunity for attacks, surveillance, and criminalization of defenders in Myanmar, continued impunity of the Tatmadaw for atrocity crimes, and Myanmar's refusal to cooperate with Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council.

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## PAKISTAN: DAY OF THE ENDANGERED LAWYER JANUARY 2020

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LRWC has conducted advocacy on Pakistan's legal system since 2003. Pakistan was elected by the UN General Assembly as a member of the UN Human Rights Council in 2020 despite its serious human rights violations. LRWC's 2020 advocacy included:

- **7 January 2020:** LRWC letter condemning the December 2019 conviction and death sentence of university lecturer Junaid Hafeez for blasphemy under the Pakistan Penal Code after a grossly unfair trial. Mr. Hafeez



has been in prison, largely in solitary confinement, since his 2013 arrest. His first lawyer, Rashid Rehman Khan, was assassinated in May 2014 after agreeing to take the case.

- **23 January 2020:** Marking the Day of the Endangered Lawyer, a joint petition by 32 organizations around the world, including LRWC, called for action to protect lawyers in Pakistan..
- **24 January 2020:** An event in Toronto marking the Day of the Endangered Lawyer, entitled “The Role of Lawyers, Paralegals, Judges and Advocates in Defending the Rule of Law in Pakistan,” co-sponsored by the Law Society of Ontario, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International (see more below under educational events).

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### **THE PHILIPPINES: *IMPUNITY FOR EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS OF LAWYERS***

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LRWC has conducted advocacy on the Philippines since 2000. Attacks on human rights lawyers and defenders have dramatically increased since the election of President Rodrigo Duterte in July 2016. Since then, dozens of jurists have been murdered with impunity. LRWC was part of an intensive 2019-2020 global advocacy campaign seeking to halt thousands of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances in the Philippines since July 2016. In 2020, the Philippines remained a member of the UN Human Rights Council despite its grave violations and failure to cooperate with a Council resolution to halt extrajudicial killings in July 2019.



- **28 February 2020:** LRWC and the International Association of People’s Lawyers (IAPL) released a list of dozens of lawyers, judges and legal workers extrajudicially killed or attacked with murderous intent in the Philippines since July 2016.
- **16 June 2020:** LRWC and the Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC) submitted a joint written statement to the UN Human Rights Council for its 30 June to 17 July 2020 session noting the acceleration of extrajudicial killing and murderous attacks on lawyers and noting that the Philippines had failed to take effective measures to implement the recommendations of the 5 July 2019 Resolution of the Human Rights Council, “to take all necessary measures to prevent extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances, to carry out impartial investigations and to hold perpetrators accountable, in accordance with international norms and standards, including on due process and the rule of law.” The LRWC and ALRC statement listed 74 names of jurists and legal workers who were murdered or survived murderous attacks from July 2016 to February 2020.
- **27 August 2020:** Prior to the September/October session of the UN Human Rights Council, 62 NGOs, including LRWC, wrote a letter to member and observer States of the Human Rights Council seeking a resolution to establish an independent international investigative mechanism of human rights in the Philippines. The letter outlined “grave concern over ongoing extrajudicial executions and other serious human rights violations” by the Philippines, a member of the Human Rights Council. The Council’s preference to seek consensus resulted in a resolution that failed to establish an independent investigation. Instead, the Council adopted a weak consensus resolution for “technical cooperation and capacity building for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Philippines.”

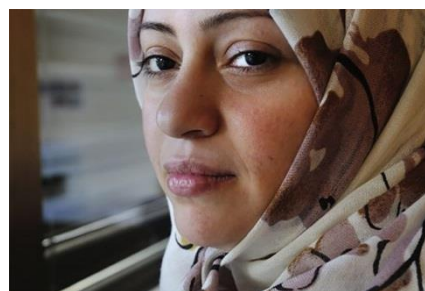


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## SAUDI ARABIA: GRAVE AND SYSTEMATIC VIOLATIONS

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In Saudi Arabia, numerous human rights defenders are in prolonged arbitrary detention with high risk of torture and ill-treatment. In October 2020, LRWC welcomed the news that due to these grave and systematic human rights violations, Saudi Arabia failed to receive enough votes in the General Assembly to secure a 2021-2023 seat on the UN Human Rights Council. LRWC had raised grave concerns about Saudi Arabia's persistent gross, widespread, and systematic violations of human rights while it was a member of the Council from 2014-2019, seeking action in 2018 towards suspension of Council members that refuse to "uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights" as required by General Assembly Resolution 60/251 of 2006. LRWC participated in the following interventions:



- **14 January 2020:** LRWC and the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights wrote a letter to authorities in Saudi Arabia seeking the release of lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair, who has been unlawfully imprisoned since April 2014 as a result of his representation of human rights defenders. Please see more information in the brief case study in the section below on the UN Special Procedures.
- **14 February 2020:** LRWC nominated human rights defender Ms. Samar Badawi for the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award. Ms. Badawi (photo top right), the former wife of Waleed Abu al-Khair, has been detained incommunicado in an unknown location since July 2018. At the time of her arrest and enforced disappearance, her daughter, then aged 6, was transferred to a relative. Ms. Badawi was last seen at the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh on 27 June 2019. She faces a sentence of up to 20 years for charges under Saudi Arabia's Cyber Crimes Law.
- **25 February 2020:** Ahead of the February-March 2020 session of the UN Human Rights Council, LRWC joined 43 NGOs in joint letters calling on 40 States to collectively identify and condemn widespread grave human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia.
- **13 July 2020:** Saudi Arabia's arbitrarily detained human rights defences were mentioned in an oral video statement by LRWC at the UN Human Rights Council. The statement emphasised that lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair is one of hundreds of defenders arbitrarily convicted and jailed in Saudi Arabia.
- **17 December 2020:** The safety and wellbeing of women's human rights defender Loujain Al-Hathloul (photo below) was the subject of a letter by LRWC calling for her release from imprisonment in reprisal for her



peaceful advocacy against the driving ban and male guardianship system. She was subjected to illegitimate criminal charges and unfair proceedings. During 1,001 days of pre-trial arbitrary detention, she was reportedly subjected to sexual harassment, torture, and other ill-treatment. On 28 December 2020, Saudi Arabia's Specialized Criminal Court convicted Ms. Hathloul, sentencing her to five years and eight months imprisonment. Global advocacy is credited with the court's ruling to suspend a portion of the sentence to allow for release early in 2021. However, she remains subject to a five-year travel ban and probation for three years. This means she is unable to exercise her right to freedom of expression without risk of being rearrested.

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### **SOUTH SUDAN: *IMPUNITY FOR EXTRAJUDICIALLY KILLINGS***

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The UN Human Rights Council appointed a Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan in 2016. In 2020, LRWC raised concerns about the continuation of South Sudan's entrenched impunity for serious crimes and human rights violations; continued threats against human rights defenders, journalists, and dissidents; and corporate corruption. LRWC continued its advocacy for an impartial investigation of the 2017 enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of human rights lawyer Dong Samuel Luak (photo) and opposition politician Aggrey Idri. LRWC conducted the following advocacy in 2020:

- **23 February 2020:** LRWC joined a group of 23 human rights NGOs in publishing an open letter calling on member States of the Human Rights Council to extend the mandate of the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan.
- **9 March 2020:** LRWC joined the International Commission of Jurists in an oral statement to the UN Human Rights Council underlining concerns of the UN Commission of Inquiry including lack of access to justice, impunity for rights violations, threats against human rights defenders, and extrajudicial killings including the murders of Dong Samuel Luak and Aggrey Idri.
- **16 July 2020:** LRWC gave an oral video statement to the UN Human Rights Council pointing out that the extrajudicial killing of lawyer Dong Samuel Luak remains uninvestigated.

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### **SUDAN: *JUSTICE FOR PEACEFUL PROTESTORS EXTRAJUDICIALLY KILLED***

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In December 2018, citizens of Sudan rose up to demand that long ruling President Omar al-Bashir step down after 30 years of rule. In April 2019, Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir was ousted by a military council. There were severe crackdowns against peaceful protestors between December 2018 and April 2019, resulting in the deaths of more than 100 people. In August 2019, a transitional government composed of military and civilian members replaced the military council.

In September 2019, the Government of Sudan agreed to the establishment a UN Human Rights Office in Sudan with several field offices. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights identified transitional justice as a key area of focus for the office. On 16 July 2020, LRWC presented an oral video statement to the UN Human Rights Council expressing concern about delays in accountability of perpetrators and reparations for victims of violent attacks by Sudan security forces.

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### **THAILAND: *SLAPPS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS***

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LRWC has conducted advocacy on Thailand since 2006, where human rights lawyers and defenders are often subjected to Strategic Litigation against Public Participation (SLAPP). They are threatened, charged or arbitrarily detained on offences such as criminal defamation, computer crimes, sedition, or lèse majesté. SLAPPs against human rights defenders by Thai poultry company Thammakaset Co. Ltd, (Thammakaset) and the Natural Fruit Company Ltd. (Natural Fruit) continued to be of concern in 2020. Numerous human rights

defenders in Thailand continue to be subjected to judicial harassment. LRWC's 2020 advocacy included the following:

- **27 April 2020:** LRWC and the International Commission of Jurists jointly filed an amicus curiae brief in criminal defamation proceedings by Thai poultry company, Thammasakaset Co. Ltd, against Thai journalist, Ms. Suchanee (Cloitre) Rungmuanporn, who in December 2019 had been convicted and sentenced to two years' imprisonment for comments on labour rights violations by Thammakaset. The charges against her were overturned on appeal in October 2020.
- **7 June 2020:** LRWC joined a group of 53 groups and 23 individuals urging the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights and the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights and other agencies working on Business and Human Rights to intervene in the ongoing situation of judicial harassment against women human rights defenders upholding land and environmental rights in Thailand.
- **8 June 2020:** Criminal defamation charges by Thammakaset were dismissed against two human rights defenders for whom LRWC had conducted advocacy, Ms. Sutharee Wannasiri and Mr. Nan Win (photo).
- **30 July 2020:** LRWC joined a statement by the Thailand Seafood Working Group registering concern about the decision of the US to maintain Thailand's ranking in the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report at "Tier 2" despite Thailand's weak and ineffective efforts to prevent and prosecute human trafficking in 2019 and ongoing SLAPPs against human rights defenders. The statement recommended that Thailand be downgraded to the "Tier 2 Watch List" with a view to future downgrading to "Tier 3," the lowest ranking, potentially triggers aid sanctions.
- **29 October 2020:** LRWC signed a joint letter of the Thailand Seafood Working Group urging the European Union to require Thailand's commitment to human rights including International Labour Organization (ILO) treaties and anti-SLAPP legislation prior to restarting EU-Thailand trade negotiations.

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### **TURKEY: THE PERSECUTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYERS**


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Deterioration of the rule of law in Turkey escalated dramatically after an attempted coup of 15 July 2016. Since then, Turkey has used vague and overbroad anti-terrorism laws to stifle dissent, and thousands of jurists have been arbitrarily dismissed or detained. Hundreds of human rights lawyers are currently arbitrarily detained on spurious charges. In September 2020, LRWC joined other human rights lawyers around the world in mourning the tragic death in custody of Ms. Ebru Timtik (photo), who died while on a hunger strike demanding fair trial rights in Turkey. LRWC's intensive advocacy on Turkey in 2020 was as follows:

- **22 January 2020:** LRWC letter calling for the release of arbitrarily detained women lawyers Esra Uymaz Saral, Ozge Elif Hendekci, and Büşra Erdal Cinkara. Ms. Saral was pregnant and in need of medical care, and Ms. Hendekci and Ms. Cinkara were imprisoned with their infant children. Ms. Saral was released on 13 February 2020 and sent a message of thanks to LRWC for its support and solidarity.
- **28 January 2020:** The UN Human Rights Council conducted its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Turkey. In July 2019, the Law Society of England and Wales, Lawyers for Lawyers, and LRWC made a joint stakeholder submission to the UPR. Several States made recommendations concerning independence of the judiciary, fair trial rights, and protection of human rights defenders which Turkey stated it "supported."
- **25 March 2020:** Endorsement of a statement by 16 NGOs welcoming Turkey's announcement of the release of 100,000 prisoners to prevent COVID-19 risks. Among Turkey's prisoners are many human rights

defenders, and the statement called on Turkish authorities to include in the release of lawyers, human rights defenders, and others arbitrarily detained after the 2016 coup attempt.

- **13 May 2020:** LRWC letter noting that Turkey failed to include persons unlawfully detained on politically-related “terrorism” charges in its April 2020 release of 90,000 prisoners due to COVID-19 risks. LRWC called for immediate and permanent release of all lawyers, human rights defenders, journalists, academics, politicians and others detained, convicted or sentenced on vague and overbroad terrorism-related charges. 
- **15 May 2020:** Endorsement of a letter by 12 NGOs calling on Turkey to release lawyer Turan Canpolat who is serving a 10-year prison sentence for use of a telephone application, “Bylock,” which was publicly available until February 2016 and retroactively criminalized after the attempted coup in July 2016.
- **29 May 2020:** Joint letter of 10 lawyers’ organizations expressing concern about joint criminal investigations of the Ankara Bar Association and the Diyarbakir Bar Association for “openly disrespect[ing] the religious belief of a group” after the bar associations criticized a government official for making public remarks provoking hostility against LGBT people.
- **24 June 2020:** Joint full-page advertisement in two Turkish newspapers by 34 lawyers’ associations from around the world pointing out that lawyers in Turkey “are being prosecuted and convicted in large numbers for simply doing their job and defending their clients” and expressing grave concern about the deteriorating health of lawyers Ebru Timtik and Aytaç Ünsal, who had been on a hunger strike for more than 150 days to demand fair trials in Turkey. Ms. Timtik was sentenced to 13.5 years imprisonment and Mr. Ünsal to 10.5 years.
- **13 July 2020:** Oral video statement to the UN Human Rights Council calling for release of human rights lawyers in Turkey, including Amnesty International chair, Taner Kılıç.
- **14 July 2020:** LRWC letter objecting to the six-year prison sentence of lawyers Mr. Taner Kiliç, Ms. Özlem Dalkiran, Ms. Idil Eser, and Mr. Gunal Kursun. The sentence was handed down on 3 July 2020 after an unfair trial on illegitimate “terrorism” charges.
- **12 August 2020:** Endorsement of a joint statement by 28 lawyers’ organizations seeking the release of Ebru Timtik, Aytaç Ünsal and other lawyers unlawfully convicted and sentenced to long-term imprisonment.
- **18 August 2020:** Joint letter to UN Special Procedures by 17 lawyers’ organizations seeking urgent intervention for the release of Ebru Timtik and Aytaç Ünsal, both feared to be near death as a result of their hunger strike in prison.
- **27 August 2020:** LRWC and lawyers around the world were shocked and saddened by the death of Ebru Timtik after 238 days of fasting to demand fair trials and release from prison for arbitrarily detained lawyers. Ms. Timtik died despite intensive global advocacy for her release. On 2 September 2020, thirteen UN Experts called for an investigation into her “entirely preventable” death. The Experts also called on Turkey to release other defenders.
- **2 September 2020:** Joint obituary for Ebru Timtik led by Lawyer for Lawyers published in two Turkish newspapers. LRWC was one of 139 lawyers’ organizations from around the world listed in the obituary.
- **11 September 2020:** Joint statement of 22 human rights organizations calling for an end to a campaign of mass arrests against lawyers after Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan gave a speech saying that lawyers accused of links to “terrorists” should be expelled from the legal profession. Days later, 60 lawyers were arrested for being “members of a terrorist organization.”
- **29 September 2020:** Joint oral video statement of LRWC and Lawyers for Lawyers to the UN Human Rights Council, emphasizing that lawyers “should not have to die or be imprisoned for asking that the rule of law be

respected” and seeking release of all arbitrarily detained defenders. The statement also expressed concern about amendments to Turkey’s Law on Lawyers aimed at undermining independence of the legal profession.

- **18 November 2020:** LRWC statement welcoming rare good news that a Turkish court had acquitted eleven people of false charges of membership in a terrorist organization and terrorist propaganda, including lawyers Levent Pişkin, Cahit Kırkzak, and Ayşe Batumlu. Levent Pişkin was named in the 2019 joint UPR submission of the Law Society of England and Wales, Lawyers for Lawyers, and LRWC (see 28 January above).

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### **UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: UNLAWFULLY DETAINED DEFENDERS**

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LRWC has conducted occasional advocacy for human rights defenders in the United Arab Emirates since 2015. On 21 February 2020, LRWC endorsed a letter of 37 NGOs and 19 human rights specialists led by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights and the International Campaign for Freedom in the UAE. The joint letter called for the unconditional release of unlawfully detained writers, academics and human rights defenders, including lawyer Dr. Mohammed Al-Roken, arbitrarily detained since July 2012; academic economist Dr. Nasser Bin Ghaith, detained since March 2017; and human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor, detained since March 2017.

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### **UNITED STATES: SYSTEMIC RACISM AND ATTACKS ON RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

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In 2020, LRWC monitored several issues of concern in the United States (US), including unlawful use of violence against peaceful protestors, and clearly identified journalists and legal observers, during demonstrations after the 25 May 2020 extrajudicial killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. Advocacy on this and other situations related to the US are outlined below:



- **9 April 2020:** LRWC joined more than 200 human rights groups and individuals in a letter calling on the US to immediately lift sanctions against Iran and Venezuela and to keep sanctions suspended at least until the World Health Organization declares each country free of COVID-19. The letter notes the 25 March statement of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights calling on States to ease or suspend sanctions so as to “enable medical systems to fight COVID-19 and limit global contagion.”
- **18 June 2020:** During the month of June, LRWC joined a campaign led by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) seeking a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the situation of systemic racism against Black people and violent suppression of peaceful protests in the US. The campaign included a joint letter of 8 June 2020 with hundreds of signatories from around the world and a joint oral statement to the UN Human Rights Council led by the ACLU and presented at the Council’s Urgent Debate on Racially Inspired Human Rights Violations held 17-18 June 2020. The Council adopted a consensus resolution on 18 June 2020.
- **29 June 2020:** LRWC joined hundreds of civil society and human rights organizations and thousands of individuals around the world in signing a letter to ask the US Congress to express support for the Open Technology Fund (OTF) and to ensure that the United States Agency for Global Media (USAGM) does not dismantle OTF or rescind support for its independent work towards safeguarding internet security.
- **29 July 2020:** LRWC announced an intention to monitor “with concern” allegations that Steven Donziger, a New York human rights lawyer, has been subjected to judicial harassment relating to his attempts to assist his clients to recover a judgement awarded by courts in Ecuador against Chevron. LRWC issued an 8-page



briefing note. Mr. Donziger has remained under house arrest without trial since early August 2019. On 17 October 2020, LRWC published a report of trial monitors' impartial analysis of a pre-trial conference; the report examined issues of judicial impartiality, fairness of the prosecutor, right to representation by counsel of choice, equality of arms, presumption of innocence, and right to a fair and public hearing, all in the context of rights protection during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **6 August 2020:** LRWC was among hundreds of organizations endorsing a letter of the ACLU to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights seeking implementation of the June 2020 Resolution of the Human Rights Council on systemic racism and police violence (see above).
- **1 October 2020:** LRWC was among 300 NGOs from more than 60 countries that joined an oral statement to the UN Human Rights Council led by the ACLU to follow up the Council's June 2020 resolution on systemic racism and police violence against people of African descent around the world, including the US.

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### **VIET NAM: HARASSMENT AND OBSTRUCTION OF LAWYERS AND DEFENDERS**

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LRWC has conducted advocacy for human rights lawyers in Vietnam since 2006. LRWC continues to monitor major concerns about the administration of justice, arbitrary detention, and forcible exile of human rights lawyers and defenders. In 2020, LRWC cooperated with Vietnamese and European defenders on joint advocacy:



- **8 October 2020:** Joint letter 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 held in Hanoi, Vietnam, in September 2020. Defense lawyers were harassed and obstructed in defending their 29 clients, 19 of whom indicated they were tortured to obtain forced confessions. The most severe sentences included the death penalty, life imprisonment, or lengthy prison sentences.

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### **YEMEN: WAR CRIMES ABETTED BY THIRD COUNTRIES' ARMS TRANSFERS**

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Human rights defenders have been heavily affected by the armed conflict in Yemen, which has been ongoing since 2014. Defenders have been subjected to harassment, false charges, arbitrary arrests, and physical attacks. Since 2018 LRWC has conducted advocacy concerning Yemen at the UN Human Rights Council. That year, the UN Secretary General sounded the alarm that the armed conflict had created the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.

By October 2020, it was estimated that there had been 233,000 war-caused deaths. The combatants in the armed conflict between the Government of Yemen and Houthi resistance forces include a coalition of countries led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and a number of armed non-state actors assisting the Government of Yemen.

In 2017, the UN Human Rights Council appointed a Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen. The UN Group of Experts have reported the targeting of human rights defenders, jurists and journalists. The Group of Experts in 2019 and 2020 expressed concern that conflict is exacerbated by the sale of arms to the parties by third party States. Canada, France, the UK, and the US have fuelled the conflict by providing weapons to members of the coalition. Iran has provided arms to Houthi forces. The majority of civilian casualties since



the civil war began in 2014 have been caused by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition air strikes, but the UN Group of Experts have reported evidence that all parties to the conflict have committed violations of international humanitarian law through air strikes, shellings, indiscriminate attacks, interference with humanitarian aid and access to food, murders and arbitrary detentions.

LRWC advocacy on Yemen in 2020 was as follows:

- **12 May 2020:** LRWC endorsement of a letter from more than 150 NGOs calling on the UN Human Rights Council mechanisms to help save the lives of four Yemeni journalists sentenced to death by de facto Houthi authorities in April 2020 on charges of “spying” and spreading false news “in support of the crimes of Saudi aggression and its allies against the Republic of Yemen.”
- **29 September 2020:** LRWC oral video statement to the UN Human Rights Council pointing out that parties to the conflict have targeted journalists, lawyers, and defenders, including women defenders, to repress dissent, and noting that the UN Group of Experts had singled out Canada, France, Iran, United Kingdom, and the US for supporting and helping to perpetuate the conflict by continuing to supply weapons to the parties. LRWC’s statement called for a Security Council referral of the Yemen conflict to the International Criminal Court, and a resolution requiring third countries to cease arms transfers to any of the parties to the conflict.

## LRWC AND THE UNITED NATIONS

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LRWC has held Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 2005. This means LRWC may send delegates to several UN bodies. In 2020, LRWC participated in all three sessions of the UN Human Rights Council as well as meetings held under the auspices of the General Assembly and ECOSOC.

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### UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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LRWC took part in two meetings held under the auspices of the UN General Assembly in 2020.

- **28 August 2020: UN Treaty Body Strengthening Process.** LRWC oral statement during an informal UN online consultation in Geneva, part of the 2020 Review of the UN Treaty Body System undertaken by the UN General Assembly as part of its Treaty Body Strengthening Process. LRWC’s statement was based on a briefing note entitled, “Fundamental pillar of the UN human rights system: Expertise, Independence, and Impartiality of UN Human Rights Treaty Body System” issued on 28 August 2020 and footnoted in the written version of LRWC’s online oral statement. The oral statement emphasized that States Parties to the treaty bodies have treaty obligations to ensure the expertise, independence, and integrity of Treaty Body members, expressing concern that some States Parties’ nominations to Treaty Bodies include persons with ties to governments, that nomination processes are generally not transparent, and that there is no pre-election process by which to objectively evaluate whether nominees’ qualifications meet the treaty requirements. LRWC recommended increased emphasis on independence, impartiality, expertise, and integrity of the Treaty Bodies, saying that “expertise entails gender balance” and that independence “entails provision of resources sufficient for effective and timely fulfilment of Treaty Body mandates.”
- **30 November 2020: NGO access to the UN during the COVID-19 pandemic.** LRWC joined a written statement to the UN General Assembly led by the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in

Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) on behalf of more than 100 NGOs seeking fair NGO access to the UN during the COVID-19 pandemic. 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.”

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### **UN HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (HLPF)**

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The UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HPLF) was established in 2012 by the UN Conference on Sustainable Development. The HPLF meets annually under the auspices of UN ECOSOC.

On 26 May 2020, LRWC joined 460 civil society organizations from 115 countries in a letter seeking support from UN Member States to ensure the effective participation of civil society during the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) scheduled for 7-16 July 2020. The letter referenced the 23 April 2020 statement of the UN Secretary General, “We are all in this together,” which emphasized the essential role of civil society in implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The joint statement made recommendations for civil society participation in the HLPF.

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### **UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

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LRWC regularly participates in the work of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) through written and oral statements, and submissions to the Council’s Special Procedures. LRWC regularly accredits volunteers to attend Council sessions to make oral statements and to engage in face-to-face meetings with Special Procedures mandate holders, diplomats and civil society representatives from around the world.

LRWC’s participation in the work of the Human Rights Council has expanded LRWC’s ability to conduct in person strategy meetings to strengthen relationships and solidarity with leaders of human rights organizations around the world. LRWC’s volunteers attend the Council on a self-funded basis.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic precluded in-person attendance in Geneva. However, LRWC participated in all three regular sessions of the Council in 2020. LRWC volunteers prepared and submitted a written statement on the situation of extrajudicially killed lawyers in the Philippines and made or participated in 14 oral statements by video or by joining oral statements of other NGOs present at Council sessions in Geneva.



UN Human Rights Council chamber, Palais des Nations, Geneva

## WRITTEN AND ORAL STATEMENTS TO THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL IN 2020

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### 43RD SESSION OF THE UNHRC, 24 FEBRUARY TO 23 MARCH, AND RESUMED 15 JUNE TO 23 JUNE 2020

#### *Preparatory letters to member States prior to the 45<sup>th</sup> session*

- **6 February 2020, South Sudan:** Ahead of the 43<sup>rd</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, LRWC joined 22 NGOs in signing a letter drafted by the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (“Defend Defenders”) to all UN Human Rights Council member States and Observer States calling for their active support for extension of the mandate of the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan.
- **25 February 2020, Human rights defenders:** Ahead of the 43<sup>rd</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, LRWC joined 43 NGOs in signing a letter produced by the International Service for Human Rights calling on Council member States to support the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and oppose attempts to dilute the mandate.

#### *Oral statements*

- **9 March 2020, South Sudan:** LRWC oral video statement and Interactive Dialogue with the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, Human Rights Council, “Human Rights Violations and Corporate Accountability in the Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan.”
- **18 June 2020, Systemic racism and police violence in the US:** Joint oral statement of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), “Urgent Debate on Racially Inspired Human Rights Violations,” Human Rights Council, Urgent Debate, resumed 43<sup>rd</sup> session.

### 44TH SESSION UNHRC: 30 JUNE TO 17 JULY 2020

#### *Written statement*

- **16 June 2020, Philippines:** Joint written statement by LRWC and the Asian Legal Resource Centre, endorsed by the International Association of People’s Lawyers, “Acceleration of extrajudicial killings of jurists in the Philippines.”

#### *Oral Statements*

- **9 July 2020, Philippines, Myanmar, South Sudan:** LRWC oral video statement, “Extrajudicial killings of jurists in Philippines, Myanmar, South Sudan,” Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions.
- **10 July 2020, China:** Joint oral statement led by the International Service for Human Rights, “China: End restrictions on free media and lawyers,” Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression.
- **13 July 2020, China, Turkey, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Colombia:** LRWC oral video statement, “Duty of States to ensure protection of lawyers: 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the UN *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers*,” Interactive Dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on independence of judges and lawyers.
- **13 July 2020, Myanmar:** Joint oral video statement to UN Human Rights Council with Lawyers for Lawyers, “Myanmar must ensure the independence of the legal profession,” Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

- **16 July 2020, Sudan:** LRWC oral statement, “Sudan’s National Investigative Committee should release report regarding attack on peaceful protesters in 2019,” Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on oral reports of the Government of Sudan and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

#### **45TH SESSION OF THE UNHRC: 14 SEPTEMBER TO 6 OCTOBER 2020**

##### ***Preparatory letter to member States prior to the 45<sup>th</sup> session***

- **7 September 2020, Role of lawyers:** Prior to the 45th session of the Human Rights Council, LRWC joined 40 lawyers’ organizations in a letter seeking support of Council member States’ for the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and for the Council of Europe’s initiative towards a future binding “European Convention on the profession of lawyer,” aimed at preserving the independence and integrity of the administration of justice and the rule of law. The joint letter was coordinated by the Council Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE).

##### ***Oral Statements***

- **21 September 2020, Turkey and Iran:** Joint oral video statement with Lawyers for Lawyers, Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.
- **21 September 2020, China:** LRWC oral video statement, “Criminalization of peaceful dissent and human rights advocacy in Hong Kong SAR,” Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons.
- **22 September 2020, Myanmar:** LRWC oral video statement, “Myanmar legal profession; impunity for atrocity crimes,” Interactive Dialogue, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.
- **29 September 2020, Turkey:** Oral video statement of Lawyers for Lawyers joined by The Law Society of England and Wales, LRWC, and the International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute, Universal Periodic Review adoption.
- **29 September 2020, Yemen conflict:** LRWC oral video statement, “Cease arms transfers by Canada, France, Iran, US & UK,” Interactive Dialogue, Group of Experts on Yemen.
- **1 October 2020, Systemic racism against people of African descent:** Oral statement of American Civil Liberties Association, joined by numerous NGOs including LRWC, delivered by the International Service for Human Rights, General debate on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.
- **1 October 2020, Cambodia:** oral video statement, “Lack of independent courts and misuse of laws to crackdown on dissenters,” Interactive Dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Cambodia.

## SPECIAL PROCEDURES OF THE UNHRC

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The Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council consist of pro bono independent human rights experts appointed by the Council. LRWC regularly engages with Special Procedures through oral video statements in interactive dialogues at UNHRC sessions, letters to Special Procedures, and occasional face to face meetings. In 2020 LRWC sent correspondence to several of the 44 thematic mandates and 11 country-specific mandates:

- Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers;
- Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions;
- Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders;
- Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression;
- Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association;
- Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- Special Rapporteur on protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism;
- Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- Working Group on arbitrary detention;
- Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances;
- Working Group on the issue of human rights and business;
- Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia;
- Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran;
- Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

THE PROHIBITION OF ARBITRARY DETENTION  
IS **ABSOLUTE** EVEN DURING TIMES OF  
PUBLIC EMERGENCIES.

*UN WORKING GROUP ON ARBITRARY DETENTION*

## CASE STUDY: LRWC AND THE UN WORKING GROUP ON ARBITRARY DETENTION

LRWC has regularly made submissions to the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), a group of five independent experts, representing five UN regions. The WGAD has a mandate to investigate and make recommendations regarding allegations of unlawful deprivation of liberty. Complaints to the WGAD may be initiated by individuals or groups or by the WGAD itself.

### *The situation of arbitrarily detained lawyer in Saudi Arabia, Waleed Abu al-Khair*

During 2020 LRWC followed up on a WGAD opinion resulting from a petition initiated by LRWC with other NGOs in 2015 in the case of human rights lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair (photo), who has been arbitrarily detained in Saudi Arabia since 2014. This case study illustrates limitations of UN Human Rights Council measures when the State perpetrator fails to cooperate with the Council's Special Procedures. Saudi Arabia's impunity for grave violations is abetted by other States, including General Assembly members who elected the country to the Human Rights Council from 2006-2012 and 2014-2019. Below is a timeline of events in the context of LRWC interventions.



- **January 2015:** Mr. Abu al-Khair was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment on charges such as “breaking allegiance to and disobeying the ruler” and “setting up an unlicensed organization.”
- **April 2015:** LRWC took the lead in the drafting and filing of a joint petition of eight human rights organizations to the WGAD seeking a remedy for the arbitrary detention of Mr. Abu al-Khair. The WGAD issued an opinion in November 2015 that his detention was arbitrarily and that the charges against him were unlawful reprisals for his human rights work. The WGAD also found that the charges against him fell short of international standards and that he did not receive a fair trial. The WGAD Opinion found that the detention of several other people was also arbitrary, including Raif Badawi, who has been subjected to arbitrary detention since 2012 and tortured by means of lashing in 2015, and Samar Badawi, who has been subjected to arbitrary incommunicado detention since 2018. Samar Badawi is the sister of Raif Badawi and the former wife of Waleed Abu al-Khair.
- **July 2018:** The WGAD issued another opinion recommending the release of Waleed Abu al-Khair. However, Saudi Arabia did not release Mr. Abu al-Khair.
- **March 2019:** LRWC submitted to the WGAD an update on Mr. Abu Al-Khair's continued arbitrary detention.
- **September 2019:** In an oral statement to the UN Human Rights Council, LRWC advocated that Saudi Arabia's human rights violations made it unqualified to be a member of the Council.
- **September 2019:** LRWC examined Saudi Arabia's record of implementation of WGAD recommendations, finding that between 2002 and 2018, the WGAD had identified 105 adults and four minors who were arbitrarily detained in Saudi Arabia. In 53 of 55 Opinions from 2002-2018, the WGAD concluded that detentions were arbitrary, but Saudi Arabia released only eight of the persons the WGAD recommended for release.
- **January and March 2020:** LRWC continued to write letters to the government of Saudi Arabia seeking release of Mr. Abu-Khair and other defenders in Saudi Arabia, sending copies to the WGAD and other Special Procedures.
- **June 2020:** The WGAD Secretariat wrote to LRWC to confirm it had sent a follow-up letter to the government of Saudi Arabia in January 2020. Yet Mr. Abu al-Khair remains in prison, along with numerous other defenders. Other Special Procedures mandate holders have called for the immediate release of Waleed Abu al-Khair, Raif Badawi and the other arbitrarily detained rights defenders.
- **October 2020:** Ahead of the UN General Session, a coalition of human rights organizations from around the world called on UN member States to oppose the election of China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Pakistan and Uzbekistan to the Human Rights Council, saying their human rights records make them “unqualified”.
- **14 October 2020: “Stunning rebuke”:** In what was called a “stunning rebuke,” Saudi Arabia failed to gain enough votes to secure a seat on the Council. China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Pakistan and Uzbekistan were elected to the Council. LRWC continues to monitor and advocate in this and other cases involving persecution of human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia. See above under Countries of Concern: Saudi Arabia.



## UN HRC UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR)

Every four years, each UN member State undergoes a Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by the UN Human Rights Council. The UPR is conducted by other States. The UPR process is overseen by a Working Group composed of a “troika” of representatives of three States. The UPR is based on reports provided by stakeholders, including civil society groups, a report by the State under review, and half-day hearing by the Council. Prior to the UPR hearing, the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) creates a summary of all reports, including the report of the State under review and reports of other stakeholders.

NGOs do not attend the UPR hearing itself. Instead, prior to the hearing, NGOs lobby States to make recommendations to the State under review. After the UPR, all recommendations are compiled, and the State under review provides an Outcome Report and an Addendum indicating what recommendations it “supports” and what recommendations it “notes.” At a subsequent session, the Human Rights Council holds a debate on the outcome of the UPR at which States and NGOs make oral statements.

While formal NGO input is limited, human rights organizations’ identification of human rights violations and concise articulation of specific remedies are often adopted by States in their recommendations to the State under review. In 2020, LRWC worked with other NGOs to produce reports and comment on:

### *UPR of Myanmar*

- **July 2020:** LRWC joined Lawyers for Lawyers in a July 2020 submission for the UPR of Myanmar scheduled for early 2021. The joint submission focussed attention on lack of consistency in Myanmar’s progress towards an independent legal profession and outlined examples of harassment, interference, with the work of lawyers as well as threats, surveillance, and attacks, including the extrajudicial killing of lawyer U Ko Ni in 2017.

### *UPR of Turkey*

- **January 2020:** A Fact Sheet, prepared by the Law Society of England and Wales was distributed to selected UN member States prior to the UPR hearing of Turkey on 20 January 2020. The Fact Sheet highlighted recommendations made by 14 NGOs, including LRWC, in joint UPR submissions filed in 20 July 2019. At the UPR in January 2020, a number of States’ made recommendations for improvements to judicial independence and fair trial rights.
- **29 September 2020:** LRWC joined an oral video statement given by Lawyers for Lawyers, also joined by The Law Society of England and Wales, and the International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute. While welcoming Turkey’s support for some recommendations relating to the rights of human rights defenders including lawyers, the statement pointed out that many lawyers representing clients in politically sensitive cases are being arrested and some are being charged with the same terrorism-related offences of which their clients are accused in violation of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, which states that lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients’ causes and that lawyers must be able to carry out their professional duties without harassment, intimidation or improper interference.



Joint oral video statement delivered at Turkey’s UPR consideration at the Human Rights Council, 29 September 2020. This debate was held in the Assembly Hall, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

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## VIRTUAL INFORMATION SESSION WITH UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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LRWC was among 33 NGOs joining a written statement to the first ever virtual information session with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, held 9 April 2020. The joint statement was entitled, “Civil society’s call to states: We are in this together, don’t violate human rights while responding to COVID-19.” It sought States’ compliance with their international law obligations and to ensure that any restrictions on human rights are necessary, proportionate, inclusive, time-limited and meet all other requirements under international human rights law.

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## UN HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES

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Each of the core UN human rights treaties sets out a system of monitoring States Parties’ performance under the treaties through a Committee composed of independent experts appointed by the States Parties to the treaty. There are ten treaty bodies, together comprising the UN Treaty Body System, listed below in date order of adoption of the relevant treaty:

- Committee on Economic and Social Rights (CESCR), *International Covenant on Social and Economic Rights*, 1966;
- Human Rights Committee (HRCttee), *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR), 1966;
- Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (ICERD), 1969
- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), 1979;
- Committee against Torture (CAT), *Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (UNCAT), 1987;
- Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), 1990;
- Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW); *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families* (ICRMW), 2003;
- Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT), *Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (OPCAT), 2006;
- Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD), 2008
- Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED), *International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance* (ICPPED), 2010.

The treaty bodies’ responsibilities include periodic review of the performance of countries that have ratified the particular treaty. NGOs, including LRWC, regularly submit reports for consideration of the treaty bodies during the country’s periodic review. Treaty bodies also issue General Comments (or General Recommendations) regarding issues that require guidance to States.

LRWC's interventions and reports often make reference to treaty bodies' recommendations. In 2020, for example, LRWC sought Canada's implementation of recommendations made by the CERD:

- **March 2020:** "Canada's international human rights law obligations to suspend construction of the Coastal GasLink Pipeline and stop use of force against the Wet'suwet'en: Legal Brief." See the full citation below under Publications.

In 2020, LRWC responded to the invitation the Human Rights Committee's for input of NGOs into its July 2020 General Comment on the right of peaceful assembly:

- **20 February 2020:** "Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee on Draft General Comment No.37 on Article 21 (right of peaceful assembly) of the ICCPR"

LRWC also made recommendations to the UN General Assembly's 2020 Treaty Body Review, citing LRWC's briefing paper on independence of treaty body members:

- **28 August 2020:** "Fundamental pillars of the UN human rights system: Expertise, Independence, and Impartiality of UN Human Rights Treaty Body Members. Briefing Paper."

Full citations to these publications are below under LRWC Publications.

## LEGAL RESEARCH & EDUCATION

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LRWC reports, statements, complaints, amicus briefs and other written materials are available online at [www.lrwc.org](http://www.lrwc.org) in the [library section](#) and/or in one of the [country sections](#) and may be downloaded free of charge and freely reproduced under a Creative Commons license. People are free to copy, distribute and display LRWC work and to make derivative works, with appropriate credit. Written and oral statements to the UN Human Rights Council and written reports to UN treaty monitoring bodies can be accessed on UN websites and LRWC's website.

## PUBLICATIONS

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In 2020, LRWC published the following:

### HANDBOOKS

- **Lois Leslie, *Attacking Defenders: The Criminalization of Human Rights Advocacy. A guide to international law rights of human rights defenders***, with a foreword by Michel Forst, former UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders (LRWC, May 2020, and CANLII October 2020), online LRWC: <<https://www.lrwc.org/attacking-defenders-the-criminalization-of-human-rights-advocacy/>>.
- **Lois Leslie, *The Right to Dissent: International law obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the right to participate in public affairs by engaging in criticism, opposition and dissent*** (LRWC 2017 and CANLII October 2020), online LRWC: <<https://www.lrwc.org/the-right-to-dissent-international-law-obligations-to-respect-protect-and-fulfill-the-right-to-participate-in-public-affairs-by-engaging-in-criticism-opposition-and-dissent-handbook/>>.



- **International Bar Association Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) in partnership with LRWC, the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales, Lawyers for Lawyers and the Human Rights House Foundation. *Tool Kit for Lawyers at Risk*** (IBAHRI, January 2020), online LRWC: <<https://www.lrwc.org/toolkit-for-lawyers-at-risk/>>.

#### NEWSLETTERS, REPORTS, BRIEFS, AND PAPERS

- **Gail Davidson and Heather Neun, “Canada’s international human rights law obligations to suspend construction of the Coastal GasLink Pipeline and stop use of force against the Wet’suwet’en: Legal Brief,”** LRWC, March 2020, online LRWC: <<https://www.lrwc.org/canada-legal-brief-international-law-wetsuweten/>>.
- **Pearl Eliadis, Gail Davidson, and Catherine Morris, “Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee on Draft General Comment No.37 on Article 21 (right of peaceful assembly) of the ICCPR,”** 20 February 2020, online LRWC: <<https://www.lrwc.org/un-human-rights-committee-general-comment-on-peaceful-assembly/>>.
- **Marcia V.J. Kran, O.C., “Amplifying the Impact of UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies on the Enjoyment of Human Rights: Opportunities for Civil Society Action,”** paper based on speaking notes for LRWC’s webinar on 10 December 2020, online LRWC: <<https://www.lrwc.org/the-un-human-rights-treaty-bodies-a-lecture-by-marcia-kran-10-december-2020/>>.
- **Catherine Morris, “Fundamental pillars of the UN human rights system: Expertise, Independence, and Impartiality of UN Human Rights Treaty Body Members. Briefing Paper,”** LRWC, 28 August 2020, online LRWC: <<https://www.lrwc.org/united-nations-treaty-body-review-informal-consultations-28-august-2020-oral-statement/>>.
- LRWC published quarterly [newsletters](#) in 2020.

#### VIDEO

##### **“What are the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers? A video explanation in 8 minutes,”**

International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), LRWC, Lawyers for Lawyers, the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales, the International Commission of Jurists, and the Human Rights House Foundation, July 2020, online: <<https://www.lrwc.org/30th-anniversary-of-un-basic-principles-on-the-role-of-lawyers-press-release/>>.

#### LRWC ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN PERIODICALS

- **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, online *Slaw.ca*: <<http://www.slaw.ca/2020/10/27/canadian-pro-bono-lawyers-amplify-the-calls-for-justice-worldwide-30th-anniversary-of-the-un-basic-principles-on-the-role-of-lawyers/>> or LRWC: <<https://www.lrwc.org/canadian-pro-bono-lawyers-amplify-the-calls-for-justice-worldwide-30th-anniversary-of-the-un-basic-principles-on-the-role-of-lawyers-report-from-lrwc/>>.

- **Catherine Morris, “Doing the Two-Step on Uneven Platforms: Successes and Setbacks of Human Rights Advocacy,”** *Slaw.ca*, 30 December 2020, online *Slaw.ca*: <<https://www.slaw.ca/2020/12/30/doing-the-two-step-on-uneven-platforms-successes-and-setbacks-of-human-rights-advocacy/>> or LRWC: <<https://www.lrwc.org/doing-the-two-step-on-uneven-platforms-successes-and-setbacks-of-human-rights-advocacy/>>.
- **Catherine Morris, “Lawyers in Danger: Threats to Advocates Worldwide,”** *The Advocate* 78(6) (November 2020): 867-73, online *Advocate*: <[https://the-advocate.ca/emag/issues/2020/november/page\\_68.html](https://the-advocate.ca/emag/issues/2020/november/page_68.html)> or LRWC: <<https://www.lrwc.org/lawyers-in-danger-threats-to-advocates-worldwide-the-advocate-november-2020/>>.
- **Catherine Morris, “Reflections on the 19 June 2020 UN Human Rights Council resolution on systemic racism, police brutality, and unlawful suppression of peaceful protest,”** *Slaw.ca*, 23 June 2020, online *Slaw.ca*: <<http://www.slaw.ca/2020/06/23/you-are-your-brothers-and-sisters-keepers-now-is-the-time-to-move-from-words-to-deeds/>> or LRWC: <<https://www.lrwc.org/reflections-on-the-19-june-2020-un-human-rights-council-resolution-on-systemic-racism-police-brutality-and-unlawful-suppression-of-peaceful-protest-publication/>>.

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## EDUCATIONAL EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

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Central to LRWC’s mandate is the provision of education about international human rights laws and standards with particular focus on the rule of law, integrity of legal systems, the right to legal representation, and access to remedies. LRWC members participate in educational conference sponsored by others. In 2020, LRWC engaged in the hosting, co-sponsoring or attendance at the following educational events:

- **24 January 2020: Day of the Endangered Lawyer 2020: The Role of Lawyers, Paralegals, Judges and Advocates in Defending the Rule of Law in Pakistan**, cosponsored LRWC and the Law Society of Ontario in Toronto with a panel of including Mariam Mufti (University of Waterloo), Abdul Hamid Khan (lawyer and LRWC member), Ferry de Kerckhove (former Canadian High Commissioner to Pakistan), and Haroon Siddiqui (*Toronto Star*). The event was co-sponsored by Amnesty International Canada and Human Rights Watch Canada.
- **10 December 2020: International Human Rights Day: An overview of the UN Human Rights System**, webinar hosted by LRWC, featuring expert speakers, Marcia Kran, O.C., a member of the UN Human Rights Committee, Catherine Morris, LRWC Executive Director, and Harini Sivalingam, LRWC Director, along with discussion moderator, Melissa Tessler, and technical moderator, Joey Doyle, both LRWC Directors.
- **31 March 2020: Coordinating Strategies to ensure protection of international human rights during COVID-19**. LRWC convened an electronic meeting with more than a dozen leaders of international human rights groups from across Canada on to discuss ways to coordinate efforts to advocate for international human rights-based approaches to governments’ COVID-19 strategies.

## NOMINATIONS AND AWARDS

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In 2020 LRWC nominated several human rights defenders for awards. Publicity associated with nomination for awards can enhance the safety and reputation of human rights defenders at risk of vilification, illegitimate charges, arbitrarily imprisonment or other threats.

- **March 2020:** Saudi Arabia's Samar Badawi was nominated for the Robert F. Kennedy Human rights Award
- **April 2020:** Colombia's Adil Mélenz Marquez was nominated for the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize
- **December 2020:** LRWC's Catherine Morris was a juror for the Moore Prize 2020 for Writing on Human Rights, which announced its short-list on Human Rights Day, 10 December 2020, and provided the date of 11 January 2021 for announcement of the winning title.

## WORK WITH OTHER NGOS

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LRWC collaborated with hundreds of domestic, regional, and international NGOs around the world working to promote and protect some aspect of internationally protected rights. Work in cooperation with other organizations serves to increase the quantity, extend the scope, improve the quality, and enhance the effectiveness of letters, written and oral statements, amicus briefs, petitions, and reports to monitoring bodies and education initiatives.

## LRWC IN THE NEWS IN 2020

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The work of LRWC was mentioned in a number of news stories in 2020, which publicity amplifies the advocacy of LRWC's research, education, and advocacy, including the following (in date order):

- "LSO event explores nuances of supporting human rights abroad: 2020's International Day of the Endangered Lawyer focused on lawyers in Pakistan," *Law Times*, 27 January 2020.
- "Toolkit on Lawyers at Risk" was launched on Day of the Endangered Lawyer," *The Canadian Lawyer*, 6 February 2020.
- "Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada petitions Biya over sacking of Agbor Balla," *Cameroon Guardian Post*, 11 June 2020.
- "Privacy and civil rights advocates urge federal government to ban facial recognition surveillance," *The Canadian Lawyer*, 15 July 2020.
- "Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada urges Zoom to abide by international human rights obligations: Zoom suspended accounts of human rights activists in response to request from government of China." *The Canadian Lawyer*, 28 July 2020.
- "LRWC calls out potential breach of international law in U of T staff recruitment process," *Law Times*, 14 October 2020.
- "Lawyers' Rights Watch report summarizes its interventions at UN to protect practitioners," *The Canadian Lawyer*, 6 November 2020. See more under publications (Slaw.ca).
- "What Went Before: Slain lawyer, judges, prosecutors," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 18 November 2020.



## BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

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Directors of LRWC and LRW(LR)C are elected each year at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and serve until the next election. The 2019 AGM was held on 14 May 2020.

### DIRECTORS MAY 2019 – MAY 2020

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#### LRWC

Clive Ansley  
Marjorie Cohn  
Gail Davidson  
Joshua Lam  
Heather Neun  
Brian Samuels, Q.C.  
David Sutherland Q.C.  
Grace Woo

#### LRW(LR)C

Joey Doyle  
Sebastian Ennis  
Rob Lapper, Q.C.  
Gavin Magrath  
Catherine Morris  
Renée Mulligan  
Margaret (Peggy) Stanier  
Melissa Tessler

### DIRECTORS 2020 – 2021

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#### LRWC

Clive Ansley (Vice-Chair)  
Temisan Boyo May-July 2020  
Marjorie Cohn  
Gail Davidson  
Joshua Lam (Secretary/Treasurer)  
Leo McGrady, Q.C.  
Heather Neun  
Brian Samuels, Q.C.  
David F. Sutherland, Q.C. (Chair)  
Maureen Webb (May-September 2020)

#### LRW(LR)C

Joey Doyle (Vice-Chair)  
Rob Lapper Q.C.  
Gavin Magrath (Chair)  
Robert Morales  
Renée Mulligan  
Harini Sivalingam  
Margaret (Peggy) Stanier (Treasurer)  
Melissa Tessler (Secretary)  
Grace Li Xiu Woo  
Temisan Boyo (since July 2020)

## VOLUNTEERS, DONORS, AND STAFF

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LRWC is grateful for the ongoing dedication of volunteers, donors and part time staff who faithfully conduct research, education, and advocacy to uphold international human rights law and standards. In 2020, dozens of LRWC members spent countless pro bono hours conducting research, education and advocacy for LRWC events, reports, publications, letters and statements. Human rights organizations increasingly face the need to ensure security and privacy. In 2020 LRWC implemented a number of new privacy and security measures, thus names of volunteers, donors, and staff members are not listed here with the exception of LRWC's board members, Executive Directors, and those named above in publications or public events.

## TAKE UP THE CHALLENGE

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### *Membership in LRWC*

**Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada**

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

*Defending defenders around the world*

*[www.lrwc.org/membership/](http://www.lrwc.org/membership/)*

Telephone: +1-604-736-1175

Email: [lrwc@lrwc.org](mailto:lrwc@lrwc.org)

Website: <http://www.lrwc.org>

### **SHARING LRWC POSTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA *AMPLIFIES* OUR ADVOCACY**

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We invite LRWC members to share LRWC's posts on social media to strengthen our advocacy for human rights defenders at risk.

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/LRWCanada>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LawyersRightsWatchCanada>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/lawyersrightswatchcanada/>