

Organization: Lawyers for Lawyers
Item: Item 4: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus
Date: 5 July 2021
Speaker: Mr. Leroy Niekoop

Oral Statement to the 47th Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Lawyers for Lawyers & Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC), NGOs in Special Consultative Status

Mme. President,

Lawyers for Lawyers and Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada thank the Special Rapporteur for her report¹. We share the Special Rapporteur's concerns that the already existing pressure and harassment of lawyers in Belarus intensified in 2020 and persists in 2021².

We are alarmed by reports that in the aftermath of the August 2020 presidential elections, many lawyers have been arrested or detained for exercising their professional activities. There are disturbing reports that many arrested and detained citizens have not had access to a legal representative of their own choosing, and that lawyer-client confidentiality has often not been respected.

In recent months, there has been an unprecedented increase in the disbarment of lawyers by the Qualification Commission for legal practice in the Republic of Belarus³. Many of those lawyers were defending opposition figures and protestors or speaking out about the rule of law, administration of justice, and human rights.

The Belarus government has also introduced amendments to the Law on the Bar and Advocacy in Belarus that restrict independence of the legal profession as a whole.

We ask the Council to urge Belarus to:

- Guarantee that all lawyers in Belarus are able to practise their profession without intimidation, harassment, improper interference or reprisals.
- Repeal the amendments to the Law on the Bar and Advocacy in Belarus and amend the Law to ensure independence of the legal profession according to international standards.

Thank you.

¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Anaïs Marin, 4 May 2021, A/HRC/47/49, available at: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/47/49>

² Id. par. 57

³ During the side-event '[Lawyers Under Threat: Increasing Suppression of the Legal Profession in Belarus](#)' a joint report will be presented prepared by legal organizations including Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L). The report outlines the government crackdown on opposition and critical voices in Belarus following the 2020 presidential election, including on lawyers defending opposition figures and protestors or speaking out about the rule of law, administration of justice, and human rights. It uses various public case studies to illustrate the harassment, intimidation, hindrance and interference inflicted upon Belarusian lawyers. The public cases not only illustrate the impact of the government crackdown in individual lawyers but also reveal a concerning trend of interference with the independence of the legal profession in Belarus and violations of lawyers' human rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association whether through disbarments, administrative or criminal charges against lawyers.