

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION NEWS

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

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

Promoting human rights by protecting those who defend them

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This edition of LRWC's ACTION NEWS features work of LRWC volunteers during the last quarter of 2021 to stand up for lawyers and human rights defenders under threat around the world.

When lawyers are threatened, charged, jailed, disbarred, or attacked for representing victims of human rights abuses, others take notice. If impunity for threats or attacks against lawyers is permitted, others are emboldened to do the same. When human rights advocates are endangered or punished for doing their jobs, other lawyers hesitate to put themselves at risk, making it difficult for victims of rights violations to obtain needed legal representation.



In 2021, LRWC volunteers wrote or joined dozens of [letters and statements](#) to government officials and made more than two dozen written or oral statements at the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council. LRWC focused particular attention on the situations of lawyers and defenders in places where defenders are currently under siege, such as [China](#) (including [Hong Kong](#)), [Colombia](#), [Iran](#), [Philippines](#), [Turkey](#) and a number of other countries where LRWC has capacity for interventions. The dire situations of human rights advocates in [Afghanistan](#), [Myanmar](#), and [Saudi Arabia](#) continue to call for attention.

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NEWS AND UPDATES

WINTER 2022

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2021

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*Executive Director's message, continued****You can help protect lawyers under attack with your membership and donations***

And there are many other places where lawyers and defenders need advocacy. LRWC is volunteer-run, and can't do it without the support of members and donors. Thanks to those of you who have [joined or renewed](#) your membership. [Your donations helps us to defend defenders](#) all over the world who risk everything to uphold justice for their clients and their societies.

With gratitude for your solidarity and support,

Catherine Morris
Transitional Executive Director, LRWC

Upcoming Events

The Day of the Endangered Lawyer, 24 January 2022: Lawyers in Colombia featured at upcoming events

LRWC has been working with human rights organizations around the world to plan for the 24 January 2022 Day of the Endangered Lawyer. See more under Colombia below. Events are occurring around the world. LRWC is co-sponsoring two online events. Register for one or both of the following:

- [Discussion on the UN Guidelines for Lawyers in Support of Peaceful Assemblies](#), Online event 24 January 2022, 07:30 – 09:00 am (Eastern); 13:30 to 15:00 (Zurich). Panel includes the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Assembly and speakers from Colombia and Hong Kong.
- [Colombia: The Day of the Endangered Lawyer](#), 24 January 2022, 17:00- 19:00 Eastern; 14:00-16:00 (Pacific). Panel includes speakers from Colombia, Hong Kong, and Myanmar

Countries of Concern

In the last quarter of 2021, LRWC worked on situations in more than 13 countries. Below are countries where LRWC's actions in the last quarter of 2021 have been published. LRWC's priority countries of concern for 2021 have been China, Colombia, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, not all of which work is ready for summarization in this edition of ACTION NEWS.

AFGHANISTAN

Jurists and human rights defenders continue to be at grave risk in Afghanistan

Jurists and human rights defenders continue to live in a "[climate of fear](#)" in Afghanistan. The Taliban de facto authorities continue to show no signs of respecting Afghanistan's human rights obligations after their takeover of the country by force in mid-August 2021. While the Taliban controls the whole territory of Afghanistan, neither the UN nor any foreign government has formally recognized the Taliban. There are reports of extrajudicial killings, including murders of human rights defenders and journalists. The humanitarian situation in the country is increasingly [dire](#). Action by the Security Council has been limited.

In October 2021, the Human Rights Council adopted a [resolution](#) to create a new Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan to monitor and report on the situation as it unfolds. The Special Rapporteur is to be appointed at the upcoming session of the Council (28 February to 1 April 2022). LRWC continues to [monitor](#) the situation of lawyers, judges and human rights defenders in the country.

LRWC notes the [statement](#) of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) at the Assembly of States Parties on 6 December, reaffirming his 27 September decision to seek an order from the ICC Pre-Trial Chamber to reopen



Afghanistan, continued...

the investigation into alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Afghanistan since 1 May 2003. LRWC continues to be concerned about the Prosecutor's decision to focus his Office's "investigations in Afghanistan on crimes allegedly committed by the Taliban and the Islamic State – Khorasan Province ("IS-K") and to deprioritise other aspects of this investigation." Such a priority potentially deprives victims of international crimes of their right to a remedy for international crimes allegedly perpetrated by actors from the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and others. See more about LRWC's participation in the ICC Assembly of States Parties below in the section on the ICC.

CAMBODIA**Cambodia: Halt judicial harassment of human rights defenders and dissidents**

Cambodia continues its escalating pattern of judicial harassment of human rights defenders and government critics despite increasingly urgent recommendations from UN experts, the UN Human Rights Council and non-governmental organizations, including LRWC. In November 2021, 15 human rights defenders and political activists were subjected to unfair trials and sentenced to 20 months in prison for advocating for human rights or environmental protection.

On 22 December 2021, LRWC published a statement expressing alarm about the mass prosecution of more than 130 persons on charges of "conspiracy to commit treason" and "incitement to create social disorder" because of their advocacy of the right to political participation.

Among those charged in the mass trials is a Cambodian-American human rights lawyer, Ms. Theary Seng. She was separated from others being

subject to mass trials and is being tried separately for unknown reasons. Her hearing on 28 December 2021 was adjourned, as was a hearing on 4 January 2022.



Theary Seng (photo Roland Neveu)

Most of those being tried in mass trials are members of the former Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), which the Cambodian government dissolved on spurious grounds prior to the 2018 national election. The banning of the CNRP has resulted in de facto one-party rule by the long-ruling Cambodia People's Party led by Prime Minister Hun Sen.

LRWC continues to monitor the situation of human rights defenders in Cambodia with particular concern about Cambodia's pattern of unfair trials, the abuse of vague and overbroad legislation to criminalize human rights defenders and government critics, and failure to ensure the independence and integrity of Cambodia's courts and legal profession.

CAMEROON**Cameroon government must ensure protection for threatened human rights lawyer Felix Agbor Nkongho**

Cameroon human rights lawyer, Felix Agbor Nkongho, was subjected to death threats in October and November 2021 during his participation in a leadership retreat in Toronto organized by the Coalition for Dialogue and Negotiations.

JOIN LRWC

LRWC is a committee of lawyers and other human rights defenders who promote human rights, the rule of law, and protection of human rights defenders through advocacy, research and education. Please consider becoming a member of LRWC to help support our work.

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

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

Cameroon, continued...

Throughout the Toronto event, from 29 October to 1 November 2021, Mr. Nkongho received multiple death threats and calls for violence against him on social media. It is believed the threats originated in Cameroon.



Felix Agbor Nkongho

Mr. Nkongho is a human rights lawyer, a member of the Governing Council of the African Bar Association (AFBA), and the founder of the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRNA). He is a key figure in the international calls for protection of human rights in Cameroon and for the non-violent resolution of conflicts involving the Anglophone minority in Cameroon.

LRWC wrote a letter to the government of Cameroon on [12 November 2021](#) pointing out that the threats are part of a history of harassment and retaliation against Mr. Nkongho as a result of his advocacy of human rights in the Anglophone areas of Cameroon. LRWC has previously conducted advocacy for Mr. Nkongho, including a June 2020 [joint letter](#) seeking Mr. Nkongho's reinstatement as an instructor at the University of Buea after he was dismissed on spurious grounds as a result of his peace and human rights advocacy. The Minister of State for Education had instructed the university to dismiss him as a result of a class assignment in which students were asked to engage in scholarly discussion of the Anglophone crisis.

LRWC [advocacy on Cameroon](#) has included several other interventions at the UN Human Rights Council including a 2019, [joint written statement](#) to the UN Human Rights Council "seeking an end to catastrophic atrocities" by authorities and separatist militias in Anglophone areas since October 2016.

CANADA**British Columbia: Amendments to Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act represent "serious backsliding" on transparency in BC**

On 26 October 2021, LRWC joined a coalition of civil society organizations in the Province of British Columbia (BC), Canada, in an urgent letter to BC's Premier expressing concern about Bill 22, which proposed amendments to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA). Led by the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association ([FIPA](#)), the joint letter called for withdrawal of Bill 22 and an open consultation process towards comprehensive legislation that reflects recommendations of past and current special legislative committees responsible for reviewing the FIPPA. See FIPA's [concerns about Bill 22](#), which include removal of the Office of the Premier and Executive Council Operations from the list of public bodies covered by FIPPA, and the addition of a fee for Freedom of Information (FOI). A fee creates "a barrier to anyone without deep pockets" including media outlets and human rights advocates wishing to make FOI requests.

The joint letter followed the BC's Privacy Commissioner's expression of concerns on 1 October. His list of [concerns](#) about Bill 22, included a question as to why the government chose to move forward with amendments ahead of completion of the work of the BC legislature's Special Committee tasked to review the FIPPA. On 1 November 2021, the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) released an [in-depth assessment](#) of Bill 22, saying that the proposed amendments "represent a serious backsliding on transparency in British Columbia." CLD added to the calls for public consultation.

Despite this advocacy, on 24 November 2021, the BC government passed Bill 22 as the [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act](#). Less than two weeks later, on 6 December 2021, the BC legislature issued a [report](#) of the Special Committee, [Modernizing British Columbia's Private Sector Privacy Law](#). FIPA welcomed the Special Committee's report, saying that "the open consultative process that was followed by this Committee stands in stark contrast to the approach that the BC Government recently took in amending the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*." FIPA noted one "[deeply concerning gap](#)" in the

Canada, continued...

committee's recommendations, that if implemented would "enable private companies, without consent, to collect, use and disclose the personal information of British Columbians and share it with law enforcement for unspecified investigation. The BCCLA's Policy Director, Meghan McDermott, said that such a provision could make "private companies an investigative arm of the state without appropriate safeguards or oversight."

Canada: Unlawful attacks on Indigenous land rights defenders in Wet'suwet'en Territory

LRWC [wrote](#) to Canadian and British Columbia authorities on 15 December 2021 expressing concern about "allegations of unlawful use of force by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) against Wet'suwet'en people and their invitees during the enforcement of a court injunction in Wet'suwet'en territory in November 2021." Police arrested a number of peaceful Indigenous land rights defenders and clearly-identified journalists.

In addition to calling for removal of RCMP from Wet'suwet'en territory and an independent investigation of allegations of unlawful use of force by the RCMP, the LRWC letter called on authorities to comply with the 2019 Decision of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to:

1. "halt construction...of the Coastal Gas Link pipeline in the traditional and unceded lands of the Wet'suwet'en people;"
2. "immediately cease forced eviction of... Wet'suwet'en peoples,"
3. "guarantee that no force will be used against... Wet'suwet'en," and,
4. ensure that "the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and associated security and policing services will be withdrawn from their traditional lands."

The letter referred authorities to the international human rights law obligations of Canada and BC outlined in LRWC's 17 March 2020 [legal brief](#), entitled "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."

CHINA and HONG KONG

During the last quarter of 2021, LRWC worked with a group of other organizations on several interventions regarding lawyers in China who are arbitrarily detained or whose licences to practice law are unjustly threatened. Of urgent concern is the situation of arbitrarily detained former lawyer, Ms. Zhang Zhan, who is currently at risk of death if she does not receive medical parole. LRWC's interventions for lawyers in China and Hong Kong are listed chronologically below.

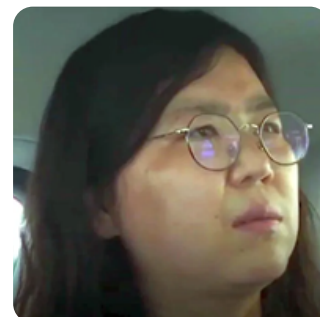
China: Suspension of Lin Qilei's and revocation of Liang Xiaojun's licences to practice law

On 8 December 2021, LRWC joined a [statement](#) of 10 human rights organizations to raise concern about the suspension of the licence of lawyer Lin Qilei and the revocation of the licence of lawyer Liang Xiaojun. Mr Lin and Mr Liang are the third and fourth lawyers to have been stripped of their practicing licence after representing one of the 12 Hong Kong human rights activists who were caught at sea fleeing to Taiwan last year.

The statement called on authorities in China to repeal the decision and reinstate the two lawyers' licences. The organizations participating in the statement were Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L), The 29 Principles, LRWC, Human Rights Now, China Change, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), the Paris Bar Association, the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales, the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), and the Taipei Bar Association's Human Rights Committee.

China must release imprisoned journalist Zhang Zhan, who is at risk of death

On 9 December 2021, LRWC joined eight human rights organizations [calling on](#) Chinese authorities to grant medical parole to citizen journalist and former lawyer Zhang Zhan, who was sentenced to



Zhang Zhan

China and Hong Kong, continued...

four years in prison in December 2020 after being detained for documenting the government's response to COVID-19 in Wuhan, Hubei province. Ms. Zhang's health is rapidly deteriorating, and her family fears she will not survive through the winter if she is not released soon. Zhang Zhan was suspended from law practice after she spoke up on human rights issues in 2018. Those joining the statement were The 29 Principles, LRWC, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), Human Rights Now, and China Change.

Hong Kong SAR: Lawyer Chow Hang-Tung sentenced to prison for organizing Tiananmen vigil

Hong Kong lawyer and human rights defender Chow Hang-Tung was convicted and sentenced to 12 months in prison on 13 December 2021 for participating in a peaceful candlelight vigil for victims of China's 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown on the anniversary of the massacre, 4 June 2020. Ms. Chow is one of eight Hong Kong pro-democracy activists who received [prison sentences](#) for participating in the vigil, which had been banned by police on the grounds of COVID-19 restrictions despite the fact that Hong Kong had few infections at that time. Ms. Chow was convicted on the charge of "inciting unauthorized assembly" and sentenced to 12 months in prison. Other pro-democracy activists sentenced to jail terms in relation to the vigil include Mr. Jimmy Lai, Ms. Gwyneth Ho and Ms. Lee Cheuk-yan. On 18 December, LRWC published a [statement](#) deploring the convictions and prison sentences.



Chow Hang-Tung

China: Arbitrary detention of human rights lawyer Ding Jiaxi and legal scholar Xu Zhiyong: Suspension of practicing licence of their lawyer Liang Xiaojun

In mid-December 2021, several human rights organizations received information that China planned to hold trials and sentence human rights

lawyer Ding Jiaxi and legal scholar and lawyer Dr. Xu Zhiyong on charges of "subverting state power" sometime during the last week in December 2021. Mr Ding and Dr. Xu have been arbitrarily detained in Shandong province, northeastern China, for nearly two years and have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment.



Ding Jiaxi (L), Xu Zhiyong (R)

On 23 December 2021, LRWC joined The 29 Principles, Lawyers for Lawyers, and Human Rights Now in a [joint statement](#) calling on China to ensure fair trials and to end all arbitrary detention, torture, and ill-treatment. The statement outlines the prolonged arbitrary detention of Ding Jiaxi and Xu Zhiyong, including incommunicado detention, denial of access to family and lawyers, and torture and ill-treatment.

The statement also calls for the reinstatement of the practicing licence of lawyer Liang Xiaojun, who was representing Dr. Xu until his licence was revoked in November 2021. As of 15 January 2021, the trials of Ding Jiaxi and Xu Zhiyong are still pending.

COLOMBIA**Day of the Endangered Lawyer: Colombia, 24 January 2022: Online event**

This year, the [Day of the Endangered Lawyer](#), marked annually on 24 January, will feature the situation of lawyers in danger in Colombia. An online event is planned by the Law Society of Ontario, LRWC, and Human Rights Watch Canada. The event is scheduled to take place online on 24 January 2022, from 5:00-7:00 pm Eastern (2:00 to 4:00 pm Pacific). While the event will have its main focus on Colombia, other confirmed speakers include human rights defenders from Colombia, Hong Kong and Myanmar.

Colombia, continued...**Colombia: Day of the Endangered Lawyer****24 January 2024, 5 pm eastern**Click [here](#) for information & registration for the online event in Canada.

LRWC volunteers, Heather Neun and Catherine Morris published two articles in January 2022 on the situation of lawyers in Colombia, one for [The Advocate](#), which reaches all lawyers in BC, and one for [Slaw.ca](#), Canada's online magazine for lawyers. The articles discussed the current dangers to lawyers in the context of a history of threats and killings. Between 1991 and 2013, more than 700 lawyers were killed in Colombia. At least four lawyers were killed between 2017 and 2019.

Lawyers and other human rights defenders were at increased risk during 2021's widespread citizen protests triggered by a proposed tax reform that disadvantaged lower- and middle-class people. Lawyers have been subjected to illegal surveillance while representing victims of rights violations and are at risk of being accused of being part of criminal and terrorist groups simply for conducting their lawful professional work representing clients.



Yessika Hoyos Morales (photo courtesy of CCAJAR)

Lawyers are also subjected to threatened and attempted assassinations. In December 2021, human rights lawyers from the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective (CCAJAR) received death threats. One of these lawyers, Yessika Hoyos Morales, will be speaking at the [LSO, LRWC, and HRW event on 24 January 2022](#).

Colombia: Ensure protection from death threats for lawyers of Corporación Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear Restrepo

In a [joint letter](#) issued on 22 December 2021, Lawyers for Lawyers, the Colombian Caravana, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, the International Observatory for Lawyers in Danger, LRWC, and the Law Society of England and Wales expressed concern about the safety of members of the Colombian human rights law firm, Corporación Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear Restrepo ("CCAJAR") after recent death threats against CCAJAR in a pamphlet issued in the name of "Águilas Negras." The letter was issued in [English and Spanish](#).

EGYPT

Mohamed el-Bager (photo: Hossam el-Hamalawy)

On 17 December 2021, LRWC joined a global coalition of 31 lawyers' organizations and 134 individual lawyers and law students in a [joint statement](#) calling for the unconditional release of Egyptian human rights lawyer, Mohamed el-Bager, charged with baseless criminal offences linked to his legitimate work as a lawyer in violation of international human rights law. The statement was led by the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy ([TIMEP](#)).

INDIA



Khurram Parvez as he is taken to prison. (Photo by Sameena Mir (Wikimedia Commons))

On 21 November 2021, Kashmir human rights defender Khurram Parvez was arrested under a vague and overbroad counterterrorism law that is increasingly being abused to target government critics. He has been denied pre-trial release. On 14 January 2021, LRWC sent a [letter](#) to authorities in India seeking his immediate and unconditional release. In 2016, LRWC wrote a [letter](#) after authorities in India arbitrarily detained him to prevent him from travelling to Geneva to attend the 33rd Session of the Human Rights Council.

IRAN

LRWC organized a joint initiative of several international human rights organizations in a [letter](#) to the government of Iran outlining concerns about a continuing pattern of unlawful detention of lawyers and human rights defenders to silence their advocacy. The letter focused on the examples of human rights lawyers Ms. Nasrin Sotoudeh, Ms. Hoda Amid, and Mr. Amirsalar Davoudi, who are currently serving lengthy prison sentences as a result of their legitimate advocacy. Such advocacy includes protesting Iran's mandatory veiling laws for women and defending persecuted ethnic/religious minorities.



Amirsalar Davoudi

Ms. Nasrin Sotoudeh has been detained since June 2018 and is currently serving a sentence of 38 year imprisonment and 148 lashes. Ms. Hoda Amid was sentenced by the Tehran Court of Appeal on February 13 2021, and given an 8-year prison sentence. On 13 July 2021 Mr. Amirsalar Davoudi's sentence of 29 years imprisonment, 111 lashes, and a fine of 60 million rials (CAD \$4,775) was upheld by the Tehran Revolutionary Court after having been previously quashed by the Iranian Supreme Court.



Nasrin Sotoudeh

The joint letter outlines a pattern of abuse by way of Iran's vague and overbroad laws, unfair proceedings, and lengthy arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment to attempt to silence human rights advocacy. Co-signatories of the joint letter included LRWC, Lawyers for Lawyers, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Committee, the Law Society of England and Wales, and Front Line Defenders. See LRWC's other [advocacy](#) for these and other human rights lawyers and defenders in Iran.



Hoda Amid

MYANMAR

Myanmar's military junta continues to escalate its grave and systematic violations against the civilian population of the country, putting human rights defenders and journalists at grave risk of arbitrary detention, torture and extrajudicial killing. Since the military coup on 1 February 2021, documentation by Burma's [Assistance Association for Political Prisoners](#) indicates that as of 15 January 2022, more than 1,400 people have been extrajudicially killed and more than 11,400 arbitrarily detained. As of 15 January 2022, at least 17 lawyers are in prison. Many people have been

Myanmar, continued...

detained incommunicado, denied access to lawyers and subjected to torture and ill-treatment.

LRWC nominee U Khin Maung Zaw honoured at awards ceremony in Amsterdam



U Khin Maung Zaw

On 18 November 2021, LRWC joined Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L) at its ceremony in Amsterdam to [honour](#) several lawyers nominated for the L4L annual Prize awarded to a lawyer who has made significant contributions to the protection of the rule of law and human rights in challenging environments. The prize was awarded to Belarus lawyers Maksim Znak and Liudmila Kazak. The two other honourees included U Khin Maung Zaw, nominated by LRWC, and the Collective for the Defence of Hirak Detainees in Algeria.



LRWC's Catherine Morris at the L4L Awards Ceremony

At the awards ceremony in Amsterdam, LRWC's Executive Director, Catherine Morris gave a [short video](#) tribute in honour of U Khin Maung Zaw, noting that he and his colleagues, who are also at grave risk, represent a number of falsely-charged journalists and officials of the government ousted by a coup committed by the Myanmar's military on 1 February 2021. Death threats and risk of arbitrary arrest means that he and other lawyers, human

rights defenders and journalists must move frequently from safe house to safe house.

Myanmar: Hold the Myanmar military and security forces accountable for their grave human rights violations, including violence against women

On 19 December 2021, LRWC joined more than 600 human rights and women's rights organizations around the world endorsing an [open letter to the UN Security Council](#) by the [Women's Peace Network](#) (WPN). The WPN is composed of lawyers, community leaders, and peace activists from Myanmar and around the world to peacefully promote and protect human rights. The letter was sent to members of the Security Council on Monday, 20 December 2021.



Women's Peace Network

Statement on the International Day for the
Elimination of Violence against Women | November 25, 2021

PHILIPPINES

Philippines: End the impunity for extrajudicial killings of lawyers and defenders

The year 2021 saw no cessation in the murders of jurists in the Philippines. On 31 December, the last day of the year, a [prosecutor](#), Mr. Edilberto Mendoza was shot to death in front of his home. Rappler, the news outlet founded by journalist and 2021 Nobel Prize recipient Maria Ressa, reports that Mr. Mendoza is the 66th lawyer killed since the beginning of the Duterte administration in July 2016. They are among tens of thousands of people murdered or attacked with [impunity](#) since that time. LRWC continues to [monitor](#) the situation in the Philippines, including further interventions at the UN Human Rights Council.

RUSSIA

Russian authorities must cease harassment of human rights lawyer Ivan Pavlov

On 2 December 2021, LRWC joined five other international human rights organizations in a [statement](#) denouncing the ongoing judicial and administrative harassment of Russian Federation lawyer Ivan Pavlov on grounds that “amount to arbitrary interference with his rights to freedom of expression and association.” Mr. Pavlov is the head litigator of the “Team 29” human rights group. Mr. Pavlov represented pro-democracy opposition leader Aleksei Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation in a 2021 case launched by the Prosecutor’s Office to designate the Foundation as an “extremist” group. On 20 September 2021, Russian Federation authorities filed a motion to initiate politically motivated disciplinary proceedings against Ivan Pavlov seeking his disbarments. On 8 November 2021, Russia’s Ministry of Justice declared Mr. Pavlov and four of his former colleagues from Team 29 as “foreign agents.” Earlier in 2021, Ivan Pavlov left the Russian Federation because of fear of prosecution on political grounds.



Ivan Pavlov

The joint statement was signed by the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE); the International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L), LRWC, and the UIA-IROL (the Institute for the Rule of Law of the International Association of Lawyers).

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia: Release lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair from arbitrary detention

January 2022 marks seven years since the 15-year prison sentence of human rights lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair was confirmed by Saudi Arabia’s Specialized Court of Appeal on 12 January 2015. He was targeted for imprisonment because of his representation of clients unpopular with Saudi Arabia’s monarchy and for peacefully advocating for improved human rights in the country. He has also advocated for a constitutional monarchy and an elected parliament.



Waleed Abu al-Khair

He has been arbitrarily detained and ill-treated by Saudi Arabia since April 2014. LRWC has been campaigning for Waleed Abu al-Khair’s release since 2015 in cooperation with other international human rights NGOs. On 14 January 2022, LRWC published a [summary](#) of interventions in the case, which have included joint communications to Saudi Arabia, the UN Human Rights Council, and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD). LRWC is concerned that there is now no news of Waleed Abu al-Khair or his condition or treatment. LRWC monitors continue to [follow up](#) regarding situation of human rights defenders at risk in Saudi Arabia, including Waleed Abu al-Khair.

IMPRISONED, ATTACKED, MURDERED, TORTURED, DISAPPEARED

**Lawyers around the world are under attack for their work
representing victims of human rights violations**

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

Visit LRWC.org to learn more and donate

LRWC is a Canadian organization that advocates for human rights defenders and lawyers under attack for their work.

THAILAND

Thailand: Migrant workers arrested after seeking protection of their rights

One hundred civil society organizations [wrote](#) to the government of Thailand on 1 November 2021 to raise concern about the arrest and detention of seven migrant workers who submitted a petition to the Minister of Labour demanding better welfare and rights of migrant workers working in Thailand affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Led by Protection International in Thailand, LRWC was among the signatories. The letter is available in English and Thai.

Thailand: Withdraw the Draft Act on Not-for-Profit Organizations | Joint letter

On 27 December 2021, 47 Thai and international civil society organizations, including LRWC, signed an open [letter](#) to Thailand's Cabinet urging immediate withdrawal of its proposed Operation of Not-for-Profit Organizations Act (NPO law). The signatory organizations expressed grave concern that the draft law's "currently excessively broad provisions, could be easily misused and abused to significantly restrict the rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and other human rights" and could threaten "Thailand's status as a hub for local and international not-for-profit organizations working on diverse issues of public interest in Southeast Asia."

The Cabinet went ahead on 3 January 2022 to approve the draft law. A limited period of public consultation is to be held during January 2022. On 6 January 2022, Thailand emeritus professor [Vitit Muntarbhorn](#) (who current serves as UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Cambodia), raised concern that the current draft contravenes international standards for protection of human rights defenders and says "there has not been adequate consultation with civil society during the drafting process." LRWC had previously raised concern about a previous draft of the NPO law in a [31 May 2021](#) statement.

TURKEY

Human rights in Turkey continue to deteriorate

The human rights situation in Turkey continues to deteriorate. LRWC continues to receive reports of abuses of human rights defenders, including lawyers and journalists.



Aysel Tuğluk, Amerika'nın
Sesi (VOA, 2014)

In January 2021, LRWC agreed to become a co-signatory to a letter, sponsored by the Turkey Human Rights Litigation Support Project, in support of human rights lawyer and Kurdish opposition politician Aysel Tuğluk. Ms. Tuğluk has been unlawfully imprisoned since December 2016 because of her legitimate political activities as a member of pro-Kurdish political parties. She is confined in high security prison together with a number of other women opposition politicians. She has denied release despite very serious health issues that require urgent attention. A report by nine medical experts states that Ms. Tuğluk cannot obtain adequate medical assistance in prison conditions. Despite her rapidly deteriorating state, including inability to care for herself, even for her most basic needs, the official Forensic Medicine Institute, which lacks independence from the Turkish government, have been blocking her release by disregarding the experts' findings. LRWC Executive Director Catherine Morris also added her signature to an international campaign in support of this same lawyer, initiated by women.

United Nations

LRWC remains concerned about the election of States to the UN Human Rights Council whose human rights records fail to meet the standards of UN General Assembly [Resolution 60/251](#). The resolution requires all Council members to “uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights [and] shall fully cooperate with the Council.”

LRWC has been particularly concerned by the human rights records of [current](#) Council member States such as China and Russia and newly reelected member, Cameroon.

LRWC monitors are currently preparing for the 49th session of UN Human Rights Council to be held 28 February to 1 April 2022.

International Criminal Court

LRWC attends Assembly of States Parties of the Rome Statute of the ICC in The Hague

From 6–11 December 2021, the Assembly of States Parties (ASP) to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) convened the [20th session](#) of the ASP, which meets annually at the World Forum in The Hague. Over the course of six days, the Assembly —

including States Parties to the Rome Statute, observer and invited States, civil society, international and regional organizations — discussed a number of issues including the administration and functioning of the Court, its activities and the Trust Fund for Victims.

Attendance at the 20th session was lighter than usual as many attendees presented virtually due to COVID-19. All side events, often the highlight of the ASP during which civil society attendees are given a platform to discuss current issues in the field of international justice, were also moved online.

As a member of the Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC), LRWC was invited to attend plenary sessions on 8 December 2021, one on “Cooperation” and the other a “Review of the ICC and Rome Statute System.” LRWC board member Melissa Tessler attended.

The session on cooperation commenced with a discussion on the difficulty the Court faces enforcing sentences without the availability of States willing to receive convicted persons. This was followed by a discussion on cooperation in financial investigations.

“We cannot step foot in a State without cooperation of the State Party...,” emphasized ICC Chief Prosecutor Karim Kham, “and that cooperation is dynamic.” The Prosecutor raised the need to compel social media information for investigations as well.

The ICC registrar spoke about the need to protect witnesses which cannot be done without the support of States who have signed cooperation agreements. This year, the Court was able to relocate only five of the 21 families that were at risk. The remaining 16 families had to resort to ad hoc measures which are not only expensive for the Court to achieve on short notice but add stress

to victims who have already been traumatized and require a smooth transition to a safer location.

The session focusing on the Review of the ICC and Rome Statute System recognized the urgent need to improve the wellbeing of staff working at the

Court and to end harassment and intimidation. The CICC was given a platform to make a statement summarizing its own [Review of the Rome Statute System](#), which was co-led by Human Rights Watch and the International Federation for Human Rights. The CICC [statement](#) listed the following as key priority areas for improvement:

- ...gender equality; safety and respect in the workplace; the highest standards of fair trial and completion of the legal aid policy; better cooperation by States Parties



20th session of the Assembly of States Parties of the ICC opens in The Hague (Photo, ICC press release 6 December 2021)

with the Court, particularly in the face of politicized attacks; merit-based nominations and elections of highly qualified Court officials; improved and strengthened methodologies of the Office of the Prosecutor; adequate and sufficient resources to carry out the Court's mandate, consistent with its workload; as well as all the recommendations aiming at placing victims and affected communities at the heart of ICC proceedings and at ensuring the respect of their rights, including early and direct engagement with victims and affected communities, better outreach and public information strategies; increased field presence; and meaningful participation, including through chosen and effective representation during all stages of the proceedings.

Other significant issues raised during the week of the ASP included:

- the desire to bring crimes against the environment under the purview of the Court, or to establish a crime of “ecocide;”
- budget constraints, with countries including Canada urging all States Parties to pay their dues on time to allow the Court to fulfil its mandate;
- how the Security Council's veto system prevents accountability; and
- the ongoing need for access to justice for victims.

In its statement during the General Debate, the CICC implored the Court “to explore ways to ensure that the 21st Session of the ASP can proceed... with prior consultation with civil society representatives to ensure full participation of all.”

See [more information](#) on this year's ASP, including [statements](#) made by States' Parties and NGOs.

The ICC is referred to in sections above on Afghanistan.

Educational Events

- Catherine Morris, “What is the International Criminal Court (ICC)? The Situation of The Philippines.” Presentation at “Philippines Under Siege: Solidarity for Justice and Peace,” Conference and Training session of the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP), Vancouver, Canada, 23 October 2021.

UPCOMING on 24 January 2022, the Day of the Endangered Lawyer (more information on page 1)

- [Discussion on the UN Guidelines for Lawyers in Support of Peaceful Assemblies](#), Online event 24 January 2022, 07:30 -09:00 am (Eastern); 13:30 to 15:00 (Zurich).
- [Colombia: The Day of the Endangered Lawyer](#), 24 January 2022, 17:00- 19:00 Eastern; 14:00-16:00 (Pacific).

Awards

Renée Mulligan: In November 2021, LRWC board member Renée Mulligan was honoured by the Victoria Bar Association (VBA) as the recipient of the 2021 VBA's Volunteer Award for her work with Karenni students from Myanmar living in one of the refugee camps along the Thai/Myanmar border. She was also recognized for her volunteer work with LRWC as a board member, advocacy for human rights defenders in Southeast Asia elsewhere through letters and advocacy at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Publications

The following articles were written by LRWC directors and volunteers and published between 1 October 2021 and 15 January 2022.

- Catherine Morris, “Access To Justice: Defending Defenders And Truth-Tellers Is Fundamental To The Rule Of Law,” [*The Advocate*](#) 79(6) (November 2021): 869-73. Catherine Morris is UN Liaison Coordinator of LRWC and serves as its Transitional Executive Director of LRWC until 25 January 2022.
- Marjorie Cohn, “Absent Any Proof, Israel Designates Palestinian Rights Groups ‘Terrorist,’” [*Truthout*](#), 9 November 2021. Marjorie Cohn is on the board of directors of LRWC.
- Catherine Morris, “The ‘two Michaels’ and Celil: Windows into China’s legal gulag,” [*Slaw.ca*](#), 16 November 2021.
- Heather Neun and Catherine Morris. “The Day of the Endangered Lawyer, 24 January 2022: Colombia.” *The Advocate* 80(1) (January 2022): 29-82. Heather Neun is on the board of directors of LRWC.
- Heather Neun and Catherine Morris. “Escalating Threats to Colombian Human Rights Advocates: The Day of the Endangered Lawyer, 24 January 2022.” [*Slaw.ca*](#), 11 January 2022).

LRWC in the News

The following news stories published between 16 October 2021 and 15 January 2022 mentioned LRWC:

- Cathrine Gonzales, “Rights groups urge UNHRC to set up system for collecting evidence on EJKs,” [*The Inquirer*](#) (Philippines), 7 October 2021.
- Bhavan Jaipragas, “Singapore’s anti-foreign interference law will ‘substantially narrow’ civic space, rights groups say,” [*South China Morning Post*](#), 13 October 2021.

- Bernise Carolino, “B.C. urged to stop amendments to freedom of information and privacy legislation,” [*Canadian Lawyer*](#), 2 November 2021.
- “Turkey has prosecuted some 1,600 lawyers, arrested 615 since failed coup: report,” [*Turkish Minute*](#), 11 December 11, 2021.
- “Christmas as Usual: CCP Detains Human Rights Defenders,” [*China Digital Times*](#), 30 December 2021.

Working Pro Bono for LRWC

LRWC acknowledges with gratitude the ongoing dedication of volunteers, donors, and part time staff who faithfully work to uphold international human rights law and standards. During the third quarter of 2021, dozens of LRWC members worked pro bono conducting research, education and advocacy for LRWC events, reports, publications, letters and statements. Human rights organizations increasingly face the need to ensure their security. In 2020 LRWC implemented new privacy and security measures; thus names of volunteers and donors are not listed here with the exception of LRWC’s Executive Director and those named in publications or public statements or events.

Working in Cooperation with Others

Through joint advocacy between October and December 2021, LRWC worked in cooperation with hundreds of other organizations around the world.

Board of Directors

LRWC is composed of [two entities](#), Lawyers Rights Watch Canada ("LRWC"), and a Canadian charitable organization, Lawyers' Rights Watch (Legal Research) Canada ("LRW(LR)C").

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Gail Davidson
Joshua Lam
Leo McGrady, Q.C.
Heather Neun
Brian Samuels, Q.C.
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Harini Sivalingam
Margaret (Peggy) Stanier
Melissa Tessler
Grace Li Xiu Woo

LRWC membership and donations

To our readers...

We hope you have found this edition of *ACTION NEWS* informative. We invite you to join or renew your membership in LRWC to help ensure that our volunteers have adequate resources to continue to advocate for lawyers and other human rights defenders at risk in numerous countries around the world.

LRWC membership fees and donations ensure needed support for our volunteers' research, educational activities, and advocacy. To ensure independence, LRWC does not accept government funding and relies on memberships and donations. LRWC has no paid Executive Director. Membership fees and donations – payable to Lawyers' Rights Watch (LegalResearch) Canada – are tax deductible.

LRWC volunteers work to build knowledge of international human rights:

- [ACTION NEWS](#). LRWC publishes four editions of ACTION NEWS per year.
- **Articles in Canadian legal magazines** to raise awareness about the dire situation of jurists and defenders around the world.
- [Annual reports](#). LRWC's 2020 Annual Report summarized work in 21 countries.
- [Publications and resource manuals](#), free to download.
- **Educational events**, provided free of charge.

LRWC volunteers work globally to defend human rights defenders at risk.

- [LRWC conducts advocacy](#) through letters, statements, and interventions at UN Human Rights Council. LRWC works with other human rights organizations around the world to amplify the effectiveness of advocacy.

We hope you will consider joining, renewing, or donating to LRWC by visiting our [website](#). Feel free to write to us at lrwc@lrwc.org.

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