

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 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

During the first quarter of 2022 lawyers and other human rights defenders continue to be under threat around the world. While the violations by **Russia**, including its unlawful invasion of **Ukraine** dominate headlines, lawyers and defenders are at risk in many other countries. This edition of *Action News* outlines LRWC's work on a dozen countries during the first quarter of 2022 with breaking news up to mid-April.

Lawyers around the world are under attack for representing victims of human rights violations.

You can help protect lawyers under attack with your membership and donations

In **Afghanistan** women jurists are under severe threat. In **China**, human rights lawyers face arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and torture. In **Colombia**, defenders face stigmatization and violence. In **Iran**, human rights lawyers, particularly those advocating rights of women and minorities experience unfair trials and lengthy jail sentences. In **Myanmar**, the ongoing coup has resulted in more than 1,700 extrajudicial killings, and more than 8,800 are arbitrary detained, including lawyers and defenders. In the **Philippines**, lawyers continue to be violently attacked largely with impunity.

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NEWS AND UPDATES

SPRING 2022
JANUARY TO APRIL

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Board of Director's message, continued

Turkey continues to hold the record for detaining more lawyers than any other country. Imprisonment of lawyers is most often based on unfairly determined convictions for illegitimate charges.

LRWC's transition continues. At the end of January 2022, [Catherine Morris](#) stepped down from her interim role as LRWC Executive Director. In June 2020, she agreed to serve as Executive Director in a pro bono capacity during LRWC's transition from the longstanding leadership of its founder, [Gail Davidson](#). Ms Morris, who has been a volunteer with LRWC for more than two decades, continued to serve as LRWC's Main Representative to the [United Nations](#) (UN) for the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council held from 28 February 2021 to 1 April 2022.

Countries of Concern

Below are countries where LRWC's conducted interventions during the first quarter of 2022.

AFGHANISTAN

Joint Statement to UN Human Rights Council on the situation of women jurists and defenders in Afghanistan

Judges, lawyers, prosecutors, and other human rights defenders, particularly women, have been at high risk in Afghanistan after the armed takeover of the country by the Taliban in August 2021. On 30 March 2022, LRWC delivered an oral video [statement](#) to the UN Human Rights Council urging Afghanistan's de facto authorities, the Taliban, to comply with the country's international human rights obligations, and urging Council members and observer States to ensure effective international protection and resettlement for all those at risk in Afghanistan, including women jurists, defenders, and their families, many of whom remain in hiding. The statement was joined by the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), the Law Society of England and Wales, and Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L), along with the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights. See LRWC's [previous work](#) on Afghanistan.



On 1 April 2022, the Human Rights Council appointed [Richard Bennett](#) of New Zealand as Special Rapporteur to monitor and report on the human rights situation in Afghanistan.

BELARUS

UN Human Rights Council: Harassment of lawyers in Belarus: Statement to UN Human Rights Council

On 17 March 2022, LRWC joined an [oral statement](#) to the UN Human Rights Council led by International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) and also joined by Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L) and the Law Society of England and Wales. The statement expressed alarm about the findings of a report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) confirming ongoing serious human rights violations, including disproportionate use of force, arbitrary arrests and detention, and torture and ill-treatment. Thousands of people have been arbitrarily detained. At least 36 lawyers had licenses withdrawn after representing defendants facing criminal and administrative charges and harassment in politically sensitive cases. The statement urged the Council to renew the Council's mandate for Examination of Belarus.

Harassment of lawyers in Belarus: Joint statement to the UN Human Rights Council

On 17 March 2022, LRWC joined the IBAHRI, L4L and the Law Society of England and Wales in a [statement](#) expressing alarm about the findings of an examination report on the situation in Belarus by the OHCHR and urging the Human Rights Council to renew the mandate for the Examination.

The OHCHR report found that since the August 2020 election, thousands of people have been arbitrarily detained. There is evidence of torture and ill-treatment.

In [2020](#) and [2021](#) LRWC had joined L4L and other organizations in advocating for arbitrarily detained lawyers who provided legal assistance to those detained in peaceful post-election protests.

Belarus, continued...

In 2022, dozens of journalists have been arbitrarily detained. Hundreds of civil society organizations have been closed.

The Council renewed the mandate for the OHCHR Examination on 1 April 2022. Canadian human rights lawyer [Susan Bazilli](#) is one of the independent experts appointed in May 2021 by the High Commissioner to conduct the ongoing Examination. See LRWC's [previous joint advocacy](#) on Belarus.

CAMBODIA**Cambodia urged to uphold rights of dissidents and defenders**

LRWC made an oral video [statement](#) to the UN Human Rights Council on 29 March 2022 in an interactive dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia. LRWC's statement expressed concern about Cambodia's ongoing misuse of laws and courts "to quash and criminalize peaceful dissent" as "political opposition leaders and human rights defenders face spurious charges, inadequate legal representation, unfair mass trials, and arbitrary detention."

These concerns are heightened by the looming 2022 local commune elections and the 2023 National Election. Since the 2018 election, Cambodia has been a de facto one-party State, and its legal and other institutions lack independence and integrity. See LRWC's [previous advocacy](#) on Cambodia.

CANADA**Canada: Gidimt'en land defenders made a submission to UN about ongoing rights violations by BC and Canada**

On 7 February 2022, Gidimt'en land defenders of the Wet'suwet'en Nation made a [submission](#) to the UN Human Rights Council's Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous People (EMRIP) on the "Militarization of Wet'suwet'en Lands and Canada's Ongoing Violations." The submission was made by Hereditary Chief Dinī ze' Woos (Frank Alec), Gidimt'en Checkpoint Spokesperson Sleydo' (Molly Wickham), and Gidimt'en Checkpoint Media Coordinator, Jen Wickham.

The submission outlined how forced industrialization by Coastal GasLink and police militarization on Wet'suwet'en land is a violation of Canada's international obligations under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The submission was co-authored by legal, academic, and human rights experts in Canada, and endorsed by more than dozen organizations, including the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Amnesty International-Canada, and LRWC.

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

CHINA

China: Arbitrarily detained lawyer Yu Wensheng released but remains under surveillance

On 1 March 2022, LRWC welcomed the news that Chinese human rights lawyer [Mr. Yu Wensheng](#) was released from prison after completing a four year prison sentence for “inciting subversion of State power.” There are significant [concerns](#) that he and his wife, Xu Yan, may be under police restrictions and surveillance. Yu Wensheng was also sentenced to three years’ deprivation of his political rights after his release from detention, which, according to China’s [Criminal law](#), denies his right to vote and stand for election as well as his rights to freedom of speech, assembly, and association. His licence to practise law was revoked on 18 January 2018.



YU Wensheng

China: High Commissioner’s report on grave violations in Xinjiang can wait no longer

In June 2020, an unprecedented number of UN experts issued a [statement](#) expressing concerns over human rights violations in China, including in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), and called on the UN Human Rights Council to create an impartial and independent mechanism to investigate and report annually on human rights in China. In 2018, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, began to [request](#) access to Xinjiang, but Chinese officials repeatedly rejected her requests, saying they would allow only a “friendly visit.” In 2016, Philip Alston, then the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty, visited China but was hampered by government officials during his visit, and civil society actors were warned not to meet with him. Some individuals with whom he did meet were later subjected to reprisals.

In September 2021, the High Commissioner reported that her Office was “finalising its assessment of the available information on allegations of serious human rights violations in

[Xinjiang] with a view to making it public.” In December 2021, the High Commissioner reported that little progress had been made on terms of a visit and said she would release a long-awaited report of findings in “a few weeks.”



On 8 March 2022, the High Commissioner reported to the Human Rights Council that a visit had been arranged for May 2022. However, the terms of the visit are unclear. On 8 March 2022, after several private letters from NGOs, Human Rights Watch (HRW) with 192 other NGOs including LRWC, released a [letter](#) and made an [oral video statement](#) expressing concern about the “relative silence” of the High Commissioner in the face of numerous reports of grave violations, and calling on her to release the report forthwith.

China: Torture of lawyers: Statement to the UN Human Rights Council

LRWC continues to have grave concerns about China’s pattern of arbitrary detention and torture of lawyers and others engaged in human rights advocacy. On 11 March 2022, LRWC made an oral video statement to the UN Human Rights Council, raising concerns that China, currently a member of the Human Rights Council, has persistently failed to provide access to UN officials and experts for independent investigation of violations, including alleged atrocity crimes in the Uyghur region, and calling on the Council to insist that China halt torture and ill-treatment of lawyers and defenders, and adopt the 2020 recommendations for an independent investigative mechanism.

LRWC’s statement reiterated the 8 March 2022 joint call (see above) for the release of the High Commissioner’s report on the Uyghur region. LRWC also requested the Council to adopt measures “to ensure that all Council members uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and fully cooperate with the Council, including its Special Procedures, as required by General Assembly Resolution 60/251. The statement was joined by International Bar

China, continued...

Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L), Human Rights Now, The 29 Principles, and The Rights Practice.

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

This year, the [Day of the Endangered Lawyer](#), marked annually on 24 January, featured the dire situation of Colombia's human rights lawyers and defenders.

Colombia has long been one of the most dangerous places in the world for human rights advocates, but the danger intensified in 2020 and 2021 with a [surge](#) of massacres and assassinations of human rights defenders and community leaders. While Colombia's years of internal armed conflict ostensibly ended with the 2016 Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP), significant violence and social conflict continues.

Lawyers and human rights defenders remain at [high risk](#) of murder, threats, judicial harassment, and illegal surveillance. More than [450 defenders](#) have been killed in Colombia since 2016. Colombia has not taken effective measures to curb State-sponsored attacks or to [dismantle paramilitary, criminal organizations](#) responsible for violence, nor has it investigated crimes against defenders or ensured [sufficient protection measures](#) for defenders.

More than 1,100 people from across Canada attended an online event on 24 January 2022 co-organized by LRWC, the Law Society of Ontario, and Human Rights Watch Canada. Speakers included LRWC's Catherine Morris, and Heather Neun, as well as Yessika Hoyos Morales, a lawyer from the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective in Colombia. See the [video recording](#) of the event.

The coalition for the Day of the Endangered Lawyer prepared a 27-page briefing paper available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). In addition, LRWC's Heather Neun and Catherine Morris wrote two articles on the situation of lawyer in Colombia for Canadian lawyers' publications, [The Advocate](#), and [Slaw.ca](#). Other events occurred around the world, including in, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the United States.

The annual international Day of the Endangered Lawyer has taken place on the 24th of January since 2009. Since then, the international coalition for the Day of the Endangered Lawyers has focused on one country each year to heighten international awareness of the central role of lawyers in upholding the rule of law, and to highlight the dangers they face. In previous years the Day of the Endangered Lawyers has focused on Azerbaijan (2021), Pakistan (2020), Turkey (2012 & 2019), Egypt (2018), China (2017), Honduras (2016), The Philippines (2015), Basque Country/Spain (2013), and Iran (2010). In 2021, a dramatic increase in dangers to Colombian lawyers since 2020 led the coalition to feature Colombia for a second time in 2022.



Stigmatization and violence against human rights defenders in Colombia: Oral Statement to the UN Human Rights Council

The recent report on Colombia by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights noted high levels of stigmatization and violence against human rights defenders. LRWC made a [statement](#) to the UN Human Rights Council on 8 March 2022, urging Colombia to address the root causes of violence and stigmatization of defenders, and take effective measures to dismantle paramilitary and criminal organizations responsible for the violence. The statement also urged Colombia to strengthen its capacity to investigate and bring perpetrators to justice and strengthen protection measures for defenders.

IRAN**Arbitrary detention of lawyers and other human rights defenders in Iran**

LRWC has grave concerns about the continuing pattern of unlawful detention of human rights lawyers and defenders in Iran. On 18 January 2022, LRWC wrote a [letter](#) to authorities in Iran seeking the unconditional release of lawyers Amirshar Davoudi, Nasrin Sotoudeh, Hoda Amid, Mustafa Nili, Arash Keykhosravi, "and all other lawyers and human rights defenders currently being arbitrarily detained for performing their lawful duties." The letter was joined by the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L), Front Line

Iran, continued...

Defenders, and the Law Society of England and Wales.



Amir Salar Davoudi

Iran: Arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of human rights lawyers and defenders: Two joint oral statements to the UN Human Rights Council

On 16 March, LRWC delivered an [oral video statement](#) to the UN Human Rights Council setting out serious concerns about Iran's pattern of arbitrary detention of human rights lawyers and defenders. The statement also registered concern about Iran's plans for alarming internet legislation that will further criminalize online human rights advocacy and severely restrict access to online platforms. The statement was joined by the IBAHRI, L4L, and Front Line Defenders. In addition to calling for a halt to harassment of lawyers and defenders and the immediate release of all those lawyers still detained, the statement also called on Iran to provide the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran with full access to the country. Iran has not allowed the Special Rapporteur to conduct any country visits.



Nasrin Sotoudeh

On 17 March, LRWC joined the IBAHRI's [oral video statement](#) at the Council, drawing attention to the chilling effect of arbitrary detention on the legal profession, lack of fair trials leading to arbitrary detention; torture, ill-treatment and suspicious deaths in prisons; and at least 365 arbitrary executions including of juveniles and women. The absence of enforceable rights in Iran's legal system to due process and fair trial means

that all executions in Iran are arbitrary deprivations of life.



Hoda Amid

Iran: Human rights groups sound alarm against draconian Internet Bill

On 17 March 2022, LRWC joined more than 50 other organizations, including ARTICLE 19, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Access Now, in a [joint statement](#) calling on authorities in Iran to withdraw internet legislation entitled the "User Protection Bill." If passed, the Bill will violate an array of human rights of people in Iran, including the right to freedom of expression and right to privacy. The statement urged Iranian authorities to withdraw the Bill, and called on other States to ensure that human rights in Iran are given priority.

MYANMAR

Local unions call on international brands to cease production in Myanmar

On the one-year anniversary of the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar, LRWC joined more than 80 organizations endorsing a [statement](#) by Global Women's Strike and No Sweat, urging Western garment manufacturers to cease operations in Myanmar and to stop sourcing their products from Myanmar suppliers. The call for this action came at the request of the two largest trade unions in Myanmar. Reportedly factory owners and employers are taking advantage of the coup to undermine workers' rights including by targeting of labour rights activists. Most trade union organizers are now in hiding. The reason for the action is that despite the fact that garment workers in Myanmar are paid wages among the lowest in the world, multinational corporations, including the garment sector, provide significant income for the military junta.



MYANMAR MILITARY
Never in Fashion

*Myanmar, continued...***Myanmar: Resist Myanmar's digital coup: stop the military consolidating digital control**

After the February 1st, 2021 military coup in Myanmar, the junta jailed government officials, lawyer, human rights defenders, and ordinary people, including children. The junta also curtailed the internet and shut down independent media. LRWC was among dozens of human rights organizations joining a [statement](#) on 8 February 2022 led by Access Now expressing concern that internet shutdowns continue to “shroud serious human rights violations.” The joint statement calls on the international community, technology companies, social media platforms, and network providers to stand with the people of Myanmar and resist the digital coup” including support for international sanctions aimed at restricting the sale and supply of dual-use surveillance technology.

**Sale of Norwegian internet company Telenor puts Myanmar human rights defenders at increased risk: *News update***

On 18 March 2022 the sale of Norwegian telecommunications company Telenor Myanmar was [finalized](#), sparking [outrage](#) at Telenor's “[irresponsible disposal](#)” of Telenor's Myanmar operations to a company whose 80% majority shareholder is military-linked.” Access Now called the sale “a major kick in the guts for human rights defenders on the ground.” Prior to the sale, human rights organizations had repeatedly warned that the lack of safeguards in the sale posed serious risks to privacy, expression, association, and security and urged that the sale be stopped. In early 2021, LRWC had [expressed concern](#) about Telenor's compliance with internationally unlawful internet shut-down orders by the junta. Telenor decided “to leave Myanmar to be able to adhere to our own values on human rights and responsible business” and [said](#) that the sale was the most realistic alternative to ensure that its exit from Myanmar did “not increase the safety risk” for Telenor employees.

Myanmar: Halt the atrocities against Myanmar people, including human rights defenders,

On 18 March 2022, LRWC made an [oral video statement](#) at the UN Human Rights Council pointing out that a year after the February 2021 coup “at least 1,600 people have been killed and 9,600 arbitrarily detained,” including lawyers, human rights defenders and journalists. Torture is commonplace. In addition, LRWC expressed concern about ongoing violations against Rohingya, Shan, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni and other peoples. LRWC joined the calls for a “Security Council arms embargo, targeted economic sanctions, and referral of the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court.” The statement also called for humanitarian assistance and refugee protection “for all affected persons, including human rights defenders and their families.”

PHILIPPINES

LRWC continues to monitor the situation of lawyers and other human defenders in the [Philippines](#). On 9 May 2022, the Philippines is scheduled to hold a national election. Human rights organizations are urging all candidates to put human rights at the centre of their political campaigns.

Since the beginning of the Duterte administration in July 2016 there have been thousands of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines as part of President Duterte's “war on drugs.” In addition, [dozens of lawyers](#) have been murdered with impunity for representing causes or people unpopular with the Duterte government, the latest being the murder of Reginald Manito on 22 [February 2022](#). The Philippines Commission on Human Rights is conducting an investigation into the murder.

On 17 February 2022, LRWC's UN Liaison Director, Catherine Morris, conducted an online briefing session for the Canadian chapter of the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP Canada) on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process of the UN Human Rights Council. The briefing session was part of ICHRP Canada's preparation for submission of its [report](#) for the upcoming UPR of the Philippines in November 2022.

RUSSIA

Russian Federation: Flagrant violations of international law in Ukraine and Russia

On 21 March 2022, LRWC made a [joint oral video statement](#) to the UN Human Rights Council condemning Russia's "flagrant violations of international law" including the unlawful invasion of Ukraine. The statement noted the numerous allegations that Russia's leadership has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine, as well as within Russia where authorities have arbitrarily detained thousands of peaceful anti-war demonstrators. There have been numerous reports of torture and ill-treatment of detainees, as well as denial of access to lawyers. LRWC's statement was joined by the Law Society of England and Wales, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, and Lawyers for Lawyers.

The statement also noted that in 2021, Russian authorities have judicially harassed Ivan Pavlov and other lawyers, arbitrarily shut down Memorial and other human rights and legal aid organizations and physically attacked three lawyers while engaged in providing legal assistance to clients.

The joint statement called on the Human Rights Council to ensure that all Council members uphold General Assembly Resolution 60/251, which requires all members of the Council "to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights." At the time of the statement, Russia was a member of the Council.

UN General Assembly suspends Russia from the UN Human Rights Council.

On 7 April 2022, the UN General Assembly (GA) voted 93 to 24 to suspend Russia's membership in the Human Rights Council based on GA Resolution 60/251 which provides for suspension of Council members that commit "gross and systematic violations of human rights."



SAUDI ARABIA

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



Waleed Abu al-Khair

January 2022 marked the seven-year anniversary of the confirmation of a 15-year-prison sentence for lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair on 12 January 2015 by Saudi Arabia's Specialized Court of Appeal which is controlled by the Saudi monarchy. He was falsely charged with illegitimate offences, denied a fair trial, imprisoned, and subjected to torture and ill-treatment in reprisal for his representation of clients unpopular with Saudi Arabia's monarchy and for peacefully advocating for human rights and political reforms. He has been arbitrarily detained and ill-treated since April 2014.

Mr. Abu al-Khair represented high profile human rights advocates including [Raif Badawi](#). Waleed. Mr. Abu al-Khair's former wife and Raif Badawi's sister, Ms. [Samar Badawi](#), a women's rights defender, was also arbitrarily imprisoned from July 2018 until 27 June 2021. LRWC has been [advocating](#) for the release of Mr. Abu al-Khair since April 2014. There is currently no news of Waleed Abu al-Khair, his condition, or treatment.

Saudi Arabia's Raif Badawi released from prison but remains subject to 10-year travel ban: *Update*

Blogger and human rights defender Mr. [Raif Badawi](#) was released on 11 March 2022 after serving a ten-year prison sentence. He was also sentenced to 1,000 lashes and, on release, a 10-year travel ban. On January 15, he received 50 lashes in a public square; subsequent floggings were postponed on numerous occasions due to Mr. Badawi's ill-health. Mr. Badawi's ten-year sentence officially ended on 1 March 2022. The ongoing travel ban precludes him from joining his wife and children, who live in Canada.

SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan: Joint Letter to the UN Human Rights Council

On 11 February 2022, LRWC joined dozens of NGOs in a [letter](#) to member States of the UN Human Rights Council calling for their support to extend the mandate of the Council's Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan due to continued harassment of civil society, repression of peaceful protesters, and impunity for extrajudicial executions.

THAILAND

Thailand: Safeguard lawyers in Thailand from harassment and interference

On 24 March 2022 LRWC joined an [oral video statement](#) led by Lawyers for Lawyers seeking increased protection for independence of Thailand's lawyers. The statement reported that lawyers in Thailand often experience difficulties accessing their clients in detention, and lack of respect of lawyer-client confidentiality by law enforcement agencies. Lawyers and human rights defenders are also subject to threats, intimidation, and improper interference with their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The statement urged that Thailand ensure lawyer-client confidentiality, independence of lawyers, and protection of lawyers and defenders from undue interference with their work.

Thailand: Enforced disappearances including lawyer Mr. Somchai Neelapaijit since 2004

During its 2022 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by the UN Human Rights Council, Thailand accepted recommendations to create an enabling environment for human rights defenders, and to take measures to accede to and implement the *International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance*. In an [oral video statement](#) to the Council on 24 March 2022, LRWC noted that similar promises had been made at Thailand's 2018 UPR but that "defenders are still calling for accession and a law to implement the Convention, as well as effective investigations to determine the truth and ensure accountability of the perpetrators of Thailand's many enforced disappearances – including the enforced disappearance of lawyer Mr. Somchai Neelapaijit in March 2004." The statement called on Thailand to halt the judicial harassment of defenders and to withdraw a draft non-profit law that has overbroad provisions which can be misused to violate freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

Thailand human rights defender Angkhana Neelapaijit appointed to UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances



LRWC welcomes the 1 April 2022 decision of the UN Human Rights Council to appoint Angkhana Neelapaijit, a prominent human rights advocate in Thailand, to the UN Working Group on enforced and involuntary disappearances. Angkhana Neelapaijit has served as the Chair of the Working Group for Justice and Peace which investigates allegations of human rights violations in southern Thailand. She served as a member of Thailand's National Human Rights Commission from 2016 to 2019. She has been subjected to threats and [judicial harassment](#) as a result of her human rights work, and as a result of her [advocacy](#) for an thorough, independent, impartial and effective investigation into the 2004 enforced disappearance of her husband, human rights lawyer [Somchai Neelapaijit](#).

TURKEY

Turkey: Urgent Action letter to UN Special Procedures: Imminent risk to health and life of seriously ill prisoner Aysel Tuğluk



Aysel Tuğluk

LRWC was among 43 human rights organizations signing an [urgent action letter](#) to six UN Special Procedures mandates. The joint letter, issued on 20 January 2022, expressed grave concern over the treatment of a seriously ill prisoner, Ms. Aysel Tuğluk, a human rights lawyer. Ms. Tuğluk has been unlawfully imprisoned since December 2016 because of her lawful political activities as a member of pro-Kurdish political parties.

Turkey, continued...

The urgent action letter requested the intervention of UN Special Procedures mandate holders to urge the Turkish Government to immediately release Aysel Tuğluk and other severely ill prisoners. The joint letter was sponsored by the Turkey Human Rights Litigation Support Project.

Turkey: Abuse of anti-terrorism laws to arbitrarily detain human rights lawyers and defenders

On 14 March 2022, LRWC made an [oral video statement](#) to the UN Human Rights Council expressing concern about Turkey's use of overbroad terrorism laws. Since 2016, there have been more than 1,600 prosecutions of lawyers, "with more than 615 remanded to pretrial detention, and more than 450 sentenced to prison." Many lawyers are charged with the same overbroad anti-terrorism offences as their clients. Unfair trials, and ill-treatment of unlawfully detained lawyers and defenders are commonplace.

The statement urged Turkey to release and drop charges against all legal professionals and defenders arbitrarily detained under overbroad anti-terrorism laws, and to revise its anti-terrorism laws in line with recommendations of UN human rights bodies. The statement was joined by the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute and Lawyers for Lawyers.

Turkey: Arbitrary detention of Judge Murat Arslan

On 30 March, LRWC sent a [letter](#) to Turkish authorities seeking the release of Murat Arslan from prison. He has been arbitrarily detained since 2016. On 10 March 2022, Turkey's Supreme Court of Appeals upheld a prison sentence of 10 years despite an unfair trial on charges under overbroad legislation that fails to measure up to Turkey's international human rights obligations.



Murat Arslan, Turkey

UKRAINE

The unlawful invasion of Ukraine by Russia on 24 February 2022 triggers concern about Ukrainian [human rights defenders](#) who have been working to collect and preserve evidence of violations of human rights and the international law of armed conflict, including summary executions, abductions, torture, sexual violence, and attacks against civilian infrastructures. The [UN Special Rapporteur](#) on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, is calling for coordinated international support for the work of human rights defenders in Ukraine, as well as help for defenders wishing to escape to another country.

The UN Human Rights Council on 4 March 2022 adopted a [resolution](#) to urgently create an independent international Commission of Inquiry (CoI). The CoI comprises three human rights experts appointed for an initial period of a year to investigate and collective evidence of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the context of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and make recommendations on accountability measures. The [three commissioners](#) were appointed on 31 March. Also see the section on Russia, above.

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.

UNITED STATES

US v. Donziger: Final report of international trial monitors finds criminal contempt proceedings violated US international law obligations. News update



Steven Donziger

On 24 January 2022, an international group of legal scholars and practitioners released its [final report](#) on US Federal Court criminal contempt proceedings against New York lawyer Steven Donziger. In July 2020, LRWC had issued a briefing note on [allegations](#) of judicial harassment of Mr. Donziger.

In September 2020, LRWC's Catherine Morris, was invited to monitor the criminal proceedings along with former US Ambassador Stephen Rapp. Monitoring of the Donziger trial was conceived as a pilot project to monitor US trials in light of identified needs to address international concerns about the administration of justice in the US, particularly in relation to extrajudicial killings, violence, and arbitrary arrests of people of African descent, Indigenous Peoples, and other racialized or marginalized persons or groups in the US. The group convened under the name of International Monitoring Panels to Evaluate Trials in the United States (IMPETUS). The IMPETUS monitors, including Catherine Morris, monitored the proceedings in their personal capacities.

The IMPETUS panel found that Mr. Donziger was denied a fair trial, resulting in more than two years of confinement – several times longer than the available prison sentence in the case. Findings included the appearance of judicial bias, lack of equality of arms, and denial of the presumption of innocence.

United Nations

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (ECOSOC)

ECOSOC elects Committee on NGOs: Russia voted off for the first time in 75 years



ECOSOC Chamber, New York

On 13 April 2022, the UN's Economic and Social Council ([ECOSOC](#)) elected 19 members of the UN Committee on NGOs, a body mandated to accredit NGOs to the UN. Russia was voted off the Committee after being a member since the establishment of the Committee in 1947. There are no term limits.

On 10 February, LRWC had joined a group of 349 national, regional and international NGOs [calling for](#) States to take NGO participation seriously and vote accordingly.

A number of NGOs around the world have had their applications for accreditation deferred by the NGO Committee – often for many years. This blocks them from participating fully in UN meetings. The Committee on NGOs includes several States that have demonstrated a practice of using their membership to stop NGOs from becoming accredited.

At the 13 April election, the group of Eastern European States was the only regional group to present a competitive slate. Three candidates, Armenia, Georgia, and Russia, were presented for two available seats. Armenia received 47 votes, Georgia 44, and Russia 15 votes. Other regions presented uncompetitive slates. The results of the election mean that the NGO Committee for 2022 to 2024 will comprise:

United Nations ECOSOC, continued...

- African States: Algeria, Cameroon, Eritrea, Liberia and Mozambique;
- Asia-Pacific States: Bahrain, China, India and Pakistan;
- Latin-American and Caribbean States: Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba and Nicaragua;
- Western European and other States: Israel, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States;
- Eastern European States: Armenia, Georgia.

The International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) has been among the leaders of the NGO campaign to encourage States to engage in meaningful elections to the Committee. ISHR [notes](#) that despite Russia's departure from the Committee,

“the incoming NGO Committee still includes members with deeply problematic records on safeguarding human rights and civil society participation. According to the CIVICUS Monitor, 60% of the incoming members are currently characterised as being ‘closed’ or ‘repressed’ civic spaces. This includes all members for the Asia-Pacific region. Civic space is ‘obstructed’ or ‘narrowed’ within the remaining 40%.”

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 49th Session

The UN Human Rights Council held its 49th session from 28 February to 1 March. The five-week session was the longest ever held. While LRWC was unable to send a delegate to Geneva, it participated actively in the session through oral video statements. LRWC prepared and delivered 10

statements and joined four additional statements prepared by other NGOs.

Joint letter prior to the 49th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

South Sudan: Extend the mandate of the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, [Joint letter](#) to member and observer States of the UN Human Rights Council by Defend Defenders with 80 NGOs including LRWC, 11 February 2022.

**Oral Statements at the 49th Session of the Human Rights Council**

Sri Lanka: Pursuing Accountability and Justice in Sri Lanka, LRWC [oral video statement](#) (drafted and read by Harini Sivalingam), 7 March 2022.

Colombia: Situation of human rights in Colombia, LRWC [oral video statement](#) (drafted by Heather Neun, read by Catherine Morris), 8 March 2022.

China: OHCHR report on grave human rights violations in Xinjiang can wait no longer, Human Rights Watch [oral video statement](#) joined by 192 NGOs including LRWC, 8 March 2022,

China: Torture of lawyers in China, LRWC [oral video statement](#) (read by Catherine Morris), joined by International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L), Human Rights Now, The 29 Principles, and The Rights Practice, 11 March 2022

Turkey: Abuse of anti-terrorism laws to arbitrarily detain human rights lawyers and defenders, LRWC [oral video statement](#) (read by Brian Samuels), joined by IBAHRI, and L4L, 15 March 2022.

Iran: Arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of human rights lawyers and defenders, LRWC [oral video statement](#) (read by Brian Samuels), joined by IBAHRI, and L4L, 15 March 2022.

Iran: Arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of human rights lawyers and defenders, LRWC [oral video statement](#) (read by Paria Saremi), joined by the IBAHRI, L4L, and Front Line Defenders, 16 March 2022.

Iran: Judicial harassment of human rights lawyers Nasrin

Sotoudeh and Amirshalar Davoudi, IBAHRI [oral video statement](#), joined by LRWC, 17 March 2022.

Belarus Harassment of lawyers in Belarus, IBAHRI [oral video statement](#) joined by L4L, The Law Society of England and Wales, and LRWC, 17 March 2022.

Myanmar: Halt the atrocities against Myanmar people, including human rights defenders, LRWC

United Nations, continued...

[oral video statement](#) (read by Renée Mulligan), 21 March 2022.

Russian Federation: Flagrant violations of international law (in Ukraine and Russia), LRWC [joint oral statement](#) (read by Brian Samuels), 21 March 2022.

Thailand: Safeguard lawyers in Thailand from harassment and interference, L4L [oral video statement](#) joined by LRWC, 24 March 2022.

Thailand: Implement Universal Periodic Review commitments: Enforced disappearances, including lawyer Mr. Somchai Neelapaijit, LRWC [oral video statement](#) (read by Catherine Morris), 24 March 2022.

Cambodia: Fulfil treaty promises with action to uphold rights of dissidents and defenders, LRWC [oral video statement](#) (read by Catherine Morris), 29 March 2022.

Afghanistan: Protect women jurists and defenders, LRWC [oral video statement](#) (read by Paul Scambler), joined by IBAHRI, the Law Society of England and Wales, and L4L, 30 March, 2022.

International Criminal Court

ICC Prosecutors opens investigation into the situation in Ukraine

On 2 March, ICC Prosecutor, Karim Khan opened an investigation into the Situation in Ukraine He had previously announced on 28 February that he had decided to seek authorization to open an investigation into the [Situation in Ukraine](#) because in a preliminary examination he “had already found a reasonable basis to believe crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court had been committed, and had identified potential cases that would be admissible.” While Ukraine is not a party to the Rome Statute and cannot itself refer a situation to the Prosecutor, it “has twice exercised its prerogatives to legally accept the Court’s jurisdiction over alleged crimes under the Rome Statute occurring on its territory, should the Court choose to exercise it. The [first declaration](#) lodged by the Government of Ukraine accepted ICC jurisdiction with respect to alleged

crimes committed on Ukrainian territory from 21 November 2013 to 22 February 2014. The [second declaration](#) extended this time period on an open-ended basis to encompass ongoing alleged crimes committed throughout the territory of Ukraine from 20 February 2014 onwards.” In the 28 February statement, Mr. Khan stated that it would expedite an investigation if a State Party to the Rome Statute referred the situation to his Office under the Rome Statute, Article 14. Referrals were received from 39 States Parties to the Rome Statute.

The ICC and Myanmar

While the ICC has opened an [investigation](#) into alleged crimes within the Court’s jurisdiction committed against the Rohingya population “at least in part on the territory of Bangladesh, a State Party to the Rome Statute, or on the territory of any other State Party. However, crimes against the Rohingya committed exclusively within Myanmar cannot be investigated by the Prosecutor, because Myanmar is not a State Party to the Rome Statute. This means that any referral of the situation in Myanmar must be referred by the Security Council, which so far has not done so despite urging by the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar and many NGOs including LRWC.

Educational Events

The Day of the Endangered Lawyer 24 January 2022

- [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).

LRWC in the News

The following news stories published during the first quarter of 2022 mentioned LRWC:

- “Letter to UN for Kurdish politician, ill prisoner Aysel Tuğluk: ‘Take urgent action’,” [Bianet](#), 21 January 2022.
- Brandi Morin, “Human rights matter: In Ukraine, and in Wet’suwet’en: Canada’s hypocrisy on full display during Russian invasion,” [Ricochet](#), 4 March 2022.
- “Russia and Belarus rush to Sri Lanka’s defence at UN Human Rights Council,” [Tamil Guardian](#), 7 March 2022.

Publications

The following articles were written by LRWC directors and volunteers and published between 24 January 2022 and 22 March 2022.

- 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).
- Marjorie Cohn, “Extradition Looms for Assange After UK Supreme Court Refuses to Hear His Appeal,” [Truthout](#), 16 March 2022. Marjorie Cohn is on the board of directors of LRWC.
- Catherine Morris, Stephen Rapp, and Etienne Toussaint, “Criminal Contempt and ‘Rule by Law’ in New York: Trial Monitors Reflect on US v. Donziger,” [Slaw.ca](#), 22 March 2022. Catherine Morris is LRWC’s Director of UN Participation.

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.

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").

LRWC

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Gail Davidson
Joshua Lam
Leo McGrady, Q.C.
Heather Neun
Brian Samuels, Q.C.
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