

# Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

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

## **Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC) Activities at the UN Human Rights Council's 58<sup>th</sup> Session, 24 February to 4 April 2025**

LRWC participated in the UN Human Rights Council's 58th session from 24 February to 4 April 2025.

### **Summary of pre-session letters and oral video statements in date order**

#### **Pre-session joint letters**

- **South Sudan: Pre-session joint letter urging the Council to adopt a resolution to extend the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan.**

On 5 February 2025, LRWC joined a letter drafted by Defend Defenders sent to HRC members and observer states urging support for adoption of a strong resolution for the extension of the existing UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan “for two years to address risk factors for atrocity crimes, including surveillance, search and intimidation activities by the NSS” targeting “not only political opponents but also human rights defenders (HRDs), activists, journalists, and civil society organisations.” The letter was signed by 103 NGOs with ECOCOC consultative status. See the full letter on the Defend Defenders website in [English](#) and [French](#).

Related Council action: On 4 April 2025, the Council adopted a resolution [by a vote](#) with 24 states in favour, six against, and 17 abstentions, extending the mandate of the Council's Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan for a further period of one year. See the full text of the [Resolution 58/1](#).

- **Pre-session statement joint letter on sanctions against the International Criminal Court (ICC)**

On 5 February 2025, LRWC joined a statement by the Coalition for the ICC (CICC) opposing United States (US) sanctions against the ICC. The statement was first issued on 14 January 2025. LRWC, a member of the CICC, is among 151 signatories. The statement urged member states to “defend the ICC, its officials, and those cooperating with it from measures aimed at undermining the court's vital mandate for justice.” See the letter on the [CICC](#) website. On 6 February 2025, the

President of the US issued an Executive Order placing [specific sanctions](#) against the ICC Prosecutor.

Related Council items: On [3 March 2025](#) the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) statement to the Council registered deep concern about efforts by “a number of countries to undermine and inhibit the functioning of international legal frameworks and institutions, including the International Criminal Court...” Also see LRWC’s joint oral video statement of 20 March 2025 with the IBAHRI, LSEW, and L4L (below).

- **Pre-session letter urging a UN Human Rights Council resolution on human rights defenders**

On 5 February 2025 LRWC joined a pre-session letter led by International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) and signed by 197 NGOs with ECOSOC consultative status, was sent to UN Council member States and observer States urging support for a draft resolution, led by Norway, regarding human rights defenders and new and emerging technologies. The joint letter urges “States to actively support the adoption of a resolution that recognises updated frameworks to protect human rights defenders in the digital era, addresses the growing risks of cybercrimes, online harassment, surveillance, and the suppression of free expression through censorship and disinformation.” See the full letter on the [ISHR](#) website.

Related Council action: On 26 March 2025, the Council adopted Resolution [58/23](#) by consensus (“without a vote”). The resolution, among other things, “[u]nderscores the responsibility of all business enterprises... in accordance with the *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*, to respect all human rights...” and requests the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) “to convene three regional workshops... to assess risks created by digital technologies to human rights defenders and best practices to respond to these concerns in different geographical areas” and to prepare a report on the workshops for the OHCHR at its 63<sup>rd</sup> session.

## **Oral video statements**

- **Afghanistan: Urgent Call for Accountability for Human Rights Violations**

On 27 February 2025, LRWC delivered a statement joined by the International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), welcoming the ICC Prosecutor’s request for arrest warrants for Taliban leaders for the crime of gender persecution, condemning the Taliban’s increasing repression of women and girls’ rights since 2021, and calling on the Council “to take overdue action and establish an independent gender-responsive accountability mechanism without further delay, mandated to investigate, collect, and preserve evidence, and identify perpetrators of past and ongoing international crimes, including the crime against humanity of gender persecution.” See the joint statement on [LRWC’s website](#). The video of the full debate [starts here on UN WebTV](#) at 02:38:05 and continues [here](#) with the LRWC/IBAHRI statement at 1:14:10.

Related Council action: On 20 March 2025, Iceland, supported by Chile, Costa Rica, Liechtenstein and South Africa, made an [oral statement](#) urging the Council “to urgently take action on the [Afghanistan] Special Rapporteur’s recommendation for the creation of an...independent investigation mechanism, with a comprehensive mandate and broad scope, to support efforts

towards criminal accountability for past and ongoing international crimes and other serious human rights violations [in Afghanistan].”

However, despite past and current recommendations by numerous NGOs, including LRWC, and growing concern by States, no such resolution was forthcoming at the 58<sup>th</sup> session.

- **Myanmar: Ongoing atrocity crimes and harassment of lawyers and defenders**

On 3 March 2025, LRWC, the Law Council of Australia, and Lawyers for Lawyers joined an oral statement, drafted and delivered by the IBAHRI, condemning the ongoing atrocity crimes being committed in Myanmar since the 2021 military coup. The statement pointed out the military junta’s targeting of pro-democracy activists, human rights defenders, and journalists. The emphasis was on severe restrictions on lawyers, including lack of access to clients, bans on confidential communications, and harassment and arbitrary detention of lawyers defending political cases. The statement urged the Council and the international community to use and support all possible avenues to ensure accountability for all international crimes that are being committed. See the text of the [oral statement](#). The debate, available on UN WebTV, commenced 28 February 2025 and continued [3 March 2025](#); the IBAHRI-led joint statement is at 52:12.

Related Council action: The Council adopted a consensus resolution [Res/58/20](#) extending the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar for a further period of one year. The resolution also requested the High Commissioner to continue to monitor the situation in Myanmar with focus on accountability for violation of international human rights and humanitarian law, and to make a comprehensive report with recommendations at the 62<sup>nd</sup> session of the Council.

Note that since 2018, the Council has also had an Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar ([IIMM](#)) which “collects, preserves and analyzes evidence, and prepares case files to share with relevant national, regional or international courts or tribunals who can use the information to prosecute perpetrators.” The ICC has an ongoing investigation into international crimes in [Bangladesh-Myanmar](#) regarding Rome Statute crimes such as deportation and persecution, allegedly committed against the Rohingya population, committed at least in part on the territory of Bangladesh. Myanmar is not currently a State Party to the Rome Statute of the ICC, but Bangladesh is. On 27 November 2024, the ICC Prosecutor [applied](#) to the Court for an arrest warrant against Senior General and Acting President Min Aung Hlaing.

- **Council members urged to ensure effective, timely measures to uphold the rule of law**

On 4 March 2025, LRWC delivered an oral video statement to the Council stating that it is unacceptable for States to subordinate international human rights law to their own interests or that of their allies, and pointing out that some States are actively undermining UN bodies and the ICC, as well as engaging in arbitrary detention or harassment of judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and human rights defenders. LRWC called on all members of the Council to ensure effective, timely measures to uphold the rule of law, curtail violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and called on all States to ensure adequate funding to end the Council’s liquidity crisis and enable fulfilment of Council mandates. See the [full text of the statement](#). See the oral video statement on [UN WebTV](#) at 25:47.

Also see the 20 March 2025 joint statement of LRWC with IBAHRI, LSEW, and L4L (below).

As of the end of the 58<sup>th</sup> Session, the UN continued to face an unprecedented liquidity crisis due to non-payment by UN member states of their UN dues as well as the recent abrupt funding cut by the US. See more by the [International Commission of Jurists](#). This lack of adequate funding effects the ability of the Council and its Special Procedures to fulfil the mandates set out for them by the Council.

▪ **Belarus: Repression of civil society and reprisals against lawyers**

On 19 March 2025, the IBAHRI delivered an oral video statement, joined by LRWC, the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers, LSEW, and L4L, condemning the continued repression of civil society in Belarus, particularly reprisals against defence lawyers representing political opposition, protesters or defending the rule of law. The statement urged Belarus to cease further persecution and to immediately release all arbitrarily detained persons. The statement welcomed Lithuania's referral of the situation in Belarus to the ICC and urged other States to join it. See the full text of the [statement](#). See the video on [UN WebTV](#) at 22:39.

Related Council action: On 19 March 2025, the Council adopted [Res/58/19](#) by a [vote](#) of 25 against 5 with 17 abstentions to extend the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on Belarus and the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus for a further period of one year.

▪ **United States: Alarming deterioration of the rule of law includes threats against jurists**

On 20 March 2025, LRWC delivered a joint oral video statement expressing alarm about recent threats to the independence of judges, prosecutors, and lawyers in the US as well as denial timely access to lawyers for detained migrants, along with reported cases of enforced disappearances and deportations without due process and/or in violation of judicial orders. The statement urged the US to ensure compliance with court orders, and an immediate halt all vilification, harassment, intimidation and threats to the independence of judges, prosecutors and lawyers. The Statement also asked all Council member states to condemn and reject sanctions against the ICC. See the [full text of the statement](#). See the video statement on [UN WebTV](#) at 1:40:32 (Note that due to a technical issue at the Council, the first part of the statement was cut off during delivery).

## **Upcoming sessions of the Human Rights Council**

The next session of the Council, the [59<sup>th</sup> session](#), is scheduled for 16 June to 11 July 2025.