

LRWC and the United Nations

21 April 2026

From January to April 2026, LRWC continued to contribute to the work of the UN General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Committee, UN ECOSOC (Committee on NGOs), UN Human Rights Council Special Procedures, and the UN Human Rights Council's 61st regular session.

UN General Assembly: Convention on Crimes Against Humanity

As the General Assembly proceeds towards formal negotiation of a Convention on Crimes Against Humanity, LRWC joined two advocacy statements presented to the Preparatory Committee for the UN Conference of Plenipotentiaries on Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Humanity held 19-30 January. The two joint statements joined by LRWC are:

- **Ensuring the Full, Meaningful, and Safe Participation of Diverse Civil Society in the UN Crimes against Humanity Treaty Process**, 16 January 2026, joint statement of 160 organizations and 228 individuals calling for robust and meaningful civil society participation, including both NGOs in consultative Status with ECOSOC and NGOs not in consultative status and individuals with relevant experience and expertise. See the statement on the [website](#) of the International Commission of Jurists.
- **Advancing Gender Justice in the Crimes Against Humanity Convention: A Declaration**, a joint letter with 211 signatures, including 117 organizations, 19 January 2026. See the statement on the [website](#) of Human Rights Watch.

See further information about the CAH [conferences](#) (with documentation). See the current [draft articles](#).

UN Human Rights Committee Review of Canada

LRWC was among 41 organizations joining a submission to the UN Human Rights Committee's 145th Session on the occasion of the Committee's Periodic Review of Canada's adherence to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights:

- **“Exporting violence: Canada's arms transfers and the devastation of civil and political rights in Gaza,”** joint submission dated 15 January 2026, prepared by the International Human Rights Program, University of Toronto, Henry N. R. Jackman Faculty of Law; Canadian Lawyers for International Human Rights (CLAHR), and the Global Human Rights Clinic, University of Chicago Law School. The report also raised concern about suppression of

Palestinian protestors and human rights defenders as well as freedom of expression in Canada through suppression of pro-Palestinian advocacy and demonstrations. See the full submission on the [OHCHR website](#).

See the Committee's [Concluding Observations](#) dated 2 April 2026 which expressed concern about Canada's arms transfers. The Committee urge Canada to strengthen its efforts to "prevent, address, and mitigate the adverse human rights impacts of arms transfers and exports," including reviewing and revising legislation and administrative frameworks as necessary in line with the ICCPR, the Committee's comment No. 36 (2018) on the right to life, and in line with other international instruments, and ensuring that "all allegations of unlawful arms transfers are promptly, thoroughly and impartially investigated, and that perpetrators are prosecuted and, if convicted, punished." See the full recommendations in the Concluding Observations, para 27-28.

Human Rights Council, 61st Session, 23 February to 13 March 2026 (HRC61)

During the 61st session of the UN Human Rights Council, 23 February to 31 March 2026, LRWC led the drafting and delivery of four joint oral video statements, joined three oral video statements drafted by other NGOs, and joined four pre-session advocacy submissions to the Council. LRWC worked closely with NGOs with UN ECOSOC consultative status, including:

- International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI);
- Law Society of England and Wales (LSEW);
- Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L).

LRWC also worked with NGOs without consultative status, including:

- Fédération étudiante des droits de l'homme (FEDH);
- The UK based [Centre for Supporters of Human Rights](#) (focused on human rights in the Middle East, particularly Iran).

HRC61 Oral video statements

LRWC successfully obtained a number of viable speaking slots, not all of which could be taken up due to limitations in LRWC's volunteer capacity for interventions. LRWC was unsuccessful in obtaining speaking slots on priority issues, including concerns about human rights lawyers and defenders in Myanmar, Turkey, Occupied Palestinian Territories and the overall UN financial crisis affecting the UN's human rights system. LRWC worked with other human rights organizations to deliver or co-sponsor the following oral statements (in date order):

- **26 February 2026: Afghanistan: The Taliban Penal Code and Systemic Gender-Based Repression.** The oral statement was drafted and delivered by LRWC. IBAHRI contributed to the draft and joined the statement. See the [statement](#) on the LRWC website. This statement was the subject of a news story by the Dari language news outlet, [Afghanistan International](#). (See [English](#) language Google translation).

- **26 February 2026: Situation of human rights in the Sudan.** LRWC and the IBAHRI joined a statement led by Lawyers for Lawyers raising concerns about the killing of at least 16 lawyers in Sudan since April 2024 with dozens more subjected to enforced disappearance, or arbitrarily detained or prosecuted, forcing some into hiding or exile. In 2026 alone, at least 31 lawyers were reportedly suspended or disbarred by disciplinary bodies without legal justification. The statement urged the Council to ensure that the International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan is able to effectively continue its work on Sudan. The Fact-Finding Mission [reported to HRC61](#) on the massive atrocity crimes in Sudan and that Sudan has not cooperated with the Mission. See the Lawyers for Lawyers-led [statement](#) on the OHCHR website.
- **2 March 2026: Sri Lanka: Ensure measurable progress towards accountability.** LRWC was joined by the IBAHRI in an oral video statement calling on the Council to appoint a dedicated Special Rapporteur for Sri Lanka with a robust mandate to monitor, report, and advance measurable progress toward justice and institutional reform after years of impunity and disregard of resolutions by the Council. The joint statement also urged all Member States in arrears to promptly fulfill their financial obligations to the UN to ensure that the work of the Council and other UN mechanisms can be sustained. The statement was drafted and delivered by LRWC. See the statement on the [OHCHR website](#) or on [LRWC's website](#). Despite numerous written statements by NGOs seeking a Special Rapporteur for Sri Lanka, no resolution concerning Sri Lanka was put forward at the 61st session of the Council.
- **12 March 2026: Belarus: Grave concern about arbitrary detention of lawyers on fabricated charges.** In an oral video statement during the debate on the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Belarus, LRWC and the IBAHRI joined Lawyers for Lawyers expressing deep concern about the ongoing crackdown on lawyers in Belarus. Despite the welcome release of lawyer Maxim Znak in December 2025 after more than five years of arbitrary detention development, five lawyers remain imprisoned on fabricated charges, and continued harassment of lawyers forced into exile. See the joint statement on the [OHCHR website](#). The Council adopted Resolution [A/HRC/61/L.14](#) extending the mandates of the Special Rapporteur for Belarus and the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights for a period of one year.
- **16 March 2026: Iran: Grave risks to lawyers and prisoners of conscience amid armed conflict.** LRWC was joined by the IBAHRI and the Centre for Supporters of Human Rights (CSHR) in an oral video statement expressing alarm about the situation in Iran where air strikes damaging prison structures placed detainees, including at least 20 lawyers, at grave risk. While seven lawyers were released on heavy bail conditions, they remain at risk of re-arrest. They and dozens of other lawyers face criminal proceedings. The joint statement urged Iran to release and halt reprisals against lawyers, and ensure all detainees' prompt and confidential access to counsel of their choice. The statement also urged the Human Rights Council to fully support the Council's Fact-Finding Mission and Special Rapporteur on Iran. The statement condemned all unlawful uses of force, including actions by the United States and Israel against Iran and Iran's retaliation across the region and urged immediate cessation of armed conflict. The LRWC statement was drafted by LRWC with contributions by the CSHR. See the full statement on the [OHCHR website](#) or on [the LRWC website](#).

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, in his 27 February 2026 [global update](#) at HRC61, emphasized that “the threat and use of force to solve disputes is becoming more frequent and normalized” – the day before the United States (US) and Israel launched aerial attacks on Iran. The [Special Rapporteur](#) for human rights in Iran on 16 March 2026 condemned the US and Israeli unlawful attacks together with Iran’s attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Also on 16 March 2026, the UN [Fact-Finding Mission](#) on Iran pointed out the “devastating aerial campaign against Iran” by the US and Israel, noting that “these airstrikes have resulted in mounting reports of civilian casualties, including of children,” and expressing concern about “public statements from senior US officials suggesting that long-established ‘rules of engagement’ do not apply in this conflict.” The Fact-Finding Mission also outlined the “unprecedented violence unleashed upon them by their government,” after protests by millions of people in Iran beginning 28 December 2025. [Canada](#), was one of a number of States raising concern about “developments in the Middle East” expressing deep concern “about the mounting loss of life” without naming the US or Israel, but condemning “the dangerous and destabilizing strikes by Iran on civilians and civilian infrastructure across the region” and imploring “all parties to de-escalate tensions, protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, and prioritize pathways for diplomacy.” The Council adopted by consensus HRC Resolution [61/1](#) condemning Iran’s attacks against third party States Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan. No draft resolution was put forward to address concerning attacks on Iran by the United States and Israel.

- **16 March 2026: Guatemala: Lack of judicial independence and spurious criminal prosecutions of human rights defenders, journalists and others.** LRWC joined IBAHRI’s oral video statement along with the International Platform against Impunity, Acting Together Jotay Program, Peace Brigades International. The joint statement expressed concern about the deterioration of judicial independence in Guatemala, compounded by spurious criminal prosecutions of journalists, human rights defenders, independent justice operators, and social leaders. Of particular concern is the criminalization of Indigenous authorities through misuse of terrorism legislation. See the [full statement](#) (Spanish language) on the OHCHR website.
- **23 March 2026: United States: Resume cooperation with the Universal Periodic Review.** LRWC was joined by the IBAHRI in a joint oral video statement expressing deep regret about the United States’ lack of cooperation with and engagement in the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The statement deplored ongoing erosion of human rights in the US, including violations of constitutional and statutory constraints on executive power, attempts to restrict voting rights, and attacks on the independence of judges and lawyers. The statement expressed support for the HRC’s [decision](#) on 7 November 2025 urging the US to resume cooperation with the UPR and rescheduling its UPR to occur in November 2026. The statement was drafted by LRWC and the IBAHRI. See the full statement on the [OHCHR website](#) or on [LRWC’s website](#).

HRC61 pre-session joint advocacy submissions

- **Human Rights Council mandates for Belarus.** LRWC joined a submission to the Council led by the Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF), urging Council members to support the renewal and strengthening of the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human

rights in Belarus and the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus. The joint submission was sent on 19 February 2026. See the [joint submission](#) (HRHF).

- **Human Rights Council mandate for South Sudan.** LRWC joined a letter led by Defend Defenders, urging members of the Council to [extend the mandate](#) of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan ([CHRSS](#)) to enable it to pursue its investigations on violations of international law in the country, including “surveillance, search and intimidation” of human rights defenders: English version ([PDF](#)); Version française ([PDF](#)). The joint letter was released on 19 February 2026 with 129 South Sudanese, regional, and international NGOs, including Amnesty International and HRW. The Council adopted a [resolution](#) to extend the mandate of the Commission by a [vote](#) of 24 to 4 (18 abstentions).
- **Joint Petition to the UN Human Rights Council on Sri Lanka.** LRWC joined the petition of the Fédération Étudiante des Droits de L'homme (FEDH), NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC. The petition highlights persistent and systematic violations against Tamil communities, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, and sexual violence, non-cooperation with OHCHR mechanisms, and failure of domestic justice mechanisms to ensure accountability. The petition urges appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Sri Lanka and urges that the Council recommend referral of Sri Lanka to the International Criminal Court.

Human Rights Council Special Procedures

- **Iran: Request for Urgent Action regarding arbitrary detention of human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh and human rights defender Reza Khandan.** On 10 April 2026, LRWC joined a group of 30 organizations requesting the urgent intervention of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders, and the Special Rapporteur on the Islamic Republic of Iran and others to seek the immediate and unconditional release of Iranian human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh and her husband, human rights defender Reza Khandan. Ms. Sotoudeh was arrested at her home in Tehran by agents reportedly affiliated with the Ministry of Intelligence of the Islamic Republic of Iran. She was taken to an undisclosed location. Ms. Sotoudeh’s husband, Reza Khandan, who is also a human rights defender has been detained in Evin Prison since 13 December 2024 in connection with his peaceful advocacy, including opposition to compulsory veiling rules. See the joint letter on the [LRWC website](#). See the [full .pdf submission and signatories](#).

ECOSOC Committee on NGOs

- **Competitive elections for ECOSOC’s NGO Committee.** On 4 February 2026, LRWC joined a letter led by the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), urging competitive elections for the UN ECOSOC Committee on NGOs. For civil society organisations to meaningfully engage with the UN, they must first obtain ECOSOC consultative status. The Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations, comprising 19 Member States is responsible for managing and deciding on NGO applications. Member states in the UN’s six regions nominate candidates. When regional slates are closed and the number of candidates equals the number

of seats, the elections provide no real choice. This undermines confidence in the NGO committee's role in approving civil society applications for consultative status. See the [letter](#) on the ISHR website.

In the 8 April 2026 election of the NGO Committee, all but one of the six regional slates were closed. Only the Eastern European group of States provided a choice, nominating three candidates for two seats. Estonia and Ukraine were elected but Belarus was not. The other five regions provided no choice but to elect the sole candidate in a closed slate, resulting in several States with poor human rights records being elected to the NGO committee. ISHR noted that five of the 19 newly elected members are classified by [Freedom House](#) as “free”: Estonia, Israel, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the US. Freedom House noted a recent sharp decline in the US. Freedom House classifies six elected countries as “partly free”: Côte d’Ivoire, India, Mexico, Peru, Tunisia and Ukraine. Freedom House classifies the other eight countries as “not free”: Cameroon, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates.