



The Law Society
of England and Wales

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

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

Joint statement

Call on Belarusian authorities to immediately release lawyer Dmitri Laevski

16 September 2026

Lawyers for Lawyers, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, the International Observatory for Lawyers and The Law Society of England and Wales strongly condemn the conviction and imprisonment of lawyer Dmitri Laevski by Belarusian authorities, call for his immediate release and for the dismissal of all charges against him.

On 9 September, the Minsk City Court sentenced Mr. Laevski to three years' imprisonment for "facilitating extremist activity" and "discrediting" Belarus. His conviction marks a further escalation in the systematic repression of lawyers who carry out their professional duties and exercise their right to freedom of expression in Belarus.

Dmitri Laevski is a Belarusian human rights lawyer who has represented high-profile political prisoners, including ex-presidential candidate Viktor Babaryka, lawyer Maksim Znak, and Nobel Peace Prize co-laureate Ales Bialiatski. Mr. Laevski is also known for his legal advocacy, frequently engaging with independent media to comment on his clients' cases and broader rule-of-law issues in Belarus. Belarusian authorities first pressured Mr. Laevski to leave the bar in 2011–2012 after defending Ales Bialiatski and the Minsk City Bar disbarred him in July 2021, following his defence of Viktor Babaryka and Maksim Znak.

The trial against Mr. Laevski began on 2 September, after authorities opened a criminal case in August on nine counts under the Criminal Code articles 361-4 and 369-1, including facilitation of extremist activity and discrediting Belarus. According to information received, the current [prosecution](#) is rooted in interviews he gave mostly in 2021 with various independent Belarusian and international outlets where he discussed the prosecution of his clients and the lawyers defending political prisoners, as well as his own disbarment. Beyond the fact that Mr. Laevski's statements fall within the scope of his right to freedom of expression as a lawyer, none of the media outlets involved had been designated as "extremist" at the time the interviews were given. Further, the prosecution alleged that he had "knowingly disseminated false information," yet, according to information received, it did not produce any evidence to substantiate these claims. Despite this, on 9 September 2026, the Minsk City Court sentenced him to three years in prison and took him into custody.

Mr. Laevski's prosecution fits within a broader pattern not only of [reprisals](#) against him but of the Belarusian authorities using disbarment and criminal proceedings to target lawyers representing clients in politically sensitive cases. According to the UN Special Rapporteur and the Independent Group of Experts on Belarus, lawyers face mounting [severe and systemic threats](#), reflected in at least [30 arbitrary detentions](#) and 11 criminal prosecutions since 2020, alongside more than [140 licence revocations](#), reducing the number of practicing lawyers from [2,200 to 1,602](#) with at least six lawyers imprisoned on politically motivated charges.

Belarusian authorities' use of criminal charges and disciplinary proceedings against lawyers for legitimate legal work violates international standards on the independence of the legal profession. The undersigned organisations remind Belarus that it is bound by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which it ratified in 1973, and thus has a duty to uphold its provisions, in particular the right to freedom of

expression (Article 19), the right to a fair trial (Article 14) and the prohibition of arbitrary detention (Article 9). Moreover, Principle 16 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers provides that lawyers must be able to perform their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; Principle 18 holds that they must not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their professional duties, and Principle 23 states that lawyers are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly, including the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights, without suffering professional restrictions for doing so.

In light of the above, the undersigned organisations call on Belarusian authorities to:

- Immediately release Dmitri Laevski and all other lawyers detained for carrying out their work as lawyers, and take measures to ensure that such convictions, based on their legitimate exercise of their human rights and professional functions, are set aside;
- Discontinue all criminal proceedings initiated against Mr. Laevski and other lawyers on the basis of their professional duties, including representation of clients in politically sensitive cases and public commentary on rule-of-law issues;
- Cease the misuse of criminal legislation, including “extremism-related” provisions, against lawyers carrying out their professional functions;
- Ensure due process and fair trial guarantees in all proceedings involving lawyers and human rights defenders, including the right to legal representation and protection against arbitrary detention;
- End the use of retaliatory professional sanctions such as disbarment, licence withdrawal, and other disciplinary reprisals against lawyers;
- Guarantee that all lawyers in Belarus can perform their legitimate professional duties without fear of reprisals, harassment, or undue interference in line with the Basic Principles.

The undersigned organisations will continue to monitor the situation in Belarus.

Signatories

International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute
International Observatory for Lawyers
Law Society of England and Wales
Lawyers for Lawyers
Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada