

Joint Statement

Lack of fair trial guarantees for Vadim Kobzev, Igor Sergunin and Alexei Liptser

The Law Society of England and Wales and Lawyers for Lawyers are dismayed by the continuing trial of Russian lawyers Vadim Kobzev, Igor Sergunin and Alexei Liptser, who provided legal services to late opposition politician Alexei Navalny.

Our organisations have previously raised concerns with the Russian authorities that the arrest and detention of the lawyers on 13 October 2023 was arbitrary and related to the legitimate work that these lawyers have conducted as part of their professional duties.

We are alarmed by recent [reports](#) that the state prosecutors are seeking the following severe, long prison sentences for the three lawyers:

- 5 years and 11 months for Vadim Kobzev
- 5 years and 10 months for Alexei Liptser
- 5 years and 6 months for Igor Sergunin

It is also reported that the prosecutors have asked the court to ban Kobzev, Lipster and Sergunin from providing legal services for five years.

The lawyers are being held on charges of associating with an extremist group, pursuant to Article 282.1 of the Russian Criminal Code. It is alleged that they used their status as lawyers to facilitate the transfer of letters from imprisoned Alexei Navalny to his organisation, the Anti-Corruption Foundation, which was outlawed and labelled an extremist group by Russian authorities in 2021. In November 2023, Kobzev, Liptser and Sergunin were themselves officially designated “extremists and terrorists.” Our organisations consider that the national anti-extremist law, under which they have been charged, is vague and overbroad, lacking legal certainty and it is open to arbitrary application.

Our organisations are gravely concerned that the trial of the three lawyers is failing to meet international fair trial standards. Their trial is being held behind closed doors and it is reported that the bulk of the prosecution’s evidence was gathered in an illegal law enforcement raid. In addition, meetings between the lawyers and Alexei Navalny in prison were secretly [filmed](#) and privileged documents confiscated, constituting a gross violation of the fundamental principle of lawyer-client confidentiality.

As a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Russia has an obligation to ensure that no-one is subject to arbitrary arrest or detention. Under Article 9 of the ICCPR, Russia must ensure that no-one is deprived of their liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedures as are established by law. In accordance with Article 14 of the ICCPR, Russia must also ensure that anyone charged with a recognisable criminal offence is brought to trial in proceedings which meet international fair trial standards.

Furthermore, pursuant to Principle 16 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, lawyers must be able to perform all their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; and shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognised professional duties, standards and ethics. In addition, Principle 18 enshrines the recognised principle that lawyers must not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions. Principle 22 also stipulates that governments shall recognise and respect that all communications and consultations between lawyers and their clients within their professional relationship are confidential.

Our organisations urge the relevant authorities to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release the three lawyers, unless credible evidence is presented that their arrest and detention comply fully with international human rights law and standards;
2. Pending their release ensure the physical and psychological well-being of the three lawyers;
3. Halt all acts of intimidation and harassment, including arbitrary arrest and detention, against members of the legal profession in Russia;
4. Take all necessary measures to ensure that lawyers in Russia are not identified with their clients and their clients' causes; and
5. Ensure that all lawyers in Russia can conduct their legitimate professional activities without fear of reprisals and free of undue interference.

The Law Society of England and Wales and Lawyers for Lawyers will continue to monitor the situation of the lawyers mentioned in this joint statement, as well as other members of the legal profession in Russia.