



The Law Society
of England and Wales



Belarus – Concerns about designation of lawyers association as “extremist”

10 September 2025

Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L), The International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), and the Law Society of England and Wales (LSEW) are seriously concerned about the increasing pressure on the legal profession by Belarusian authorities, most recently marked by the State Security Committee of the Republic of Belarus’ (KGB) designation of the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers (BAHRL) as an “extremist formation”. Under Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code of Belarus, the establishment of – or participation in – an extremist formation incurs penalties of up to 10 years imprisonment.

On 18 August 2025, the KGB adopted Decision No. 3/3-1962, designating the BAHRL as an “extremist formation”. The decision entered into force on 21 August 2025 and became publicly known the following day, when the BAHRL was added to the official list of institutions and individuals allegedly involved in “extremist activities,” maintained by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Along with the Association itself, included in the same official list are six individuals whom the KGB linked to the activities of the BAHRL.¹ Amongst those is lawyer Dmitri Laevski, who, based on the knowledge and experience of our organizations, has never been a member of BAHRL nor participated in its activities. Unlike the other lawyers listed, who currently reside in EU countries, Mr. Laevski is still in Belarus.

BAHRL is a non-governmental organization established by exiled Belarusian lawyers who were arbitrarily deprived of their right to practice law. The association works to protect the rights to a defense and a fair trial, promote the independence of the legal profession, and shed light on repression against their colleagues in Belarus.

It is believed that the association is targeted for their legitimate human rights activities. Designating BAHRL as an “extremist formation” has a chilling effect on the legal profession and associated fundamental freedoms (i.e., the right to freedom of expression, association and right to a fair trial), as it could be perceived as an arbitrary use of anti-extremism laws against lawyers and their activities. This creates a clear risk of politically motivated criminal proceedings targeting lawyers on the list and that would undermine fundamental freedoms.

This development is the latest manifestation of the broader pattern of repression against lawyers in and from Belarus. In April 2025, L4L, LSEW and IBAHRI, together with BAHRL, submitted several joint reports for the fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Belarus, raising serious concerns about Belarus’s compliance with its international human rights obligations, particularly in relation to the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers. Since the disputed 2020 presidential election, lawyers in Belarus who represent clients in politically motivated cases or speak out against human rights abuses have faced systematic and widespread repression. Many lawyers have had their licenses revoked arbitrarily, and some have faced criminal prosecution, with several still remaining in detention. Authorities have even placed Bar Associations under executive control, curtailing their independence.²

¹ Included in the list of “extremist” institutions were: Dzmitry Lepretar, Natallia Matskevich, Tatsiana Lishankova, Uladzimir Pylchanka, Maryia Kolesava-Hudzilina, and Dmitri Laevski. These people have been implicated as members of BAHRL.

² Through the 2021 amendment to the Law on the Bar and Advocacy in Belarus that puts it under executive control.



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The situation in Belarus demonstrates a clear disregard for international standards that safeguard the independence of lawyers and protect fundamental freedoms such as expression and association. Articles 14, 19, and 22 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR)—to which Belarus is a party—guarantee the right to a fair trial, freedom of expression, and freedom of association, respectively.

Furthermore, the *UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers* affirm that lawyers must be able to perform their professional duties without intimidation or interference (Article 16), must not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes (Article 18), and are entitled to the rights to freedom of expression and association (Article 23), which are essential to their role.

In light of the aforementioned, our organizations urge Belarusian authorities to:

- Immediately revoke the designation of the BAHRL as an “extremist formation”;
- Cease the misuse of anti-extremism legislation against lawyers and as a form of pressure and repression against CSOs and dissenting voices, in general.
- Ensure that no lawyer is prosecuted or otherwise punished for performing their professional duties or for their legitimate exercise of freedom of expression, association, or assembly;
- Disabuse of any notion of Dmitri Laevski's affiliation with BAHRL and ensure he is not subjected to harassment, arrest, or other reprisals;
- Uphold Belarus' obligations under international human rights law and create an enabling environment for lawyers to carry out their work without fear of reprisals.