



The Law Society
of England and Wales

59th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 4: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Belarus

26 June 2025

Joint oral statement

Mr. President,

Lawyers for Lawyers and the Law Society of England and Wales, thank the Special Rapporteur for his report and share his profound concern about the ongoing stranglehold over the legal profession in Belarus.

Lawyers continue to face politically motivated disbarment, arbitrary detention, and prosecution simply for fulfilling their professional duties. Since 2020, over 140 lawyers have been disbarred, at least 23 arrested, of which six remain imprisoned. Among them is Maksim Znak, legal counsel to opposition candidates, who has been held incommunicado for over 27 months.

The Executive has fully instrumentalised professional associations of lawyers. With Bar leadership actively interfering in lawyers' private lives and opinions and forcing participation in pro-government events. State-imposed loyalty is prioritized over professional ethics and independent functioning.

This climate of fear has forced many lawyers to flee or abandon their practice. Today, Belarus counts roughly one lawyer per 5,500 residents — severely limiting access to justice. Meanwhile, new admissions increasingly come from state institutions, often bypassing standard requirements, with some individuals previously involved in politically motivated prosecutions.

The result is a legal profession no longer capable of safeguarding rights but increasingly serving as an extension of state power.

We urge this Council to demand an immediate end to reprisals, support the restoration of an independent legal profession, and ensure accountability. We also call on members to raise these concerns during Belarus's upcoming Universal Periodic Review and to continue supporting the Special Rapporteur and the Group of Independent Experts in their vital work.

Thank you.

This statement was delivered by:

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