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LAWYERS**



**The Law Society
of England and Wales**



**Human Rights
Institute**

Organization: Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
Item 3: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur
Date: 21 September 2023
Speaker: Catherine Morris

Oral Statement to the 54th Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC), the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, Lawyers for Lawyers, and the Law Society of England and Wales, NGOs in special consultative status, and endorsed by OVD-Info, NGO without consultative status

Russia's systematic restrictions and repressive actions against human rights lawyers

Mr. President,

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, Lawyers for Lawyers, and the Law Society of England and Wales, along with OVD-Info, thank the Special Rapporteur for her inaugural report.¹

Russia has a longstanding pattern of violating its international law obligations to repress peaceful dissent. Since February 2022, Russia has intensified its abuse of laws to suppress all opposition within Russia to its full-scale aggression against Ukraine. Human rights lawyers face intensified restrictions on fulfilment of their professional duties, and repression of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly.² Lawyers' access to clients has been unlawfully delayed or denied³ on hundreds of occasions.⁴ Authorities have designated Russian lawyers or legal advocacy groups as "foreign agents" or "undesirable organizations," and have orchestrated unjustified disbarments.⁵ Lawyers have been charged or imprisoned for "discrediting"⁶ the use of Russian Armed Forces or disseminating "deliberately false information"⁷ for exposing facts or opinions that differ from official narratives.

We urge the Council:

- a. To renew the Special Rapporteur's mandate; and
- b. To insist that Russia:
 - halt and remove all designations of Russian lawyers and legal advocacy groups as "foreign agents" or "undesirable organizations," and
 - release and withdraw fines and charges against all lawyers and defenders detained, charged, or convicted of offences regarding anti-war expression.

Thank you.

¹ Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, A/HRC/54/54, 15 September 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session54/advance-versions/A_HRC_54_54_AdvanceEditedVersion.docx.

² For more detail and names of affected lawyers and legal advocacy groups, see Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, International Bar Association, and Lawyers for Lawyers (endorsed by OVD-Info), Written statement to the 54th session of the Human Rights Council, submitted 9 August 2023, <https://www.lrwc.org/russia-lawyers-written-statement-hrc54/> (to be published on the UN Human Rights Council website at https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/sdpage_e.aspx?b=10&se=235&t=7).

³ ICJ, June 2022, 8, 11-12, <https://www.icj.org/access-to-lawyers-must-be-ensured-for-anti-war-protesters-in-the-russian-federation/>

⁴ OVD-Info, 19 December 2022, <https://en.ovdinfo.org/repressions-russia-2022#18>

⁵ ICJ, 19 April 2023, <https://www.icj.org/russian-federation-authorities-must-end-attacks-on-lawyers-and-abuse-of-foreign-agents-law/>

⁶ LRWC *et al.*, Amicus brief, 5 June 2023, paras 18-19, <https://www.lrwc.org/russia-amicus-brief-to-the-russian-constitutional-court-the-law-on-discrediting-the-armed-forces-violates-international-human-rights-law-joint-amicus-brief/>

⁷ At least 10 lawyers and defenders have been prosecuted for allegedly disseminating false information about the actions of the Russian Armed Forces under Russia's criminal code Article 270.3, including Dmitry Talantov, a human rights lawyer and president of the Bar Association of the Udmurtia region, See Front Line Defenders, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/pre-trial-detention-human-rights-lawyer-dmitry-talantov-extended>. <https://ovd.info/antigrafika-en?tab=occupation&items=Human%20rights%20defenders> and <https://ovd.info/antigrafika-en?tab=occupation&items=Human%20rights%20defenders>.