



UIA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Venice, 1 February 2025

15th International Day of the Endangered Lawyer

STATEMENT IN SOLIDARITY WITH BELARUSSIAN LAWYERS

On the occasion of the [15th International Day of the Endangered Lawyer](#), the Executive Committee of the UIA (International Association of Lawyers) expresses its full solidarity with Belarusian lawyers, who have been facing increasing systematic repression particularly since 2020. The situation of the legal profession in Belarus has significantly deteriorated, marked by arbitrary arrests, unjustified disbarments, and increasing government pressure on the independence of the bar.

The UIA Executive Committee condemns the persecution of lawyers engaged in the defense of human rights and politically sensitive cases. More than 140 lawyers have been disbarred or have lost their licenses under opaque conditions, while at least 30 have been arrested, six of whom remain imprisoned simply for carrying out their professional duties.

Upon the occasion of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the UIA (Union Internationale des Avocats - International Association of Lawyers), held in on 1 February 2025, we reiterate our support of the [15th Day of the Endangered Lawyer \(DEL\)](#), and express our full solidarity with our Belarussian colleagues whose dire situation has been spotlighted this year.

We are deeply concerned about the alarming situation of the legal profession in Belarus, which has experienced further unprecedented degradation following the contested presidential elections and mass protests in 2020.

In a context of severe undermined judicial independence, generalized deterioration of the human rights situation, and widespread governmental crackdown on those expressing dissent, Belarussian lawyers have become one of the primary targets of persecution in the country. Numerous reports indicate that lawyers have been subjected to increasing criminal and administrative sanctions, arbitrary detention, unfair disciplinary proceedings, and systemic interference in their professional duties.

Legal practitioners defending clients in politically sensitive cases or cases involving human rights violations, colleagues advocating for the Rule of Law, and those representing opposition leaders or activists are particularly -- but not exclusively -- affected. At least 30 lawyers have been reportedly subjected to arbitrary detentions and six of them remain currently imprisoned, convicted for charges related to the legitimate and peaceful exercise of their professional duties or their human rights.

The repeated amendments introduced to the legislation on the bar and legal advocacy in the past years have increasingly expanded the Ministry of Justice's control on the legal profession -- in direct breach of international standards -- and further undermined the independence of lawyers and their professional organisations.

We deplore that, as a result, the Belarusian Republican Bar Association and its territorial bars rather than fulfilling their function of protecting their members from persecution, unjustified interference, and improper restrictions, appear to be systematically used by the Ministry of Justice as an additional tool of repression and reprisals.

Without an independent bar association to enable and defend the principles and guarantees required for the appropriate exercise of the legal profession, our colleagues in Belarus are extremely vulnerable. Since 2020, more than 140 lawyers have been reportedly abusively deprived of their right to practice the legal profession either through disbarment or license revocation, following proceedings lacking minimum standard in terms of transparency, representation, and impartiality. In the past years, dozens of lawyers have reportedly decided to leave the legal profession unwilling to accept this professional environment, and others have been forced to flee the country out of fear for their safety. The number of licenced legal practitioners have significantly decreased between 2020 and 2024.

We note with grave concern that, in the current dire circumstances, Belarusian lawyers are therefore forced to practise their profession under a climate of fear and uncertainty, facing the constant threat of arbitrarily losing their licence, or worse. Further, the persistent assaults on their ability to freely and independently exercise the legal profession can only adversely impact access to justice and the respect of the right to fair trial and due process for all Belarusians, and specially for those who may need legal assistance in politically sensitive cases.

We firmly denounce today the urgent situation of our Belarusian colleagues.

We join international voices¹ demanding the Belarusian government to immediately take all necessary measures to **reinstate the independence and safety of the legal profession, in line with all relevant international standards including all those enshrined in the [UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers](#)**, and that in order to ensure that lawyers are able to play their crucial role in the defense of the Rule of Law and human rights. More broadly, Belarusian government must urgently adhere to its international human obligations, including with respect of access to justice and the right to a fair trial.

We further support and reiterate all and each one of the demands and recommendations addressed in the [joint report of the Coalition for the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer](#), signed by UIA-IROL.

In particular, we call for a halt to all proceedings against lawyers for grounds related to their professional work, and for the immediate and unconditional release of those colleagues imprisoned for such reasons and/or political motivations.

Moreover, we demand the immediate reinstatement of lawyers unfairly disbarred on arbitrary or politically-motivated grounds, as well as the end of all interferences by the Belarusian government with disciplinary proceeding. All interference with the functioning of bar associations should cease.

Finally, we take this opportunity to echo the call addressed to the international community by the Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in Belarus and on the independence of judges and lawyers in their [statement issued on 23 January 2025](#), and offer our full solidarity to Belarusian lawyers in exile. We stand ready to assist and support their efforts in every way possible.

¹ See for instance [here](#).