



The UIA Institute for the Rule of Law

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## STATEMENT

Paris, 20 March 2025

<p><b>UIA IROL CONDEMNS ATTACKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES ON U.S. LAW FIRMS BASED ON THEIR CLIENTS, LEGAL POSITIONS, PRO BONO WORK AND EFFORTS AT INCLUSIVENESS</b></p>
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The Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA - International Association of Lawyers) was established in 1927 and with members in over 110 countries – is a global and multi-cultural organization for the legal profession that facilitates professional development, stimulates learning and networking, and promotes the rule of law. As part of its mission, the UIA is committed to defending the legal profession and the independence of judges as an essential element of the Rule of Law. This mission is carried out through the Institute for the Rule of Law (UIA-IROL). Access to justice, the independence of the judiciary, and the freedom and independence of the legal profession – all essential elements of the rule of law – are key for UIA-IROL. UIA-IROL is committed to support lawyers across the globe who may be pressured, threatened, harassed and/or prosecuted. UIA-IROL defends the proper functioning of the justice system and legally instituted bar associations.

UIA-IROL has watched with grave concern as the President of the United States has issued a series of executive orders seeking to punish well-respected American law firms based on the identity of their clients and their advocacy, pro bono work, and efforts at inclusiveness in employment. These orders impose severe sanctions such as revocation of security clearances, the banning of lawyers from federal buildings and processes, and withholding of federal contracts from the firms and their clients, with the intended purpose of persecuting the firms for legal positions they, their lawyers, or their clients have taken. This egregious infringement on the right of lawyers to fulfill their obligations as counsel and to represent their clients violates foundational principles of the United States Constitution and of the common law. It constitutes a direct assault on the Rule of Law and runs counter to international standards regarding the protection of lawyers.

United States President Donald J. Trump has issued to date three executive orders aimed at punishing three of the most prominent law firms in the country: Covington & Burling on 25 February 2025; Perkins Coie on 6 March 2025; and Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison on 14 March 2025. The executive orders explicitly seek retribution against the firms and their lawyers based on their clients, legal positions, pro bono work, and efforts at inclusiveness. Of even greater gravity, they seek to punish the law firms and their lawyers for representing clients that have taken legal positions contrary to the personal interests of government officials, including the President.

In particular, the Covington order was issued in response to the firm's representation of and counsel provided to former Special Counsel Jack Smith who, at the direction of the then-Attorney General of the United States, led an investigation into and sought indictments based on the conduct of the President and his associates. The Perkins Coie order was issued in response to the firm's representation of Hillary Clinton, one of the President's opponents in the 2016 presidential election, its legal positions challenging proposed election laws, and its inclusion policies. The Paul Weiss order was issued in response to a former firm lawyer who, after resigning from the firm, worked at a state prosecutor's office and, under the direction of that office, led an investigation into the President's business affairs; unspecified pro bono work by the firm on behalf of disadvantaged clients; and its inclusion policies.

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### UIA-IROL

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The unjustified sanctions threatened by the President and his administration are extremely harsh. They include the actual or threatened withdrawal of security clearances necessary to represent clients in cases that involve issues of national security; withdrawal of the right to access federal facilities and processes; and withdrawal of federal contracts not only from the firm but also from any client of the firm. These punitive actions would interfere with and could eliminate entirely the law firms' and their lawyers' ability to practice law. They constitute an express threat to the law firms' clients, lawyers and employees whose continued affiliation with the firms puts them and their livelihoods at risk. They also will irreparably tarnish the reputations of the firms and their lawyers, even if the executive orders are ultimately found by courts to be unconstitutional or otherwise invalid.

UIA-IROL strongly condemns such retaliatory attacks on the independence of lawyers and law firms, especially when they are based on the clients the lawyers represent and legal positions they take on behalf of those clients. The Rule of Law requires that lawyers be able to zealously represent the interests of their clients without being equated with those clients or punished for that representation. This principle is especially critical when lawyers are persecuted for taking positions contrary to the personal interests of government officials, in which case threats of retribution have no legitimate purpose other than to chill legitimate legal representation and shield those officials from democratic accountability.

UIA-IROL reiterates the concerns of the American Bar Association in its [statement](#) dated 3 March 2025 that "(t)hese actions highlight escalating governmental efforts to interfere with fair and impartial courts, the right to counsel and due process, and the freedoms of speech and association in our country."

The President's retaliatory executive orders violate international standards governing lawyers and the representation of clients. According to the United Nations' Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, "[g]overnments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of 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 recognized professional duties, standards and ethics." Article 16.

Similarly, Article 18 of the Basic Principles provides that "[l]awyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions." Moreover, "[w]here the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities." Article 17.

We therefore call for the immediate rescission of all three executive orders; for the President and his associates to refrain from any further retaliatory action against the three law firms at issue; and for the President and his associations to refrain from any similar retaliatory action against other law firms and lawyers based on their clients, the legal positions they advocate, pro bono representation of disadvantaged clients, and decisions regarding inclusive employment. In doing so, we join in the statements of our colleagues at the American Bar Association and other bar associations across the United States, in their unequivocal call to rescind the three executive orders, and cease and desist from any retaliatory measures against lawyers.

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#### **More about UIA-IROL**

*The Institute for the Rule of Law of the Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA-IROL) promotes the Rule of Law and supports and defends, in particular, (1) lawyers, judges and human rights defenders who are harassed, threatened and/or persecuted in the exercise of their professions, (2) the independence of the legal and judicial professions, and (3) the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, especially in defense of human rights.*

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