

# INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION NEWS

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

Promoting human rights by protecting those who defend them

## CRITICAL NEED TO AMPLIFY PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES

**30th Anniversary of the *UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers***

Human Rights  
LAWYERS  
AT  
RISK

Attacks and threats against human rights lawyers and defenders continue to increase around the world. During the third quarter of 2020, LRWC emphasized the need for protection of lawyers and the independence of the legal profession by observing the 30th anniversary of the United Nations (UN) *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers* (UN Basic Principles).

LRWC is increasingly working with other organizations to amplify the voices of those who seek protection for lawyers and defenders at risk and independence of the legal profession internationally. LRWC has increased its emphasis on joint projects, letters, and UN interventions. LRWC has focused attention on systemic issues in several countries where lawyers are at particular risk, including China, Turkey, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, and Colombia. For more detail, see the entries for those countries below.

NEWS AND UPDATES  
AUTUMN 2020

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### **LRWC joins 50 lawyers' organizations urging UN member states to protect lawyers**

A [joint call for action](#) to member States of the UN was issued by 50 bar associations, law societies, and national and international lawyers' organizations from around the world, including LRWC. The letter of 8 July 2020 called on States to support the UN Basic Principles and the role of the legal profession in upholding the rule of law and promoting and protecting human rights.

LRWC joined 40 lawyers' organizations in another [letter](#) on 7 September seeking governments' support for the UN Basic Principles and for the Council of Europe's initiative towards a future binding "European Convention on the profession of lawyer" aimed at preserving the independence and integrity of legal systems and the rule of law. The joint letter was coordinated by the Council Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE).

### **"Without lawyers there is no justice": UN Human Rights Council Statement:**

The Spanish expression, *sin abogados no hay justicia* (without lawyers there is no justice), sums up the importance of legal representation for access to remedies for rights violations. This was the theme of LRWC's [video statement](#) at the UN Human Rights Council's annual Interactive Dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on independence of judges and lawyers held in Geneva on 13 July 2020. LRWC's statement noted 2020 as the 30th anniversary of the UN Basic Principles.



Image credit: United Nations Photo

## **JOIN LRWC**

LRWC is a committee of lawyers and other human rights defenders who promote human rights, the rule of law, and protection of human rights defenders through advocacy, research and education. Please consider becoming a member of LRWC for \$50/year (\$15 students), and help support our work.

**Visit <https://www.lrwc.org/join/>**

~ Yes ~

I'd like to donate to

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

## What are the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers? A video explanation in 8 minutes



LRWC participated in a joint [video](#) project marking of the 30th Anniversary of the UN Basic Principles. The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) facilitated the creation and production of the eight-minute video with several other lawyers' human rights organizations, including LRWC, Lawyers for Lawyers, the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales, the International Commission of Jurists, and the Human Rights House Foundation. The video was released in July 2020 with a press release re-announcing the group's collaboratively developed [Toolkit for Lawyers at Risk](#) first launched on the [Day of the Endangered Lawyer](#) on 24 January 2020.

### Expanding Canadian lawyers' support for colleagues at risk around the world

LRWC is marking the 30th anniversary of the UN *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers* by seeking to expand the number of Canadian lawyers seeking protection for lawyers at risk. LRWC is seeking lawyers across Canada to [join LRWC](#) and become [donors](#). A broader basis of membership will enable LRWC to secure independent financial support for expansion of its work to meet the demand for research, education and advocacy to protect endangered international human rights lawyers and defenders around the world.

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## COUNTRIES OF CONCERN

### BELARUS

#### Brutal post-election crackdown on peaceful protestors must stop

Contested results of the Belarus presidential election on 9 August 2020 have drawn tens of thousands of protestors into the streets for weeks on end after long-ruling President Alexander Lukashenko claimed victory despite allegations that the election was rigged. Numerous countries, including the EU, US, UK, and Canada, have declared the election fraudulent. Thousands of peaceful protestors have been arrested, hundreds have been injured, and some have died.

Many of those arrested have been reportedly subjected to torture and ill-treatment while in detention and have been denied access to lawyers. On 18 August 2020 LRWC joined the the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales



Image credit: Presseservice Rathenow

in condemning the mass arrests in a [joint statement](#) that called for a halt to the use of excessive force, access to lawyers for detainees, and release of those unlawfully detained. The statement also sought a UN investigation into the post-election violence.

On 9 September, lawyers Mr. Maksim Znak and Mr. Illia Salei were arrested and detained. Mr. Znak was reportedly charged under the Criminal Code for "calls to action seeking to undermine national security." Lawyer Ms. Liudmila Kazak was arrested on 24 September and released after being fined approximately US\$260 for "failing to obey police." LRWC is continuing to monitor the situation in Belarus.

## BURUNDI

### LRWC joins 43 NGOs seeking continued UN oversight of human rights in Burundi

In 2016, the UN Human Rights Council established a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on Burundi, Africa, to investigate human rights violations since 2015. Over the years, the CoI has documented severe and widespread human rights violations, include crimes against humanity. Violations include arbitrary detentions of prisoners of conscience, theft of property belonging to members of opposition parties and human rights defenders in exile, torture and ill-treatment, enforced disappearances, incitement to ethnic hatred, and extrajudicial killings. On 21 August 2020, ahead of the September/October 2020 session of the UN Human Rights Council, LRWC joined 43 African and other international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in a [letter](#) to Council members and observer States to advocate renewal of the CoI's mandate until September 2021.

## CAMBODIA

### Four years on, no effective investigation into unlawful killing of defender Kem Ley

On 10 July 2016 a prominent human rights defender, Kem Ley, was shot to death while having his morning coffee at a Phnom Penh petrol station. A hitman was arrested almost immediately and after an unfair trial was sentenced to life imprisonment. There has been no effective, independent, impartial investigation to determine all perpetrators of the killing. After the murder, Kem Ley's family members and associates received death threats, and his family was forced to seek asylum in Australia.

Annual memorials of Kem Ley's death have been prohibited and disrupted by Cambodian authorities. On 8 July, police [prevented](#) monks and activists from engaging in a memorial service at the site of the murder, forcing them to pray on a sidewalk 100 meters away. Police arrested one demonstrator who was wearing a t-shirt with Kem Ley's face printed on it.

On 9 July 2020, LRWC joined 30 NGOs in a [statement](#) calling on Cambodia to create an independent Commission of Inquiry to conduct an effective and impartial investigation into the killing of Kem Ley.



UN Human Rights Council, 1 October 2020.

### Cambodia impedes access to justice though misuse of laws by executive-controlled courts

LRWC has monitored the situation of human rights lawyers and defenders in Cambodia since 2007. In Cambodia's 2018 election, the long-ruling Cambodia People's Party (CPP) took all the seats after detaining the leader of the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) on illegitimate treason charges and banning the CNRP. Cambodia's judiciary is controlled by the government. The independence and integrity of the legal profession has been limited for the past two decades. LRWC's [video statement](#) to the September/October session of the Council noted that "[h]uman rights will remain unfulfilled until Cambodia establishes genuine independence and integrity of the judiciary, legal profession, and other institutions in line with international law." LRWC asked that all States strongly call on Cambodia to implement its international human rights obligations.

## CANADA

### LRWC calls on Canadian government to ban facial recognition surveillance

A group of 77 privacy, human rights, and civil liberties advocates wrote to Canada's Public Safety Minister on 8 July 2020 calling on the Canadian government to immediately ban the use of facial recognition surveillance by all federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies. The [letter](#) was signed by 31 Canadian and international organizations, including LRWC, and 46 individuals.

### Canada appeals Federal Court order revoking Canada-US Safe Third Country Agreement: Judge says the evidence is enough to “shock the conscience.”



Image Credit: John MacDonald

Canada's federal government on 21 August 2020 [announced](#) it would appeal a 23 July 2020 ruling of the Federal Court of Canada that the Canada-US Third Country Agreement (STCA) does not measure up to Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The STCA allows Canada to reject asylum seekers entering from the United States (US) on the grounds that they should have applied for asylum in the US. Canada's Federal Court ruling stated that the STCA is “intended to help Canada and the US share responsibility for refugees in a way that complies with the Refugee Convention...” However, the judge found that “[r]esponsibility sharing cannot be positively balanced against imprisonment or the deleterious effects of cruel and unusual detention conditions, solitary confinement, and the risk of refoulement.”

The judge added that the evidence was sufficient to “shock the conscience.” LRWC's [previous advocacy](#) has called on Canada to revoke the STCA saying the US is not a safe third country due to its grave international human rights violations against migrant and refugee children and their families and lack of access to justice for asylum seekers. There have also been incidents of [US harassment](#) of lawyers and human rights defenders who advocate for asylum seekers.

### UN Experts single out Canada for perpetuating the armed conflict in Yemen

Canada was also the focus of LRWC's [video statement](#) seeking a halt to the supply of arms to parties to the armed conflict in Yemen. See more in the entry below on Yemen.

### LRWC seeks independent investigation of events at University of Toronto Faculty of Law

LRWC is monitoring reports about the recruitment process for a Director of the University of Toronto's International Human Rights Program (IHRP). On 30 September 2020, LRWC wrote a [letter](#) to the Faculty of Law expressing concern about allegations that the decision of the hiring committee to hire international human rights scholar, Dr. Valentina Azarova, was rescinded after external pressure from a donor to the University who expressed concern about Dr. Azarova's research on international human rights and international humanitarian law related to Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories.



Image Credit: Joe Daniels

## CHINA

### At the UN, LRWC recalls 5th anniversary of “709 crackdown” against China’s lawyers

The 9th of July 2020 marked the fifth anniversary of the [“709 crackdown”](#) in which hundreds of human rights lawyers in China were arbitrarily detained. On 13 July, LRWC made a [video statement](#) at the UN Human Rights Council calling attention to China’s continued repression of lawyers. LRWC also joined an [oral statement](#) of several other NGOs calling for freedom of expression in China and calling attention to the vilification and criminalization of lawyers in China for speaking out on human rights.



### LRWC urges Zoom to respect freedom of expression in China and Hong Kong

LRWC issued a [press release](#) and a [letter](#) to Zoom Communications Inc. on 17 July 2020 criticizing Zoom’s suspension of the accounts of human rights activists in the US and Hong Kong at the request of China. LRWC called on Zoom to fulfill its responsibilities under international law to respect freedom of expression of users of its services. The [Canadian Lawyer](#) magazine featured an article about LRWC’s letter on 28 July 2020. Zoom responded to LRWC’s letter, and follow-up correspondence led to conversation on 23 September with senior Zoom personnel to discuss how the company might make progress on human rights policies and practices in line with the UN *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*.

### Global call for UN international human rights mechanism to address China’s violations

In the run up to the September/October 2020 session of the UN Human Rights Council, LRWC joined more than 300 civil society groups in a

[joint open letter](#) on 11 September to the UN Secretary General, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and UN member states calling for an international mechanism to address human rights violations by China. The letter drew on the June 2020 call by 50 UN human rights experts for “decisive measures to protect fundamental freedoms in China.” The experts highlighted China’s mass human rights violations in Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang; suppression of information in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic; and attacks on defenders, journalists, lawyers and critics of the government across the country. LRWC’s [video statement](#) at the Council on 18 September endorsed a UN mechanism on China, drawing attention to the arbitrary detention of several Hong Kong defenders. These calls by UN experts and civil society have not yet resulted in action by the UN Human Rights Council to which China was elected by the General Assembly on 13 October 2020.

## COLOMBIA

### Concern about risks to lawyers in Colombia

On 14 July 2020 LRWC signed a [joint letter](#), spearheaded by Colombian Caravana, expressing serious concern about the situation of lawyers in Colombia. The COVID-19 pandemic and the situation of being confined at home has worsened the harassment and threats against lawyers and their families. During the July session of the UN Human Rights Council, LRWC made a [video statement](#) at calling attention to the risks to Colombia’s human rights lawyers, who are inadequately protected from attacks against them.

On 24 July, LRWC [joined a letter](#) of international organizations concerned about allegations of illegal surveillance by Colombia against at least 130 individuals, including lawyers of the José Alvear Restrepo Collective, lawyers of the Inter-church Commission of Justice and Peace, and other human rights defenders such as Luz Marina Cuchumbé and Jani Silva.

LRWC [joined a letter](#) on 3 September 2020 led by The Law Society of England and Wales and the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales expressing concern about threats against lawyer, Reinaldo Villalba Vargas, and his legal team from the Jose Alvear Restrepo Collective. The threats appeared to be connected to their legal representation of Colombian Senator Iván Cepeda Castro, who was brought before the Supreme Court on alleged offences of fraud and abuse of a public function. In 2018, the Supreme Court found there were no grounds to open a criminal investigation into Mr. Cepeda's activities.

## IRAN

### Precarious health of unlawfully imprisoned defenders during COVID-19 pandemic



Image Credit: Amnesty

Three lawyers' rights organizations, Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L), The Law Society of England and Wales (The Law Society), and LRWC [wrote a letter](#) to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran on 16 September 2020 about the continued unlawful detention and precarious health of human rights lawyers Ms. Nasrin Sotoudeh and Mr. Amirshah Davoodi. The two lawyers were among many human rights defenders and lawyers excluded Iran's temporary release of thousands of prisoners to alleviate health risks of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr Davoodi reportedly contracted COVID-19 in Evin Prison. On 11 August Ms. Sotoudeh had begun a hunger strike to demand the release of political prisoners at risk of catching COVID-19. At the time of the joint letter, Ms Sotoudeh had been on hunger strike for 36 days, and her health was deteriorating.

Ms. Sotoudeh, Mr. Davoodi and hundreds of other lawyers are unlawfully imprisoned on terrorism-related charges aimed at deterring other lawyers from lawfully representing dissidents. Ms. Sotoudeh is currently serving a sentence of 38 years in prison and 148 lashes on charges of "inciting corruption and prostitution," "openly committing a sinful act by appearing in public without a hijab," and "disrupting public order" as a result of her human rights advocacy. Mr Davoodi's human rights work has resulted in charges of crimes against national security for which he has been sentenced to 29 years in prison, 111 lashes, and a fine of 60 million rials (approximately CAD \$1,900.00).

### LRWC and Lawyers for Lawyers raise concern about Iran's imprisoned lawyers at UN

On [18 September 2020](#) LRWC joined L4L in a statement to the UN Human Rights Council raising concern about Ms. Sotoudeh and Mr. Davoodi. On 19 September, Ms. Sotoudeh was taken to hospital, but she was returned to the prison on 23 September amid concerns about her health and international advocacy from a number of human rights organizations and 16 independent [UN human rights experts](#). On 26 September 2020, Ms. Sotoudeh [halted her hunger strike](#) because of ill health.

LRWC has joined previous advocacy for Nasrin Sotoudeh who has been incarcerated several times for her human rights work. L4L, The Law Society, and LRWC have jointly advocated for Ms. Sotoudeh since 2010, and regarding the current period of incarceration in [2018](#) and [2019](#). LRWC advocated for her release at the UN Human Rights Council in [March 2019](#).

## MYANMAR

### Joint Submission to UN Universal Periodic Review on Myanmar's harassment of lawyers

Myanmar lacks consistency in progress towards an independent legal profession, according to a July 2020 [submission](#) by Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L) and LRWC to the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Myanmar. The UPR is scheduled to take place in Geneva in early 2021. The review covers the period between 2016 and the present. The L4L-LRWC submission points out that a number of lawyers in Myanmar "have been subjected to improper interference and harassment by members of the law enforcement agencies and investigative bodies and others. They have also been subjected to threats including death threats, surveillance, and physical attacks," including the shooting death of a lawyer, U Ko Ni in 2017. The submission points out that the [murder of U Ko Ni](#) has never been impartially investigated according to UN standards for investigation of unlawful deaths.

### Need for protection of lawyers in Myanmar: Video statement to UN Human Rights Council



LRWC and Lawyers for Lawyers made a [joint oral video statement](#) to the UN Human Rights Council on 14 July 2020 highlighting concerns about independence of the legal profession and the need for protection of lawyers in Myanmar according to the UN *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers*.

### Fair election is a "paramount" concern amid impunity of Tatmadaw for atrocity crimes

During September/October session of the Council, LRWC made a [video statement](#) reiterating [concerns](#) raised during the June session of the Council about ongoing impunity for attacks, surveillance, and criminalization of defenders in Myanmar. LRWC also raised concern about refusal of Myanmar to allow Rohingya people to vote or run as candidates, continued impunity of the military (Tatmadaw) for atrocity crimes, and Myanmar's refusal to cooperate with UN Special Procedures. LRWC urged Myanmar to cooperate with the Council including the upcoming UPR, the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, and the UN Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar.

## PHILIPPINES

### International NGOs seek independent investigative mechanism for the Philippines

Prior to the September/October session of the UN Human Rights Council, 62 NGOs [wrote a letter](#) dated 27 August 2020 to member and observer States of the Council seeking a resolution to establish an independent international investigative mechanism of human rights in the Philippines. The letter outlined "grave concern over ongoing extrajudicial executions and other serious human rights violations" since President Rodrigo Duterte assumed office on 30 June 2016 and launched his "war on drugs."

The NGOs' letter followed the June 2020 [report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (High Commissioner) that called for "independent, impartial and effective investigations into the killings" and the 25 June 2020 letter from members of 23 Special Procedures of the Council reiterating their 2019 call for "an on-the-ground independent, impartial investigation..." The High Commissioner's report "verified the killings of 208 human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists, including 30 women, between January 2015 and December 2019."



LRWC's June 2020 report to the Council documented that at least 74 legal professionals, including lawyers, prosecutors, judges, court workers and paralegals had been [murdered or survived murderous attacks](#) in the Philippines since July 2016.

The Council responded with a [resolution](#) sponsored jointly by Iceland and the Philippines for "technical cooperation and capacity building for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Philippines." The disappointing resolution fails to establish the independent investigation sought by High Commissioner and UN experts, and NGOs.

## SAUDI ARABIA

### **Saudia Arabia's violations against defenders and war crimes in Yemen**

Saudi Arabia was among the countries of focus in a [video statement](#) by LRWC at the UN Human Rights Council's annual Interactive Dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on independence of judges and lawyers on 13 July 2020. The statement noted that lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair is one of hundreds of defenders arbitrarily convicted and jailed in Saudi Arabia.



Saudi Arabia was also the focus of another LRWC [video statement](#) seeking UN intervention into allegations of war crimes by Saudi Arabia and others in the armed conflict in Yemen. See more in the entry under Yemen below.

## SUDAN

### **Sudan delays transitional justice for attacks against peaceful protestors in 2019**

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has identified transitional justice as one of the areas of focus for a UN country office in Sudan. On 16 July 2020, LRWC presented a [video statement](#) to the UN Human Rights Council noting that over a year has passed "since Sudanese security forces violently attacked peaceful protesters, killing more than 100 and wounding dozens, but the victims and their families are still waiting for justice and reparations." LRWC's statement expressed concern about delays in ensuring accountability of perpetrators and justice for victims.

## THAILAND

### **SLAPPs against workers and defenders: Thailand should be downgraded in US TIP Report**

On the World Day Against Trafficking, 30 July 2020, the Thailand Seafood Working Group, of which LRWC is a member, issued a [statement](#) registering concern about the decision of the United States decision to maintain Thailand's ranking in the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report at Tier 2 despite Thailand's weak and ineffective efforts to prevent and prosecute human trafficking in 2019. Among the concerns outlined by the SWG are that "Thai government and companies continued to use Strategic Litigation against Public Participation (SLAPP) lawsuits against trade unionists, workers, human rights defenders, and other individuals who spoke out against labor abuse in 2019 and 2020." The Seafood Working Group is a global coalition of labor, human rights, and environmental non-governmental organizations, and recommended that Thailand be downgraded to the "Tier 2 Watch List." Tier 3 is the lowest ranking and potentially triggers aid sanctions.

# TURKEY

## “Death fast” by jailed lawyers galvanizes global advocacy for Turkey’s legal profession



From July to September 2020, hunger strikes by two jailed Turkish lawyers strengthened the engagement of scores of lawyers’ organizations in global advocacy for the legal profession in Turkey. Hundreds of Turkish lawyers have been jailed, and the legal profession faces a systematic campaign of repression through mass arrests as well as new legislation that undermines the independence of lawyers and violates Turkey’s human rights treaty obligations as well as the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

Among the jailed lawyers is the respected chair of Amnesty International Turkey, Taner Kılıç. On 3 July 2020, he was sentenced to six years in prison after unfair trials on unlawful charges. Turkey’s vague and overbroad “terrorism” charges are used to unlawfully arrest, charge, convict in unfair proceedings, and mete out lengthy sentences to dissidents and the lawyers and defenders who advocate for them. LRWC’s advocacy for Mr. Kılıç and others included a [video statement](#) at the UN Human Rights Council on 14 July 2020 and a [letter](#) on 17 July 2020.

LRWC and lawyers around the world were shocked and saddened by the death of Ebru Timtik on 27 August 2020, after 238 days of fasting to demand fair trials and release from prison for herself and other jailed lawyers denied fair trials.

Ebru Timtik and her colleague Aytaç Ünsal had started a hunger strike in February 2020. Ebru Timtik had been sentenced to 13.5 years imprisonment and Aytaç Ünsal to 10.5 years. In April 2020 the two lawyers announced they were transforming their hunger strike into a “death fast.” On [12 August 2020](#) LRWC endorsed a joint statement by 28 lawyers’ organizations seeking release of the two lawyers along and other lawyers unlawfully convicted and sentenced to long-term imprisonment. On 18 August 2020, LRWC signed a [joint letter](#) from 17 lawyers organization to UN Special Procedures seeking their urgent intervention.

Despite the global advocacy, Ebru Timtik died on 27 August 2020. Lawyers’ organizations around the world, including LRWC, mourned her death in a [full-page obituary](#) published in Turkish newspapers with names of 139 lawyers’ organizations. On 2 September 2020, thirteen UN Experts [called](#) for an investigation into her death, saying it was “entirely preventable.” The Experts also called on Turkey to release other defenders.

**İLAN** | Yeni yaşam

**Meslektaşımız Ay EBRU TIMTIK'in vefatı hisi derin bir üzüntüye boğdu.**  
Ebru Timtik, 27 Ağustos 2020 tarihinde, Türkiye'de adil yargılanma ve adaletin yerine getirilmesi talebiyle başladığı oruçcumun 238. gününde hayatını kaybetti.  
Timtik'in adaleti kamuoyunda yoğun bir destek buldu.

Biz aşağıdaki imzaları bulduğumuz, ürettiği üyelerden oluşan örgütleri, Timtik'in ailesine, arkadaşlarına ve insan hakları alanında bilhassa çalıştığı meslektaşlarına başsağlığı dilerkenimizi iletirken, öcederim haklarının ve hukukun üstünlüğüne saygının korunması için yürüttüğümüz kararlı mücadelemizin önünde saygıyla eğiliyoruz.  
Meslektaşımız Aytaç Ünsal'ın tahliye edilmesi için mücadelemize sürecektir.

*(The obituary lists numerous supporting organizations and individuals, including Amnesty International Turkey, Human Rights Foundation Turkey, and various law firms and NGOs.)*

On 4 September, a Turkish Court ordered Aytaç Ünsal’s release pending his recovery, so he stopped his hunger strike. The international outcry is credited as contributing to his release.

### **New law undermines independence of lawyers**

The Turkish government has signaled a “new phase in the persecution of lawyers” through the adoption on 15 July 2020 of a new [Law on Lawyers](#) that allows “alternative bar association” to divide the legal profession along political lines and undermine the independence of Turkey’s legal profession. A statement by 78 of 80 existing bar associations opposes the law.

### **Mass arrests of lawyers**

On 1 September 2020 President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan gave a speech in which he said that lawyers accused of links to “terrorists” should be expelled from the legal profession. Days later, on 11 September 2020, 60 lawyers were arrested for being “members of a terrorist organization.” LRWC joined 22 human rights organizations in a [statement](#) calling for an end to the campaign of mass arrests against lawyers.

LRWC and L4L intervened again at the UN Human Rights Council’s September session, with a joint [statement](#) seeking release of all arbitrarily detained defenders, pointing out that tens of thousands of Turkish political prisoners, including human rights lawyers and defenders were excluded from Turkey’s release of 90,000 prisoners aimed at reducing risks of COVID-19 risks. On 29 September, LRWC joined Lawyers’ for Lawyers’ [video statement](#) at the Council, saying that “[l]awyers should not have to die or be imprisoned for asking that the rule of law be respected.” The statement also expressed grave concern about amendments to Turkey’s Law on Lawyers which human rights lawyers believe will undermine the independence of the legal profession.

## **UNITED STATES**

### **Allegations of judicial harassment and arbitrary detention of NY lawyer Steven Donziger**

LRWC [announced](#) on 29 July 2020 that it is “monitoring with concern” the situation of Mr. Steven Donziger, a New York human rights lawyer who has been under house arrest without trial

since early August 2019 and has been suspended from practicing law for two years. LRWC issued an [8-page briefing note](#) examining allegations that Mr. Donziger is being subjected to a campaign of harassment to prevent him from assisting his clients to recover a judgement awarded by courts against Chevron in Ecuador.

### **Follow up to UN Human Rights Council resolution on systemic racism and police violence**

LRWC was among 300 NGOs from more than 60 countries that joined a 1 October 2020 [oral statement](#) to the UN Human Rights Council led by American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The oral [statement](#) followed up the Council’s June 2020 Resolution 43/1 addressing systemic racism and police violence against people of African descent around the world, including the United States. LRWC also joined the ACLU’s June 2020 statement to the Council. LRWC signed the ACLU’s 6 August 2020 [joint follow up letter](#) to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights regarding the implementation of Resolution 43/1.

## **YEMEN**

### **Canada, France, Iran, UK, and US must halt arms sales to parties to the Yemen conflict**

Sales of arms to parties to the Yemen armed conflict was the subject of a [video statement](#) by LRWC at the September/October session of the UN Human Rights Council. The statement cited a [report](#) by the Council’s Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen (Experts) documenting “continuing unlawful killings; destruction of food, water, sanitation, and health infrastructure; restrictions on humanitarian access; recruitment or use of children in hostilities; enforced disappearances; arbitrary detention; torture; rape; and other crimes.” LRWC’s statement noted that parties to the conflict have targeted journalists, lawyers, and defenders, including women defenders, to repress dissent.

The Experts singled out five States – Canada, France, Iran, United Kingdom (UK), and the US – for supporting and helping to perpetuate the conflict by continuing to supply the parties with weapons despite the Experts' 2019 recommendation that third party States “refrain from providing arms that could be used in the conflict.” The LRWC statement called for a Security Council referral of the Yemen conflict to the International Criminal Court, an “international, impartial and independent mechanism to conduct further investigations and prepare cases for purposes of prosecution,” and a resolution requiring Canada, France, Iran, the US and the UK to cease arms transfers to any of the parties to the conflict.

The combatants in the armed conflict between the Government of Yemen and Houthi resistance forces include a coalition of countries led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and a number of armed Non-State actors assisting Government of Yemen. Canada, France, UK, and US have been providing weapons to members of the coalition; Iran has been providing arms to Houthi forces.

## AWARDS

### Gwangju Prize for Human Rights



In August 2020, LRWC's Executive Director, Catherine Morris, was invited to join the Nomination Committee of the [2021 Gwangju Prize](#) for Human Rights. The annual Prize is awarded by the May 18 Memorial Foundation in Gwangju, South Korea, to individuals or organizations that have contributed to promoting and advancing human rights, democracy, and peace in the world. The closing date for nominations was 30 September 2020.

The recipient of the prize is to be announced at the Award Ceremony in Gwangju, South Korea, in May 2021.

The 2020 Prize winner was Indonesian human rights defender Bedjo Untung. Among previous Gwangju Prize winners are defenders for whom LRWC has conducted advocacy, including Thailand's [Jatupat Boonpattaraksa](#) (2018 Prize winner), Bangladesh's [Adilur Rahman Khan](#) (2014 Prize winner), Myanmar's [Paw U Thun](#) (2008 prize winner), Pakistan's Munir Malik (2008 Prize winner), Thailand's [Ankghana Neelapajit](#) (2006 Prize winner), and Sri Lanka's [Basil Fernando](#), founder of the Asian Legal Resource Centre (2001 Prize winner).

### The Moore Prize 2020 Writing on Human Rights: Update

LRWC's Executive Director, Catherine Morris (photo right), BBC journalist Jonathan Head (left), and author and human rights defender Djamila Ribeiro (centre) were appointed earlier this year as jury members for the 2020 annual [Moore Prize](#) for books featuring human rights themes. Sponsored by the Christopher G. Moore Foundation, the Prize provides funds to authors whose works contribute to the understanding and universality of human rights. The deadline for submissions was 30 June 2020. The shortlist is to be announced on 10 December 2020, international human rights day. The winner is to be announced on 11 January 2021.

## MARK THE DATE

Focus on Azerbaijan on the Day of the Endangered Lawyer, 24 January 2021



The [Day of the Endangered Lawyer](#) is marked annually on January 24th. The annual event is facilitated by The Day of the Endangered Lawyer Foundation to raise awareness and dialogue about ways to protect lawyers from threats, harassment, pressure, persecution, torture, or murder for doing their work. LRWC is part of the consortium of international lawyers' organizations and bar associations supporting the annual event.

In 2021, the focus will be on Azerbaijan where concerns about independence of the legal profession include concerns about pressures on lawyers working on politically sensitive cases and politically biased criteria for bar admission, suspension and disbarment. The result has been a severe lack of human rights lawyers. In previous years, the Day has focused on the situation of lawyers at risk in Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, China, Colombia, Egypt, Honduras, the Philippines, and Iran.

## LRWC IN THE NEWS

The *Canadian Lawyer* published an [article](#) on 28 July 2020 about LRWC's letter to Zoom Inc. entitled "Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada urges Zoom to abide by international human rights obligations: Zoom suspended accounts of human rights activists in response to request from government of China." See more in the entry under China above.

## PUBLICATIONS

### Joint publications on the UN *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers*

To mark the 30th Anniversary of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, LRWC was one of the partners in a set of publications. Production of the publications was led by the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI).

- **July 2020:** IBAHRI, et al. [Toolkit for Lawyers at Risk](#).

A collaborative project of the IBAHRI, the Bar Human Rights Committee in the UK, Human Rights House Foundation, Lawyers for Lawyers and Lawyers Rights Watch Canada, the Toolkit is designed to facilitate the protection of legal professionals facing attacks connected to their work. The Toolkit is split into three modules, including a Legal Digest and a directory of organizations. LRWC's contributions to the Toolkit were provided by LRWC's past Executive Director Gail Davidson, and Catherine Morris.

- **July 2020:** IBAHRI et al, [Marking the 30th Anniversary of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers](#).

This 8.20-minute [video](#) sets out a summary of the main tenets of UN *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers*. The collaborative development of the video was led by the IBAHRI. The video features representatives of the IBAHRI, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, Lawyers for Lawyers, the Bar Human Rights Committee, the International Commission of Jurists, and the Human Rights House Foundation. The video calls on the international community to denounce the growing attacks on independent lawyers worldwide and support their role in upholding free and democratic societies. LRWC's contributions to the video were provided by Catherine Morris.

### Independence and impartiality of UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies: Briefing paper

LRWC researched and wrote a briefing paper "for persons seeking a summary overview of existing commentary and recommendations for ensuring independence, impartiality, and expertise of the Treaty Bodies as required by the human rights treaties." The briefing paper formed the basis of an oral statement by LRWC to the UN General Assembly's 2020 Treaty Body review process.

- **August 2020:** Catherine Morris, [Fundamental pillars of the UN human rights system: Expertise, Independence, and Impartiality of UN Human Rights Treaty Body Members](#). Briefing Paper, LRWC, 28 August 2020.

## UN PARTICIPATION



Between July and September, LRWC participated in two sessions of the UN Human Rights Council and a public consultation sponsored by the UN General Assembly. LRWC made a total of 13 oral [statements](#) either as the lead NGO or by joining statements of other NGOs in consultative status with the United Nations. For context, see the entries for countries named in the statements.

### 44th Session of the Human Rights Council, 30 June-17 July 2020

- **9 July 2020:** [Extrajudicial killings of jurists in Philippines, Myanmar, South Sudan](#) Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions at the 44th Session of the UN Human Rights Council.
- **10 July 2020:** [China: End restrictions on free media and lawyers](#), a joint oral statement at the 44th session of the UN Human Rights Council. LRWC joined the statement of the International Service for Human Rights.
- **14 July 2020:** [Duty of States to ensure protection of lawyers](#), Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on independence of judges and lawyers, 44th session of the of the Human Rights Council. LRWC's video statement expressed concern about killings, attacks, threats and arbitrary detention of lawyers worldwide, with examples of China, Turkey, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, and Colombia.

- **14 July 2020:** [Myanmar must ensure the independence of the legal profession](#). Video Statement at the 44th Session of the Human Rights Council (LRWC, joined by Lawyers for Lawyers).
- **16 July 2020:** [Sudan: Release National Investigative Committee report on attacks against peaceful protesters](#), Oral Statement to the 44th Session of the UN Human Rights Council.

### UN General Assembly Treaty Body Review

- **28 August 2020,** [United Nations Treaty Body Review: Informal Consultations](#). Oral online statement during an informal UN consultation in Geneva, part of a review of the UN Treaty Body system undertaken by the UN General Assembly. The statement emphasized the independence and expertise of Treaty Body members, including gender balance and adequate funding.

### 45th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, 14 September to 5 October 2020

- **21 September 2020:** [Turkey and Iran](#): Video Statement to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), LRWC joined by Lawyers for Lawyers.
- **21 September 2020:** [China: criminalization of peaceful dissent and human rights advocacy in Hong Kong SAR](#), Video Statement to the 45th Session of the UN Human Rights Council.
- **22 September 2020.** [Myanmar legal profession; impunity for atrocity crimes](#): Oral statement at Interactive Dialogue, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, 45th Session of the Human Rights Council emphasizing independence of the legal profession and impunity for violations and atrocity crimes by the Myanmar military.

- **29 September 2020:** [Turkey Universal Periodic Review adoption, Oral Statement to the 45th Session of the UN Human Rights Council](#), video statement of Lawyers for Lawyers joined by The Law Society of England and Wales, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada and the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute regarding arbitrary detention of lawyers and lack of independence of the legal profession in Turkey.
- **29 September 2020:** [Yemen conflict: Cease arms transfers by Canada, France, Iran, US & UK](#), Video statement to the 45th Session of the UN Human Rights Council.
- **1 October 2020:** [Systemic racism and police violence against people of African descent in the US and around the world](#). Oral statement to the 45th Session of the UN Human Rights Council by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) joined by 300 NGOs from more than 60 countries, including LRWC.
- **October 1, 2020:** [Cambodia: Lack of independent courts and misuse of laws to crackdown on dissenters](#), Video statement to UN Human Rights Council.

## WORKING PRO BONO WITH LRWC

### Working *Pro Bono* for LRWC July to September 2020

A big thank you to all LRWC volunteers, including Clive Ansley, Temisan Boyo, Oliver Buck, Gail Davidson, Joey Doyle, Brian Gorlick, Rai Friedman, Andrea Ho, Joshua Lam, Rob Lapper QC, Helen Lau, Gavin Magrath, Robert Morales, Catherine Morris, Renee Mulligan, Brian Samuels QC, Paul Scambler QC, David F. Sutherland QC, Melissa Tessler, Rhiannon Vader-Rikhof, Maureen Webb.

### Working in Cooperation with Other Organizations

Through joint advocacy between July and September 2020, LRWC worked in cooperation with hundreds of other organizations around the world.

### Newsletter Editorial Team

LRWC Executive Director: Catherine Morris

LRWC Research Director: Gail Davidson

LRWC Administrator: Diane Rodgers

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## JOIN LRWC

LRWC needs your donations to carry on and expand its work.

Monthly donations increase LRWC's ability both to respond quickly and plan ahead.

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Thank you for supporting LRWC.

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