



**LAWYERS FOR  
LAWYERS**

ANNUAL REPORT 2017

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cover photo: Koen Suidgeest

# Preface

*We have their backs*

Every organisation wants its annual report to feature primarily success stories and achievements. We do, too. Firstly, however, we are sad to report that the number of lawyers being threatened, persecuted, detained or even much worse is more likely to grow than decrease. Lawyers for Lawyers therefore had a lot to do in 2017. One of our key focus areas was observing trials: especially in Turkey, but also in Thailand, for example. “The whole world is watching” continues to be our message. At the same time, our incarcerated colleagues assure us that to them, our presence at the trial means we have their back, which in itself has enormous value.

Throughout the year we have conducted campaigns and written letters to fight for our colleagues in other countries. We put pressure on the authorities. We seek out publicity, intensively. Not only through the public media, with editorials for example, but also by working together with publications like *Advocatenblad* and many *Baliebulletins*. We contributed to the Day of the Endangered Lawyer and ran the Dam to Dam Run.

Another important event in 2017 was the presentation of our bi-annual award to Thai human rights lawyer Sirikan Charoensiri. The ceremony was held during our seminar “The Voice of Rights, about lawyers and freedom of

expression”, in which a large number of colleagues from all over the world participated. Less visible but very intensive and, even more importantly, effective were Lawyers for Lawyers’ activities within its consultative ECOSOC status with the United Nations, in which we provided oral and written input within the context of the Universal Periodic Review during successive hearings of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. We also spoke before the UN’s Human Rights Committee, also in Geneva.

In any event, our message is being heard increasingly more often: lawyers with backbone cannot be missed in legal systems that are based on the Rule of Law. So keep your hands off of our professional colleagues!



Phon van den Biesen,  
Voorzitter van Lawyers for Lawyers

# About Lawyers for Lawyers

Lawyers for Lawyers is an independent, non-political and not-for-profit foundation. Our mission is to promote the proper functioning of the rule of law and the protection of human rights by standing up for a free and independent legal profession.

We strive for a world where lawyers can practice law freely and independently without fear of reprisal, to effectively fulfil their role as essential agents of the administration of justice. We do this by supporting lawyers worldwide who are threatened or suppressed while exercising their profession. Amongst other things, we draw attention to their situation with the authorities of their country of origin, the Dutch authorities, the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN).



We also seek to increase the awareness - and the use - of the Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, which provide a concise description of international norms relating to the key aspects of the right to independent counsel.

In addition to our management and board of directors, Lawyers for Lawyers has 10 focus groups consisting of about 50 lawyer-volunteers. They are essential for Lawyers for Lawyers to enable us to carry out our work. For our funding, we depend on donations, mainly from lawyers and law firms.

In our 2014-2017 Policy Plan, five policy pillars have been identified: support, awareness, communication, fundraising and people.

# Keyfigures

Lawyers for Lawyers campaigned in 2017 for in total **144** individual lawyers. **59** in Turkey, **25** in Africa, **9** in the Russian Federation, **13** in Eurasia, **23** in South East Asia, **6** in China and **6** in Latin America.

In 2017, about fifty lawyers were active as volunteers for Lawyers for Lawyers in ten focus groups: South East Asia, China, Turkey, Latin-America, Russian Federation, Eurasia, Africa, Philippines, Iran/Syria, Gulf States.

In 2017, six (former) lawyers served on the board of directors of Lawyers for Lawyers:  
Phon van den Biesen,  
Irma van den Berg, Maarten 't Sas, Judith Lichtenberg,  
Harald Wiersema en Nienke van Renssen.

Lawyers for Lawyers asked attention for the situation of lawyers in **23** countries:

Algeria	Egypt	Russian Federation	United Arab Emirates
Azerbaijan	Greece	Saudi Arabia	Ukraine
Belarus	Honduras	Syria	Vietnam
Cameroon	Indonesia	Tajikistan	
China	Maleisia	Thailand	
Colombia	Myanmar	Turkey	
Congo	Pakistan		

In 2017, Lawyers for Lawyers was engaged in **23** written interventions.

In 2017, Lawyers for Lawyers cooperated with at least **130** organisations, in, among other things, joint statements.

# Lawyers for Lawyers Award 2017

*Distinction for Thai lawyer*



**On 19 May 2017, Thai human rights lawyer Sirikan Charoensiri ('June') was presented with the fourth Lawyers for Lawyers Award in Amsterdam. She is the first female recipient of the bi-annual Award.**

The Lawyers for Lawyers Award is awarded to a lawyer or group of lawyers who have worked to promote the rule of law and human rights in an exceptional way and have been threatened because of this work..

The award was presented to her by Jorge Molano, the Colombian winner of the 2015 prize. The award ceremony was attended by lawyers from all over the world. The award ceremony and the related seminar "The Voice of Rights, about lawyers and freedom of expression" could also be followed live through streaming provided by NEP webcasting.

A total of 18 lawyers were nominated for the Lawyers for Lawyers Award. Special mention was given to two of the nominees on the jury's shortlist: Iyad Alami from the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Dr Mohamed Al-Roken from the United Arab Emirates.

The independent jury for the 2017 Award selected Sirikan Charoensiri as recipient because of her "unwavering courage and commitment" and to "draw attention to the human rights situation in Thailand that is relatively unknown in the West".

## **Award recipient charged multiple times**

Sirikan Charoensiri is the co-founder of Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR), a lawyers' collective founded shortly after the military coup on 22 May 2014 to provide legal aid and monitor the human rights situation in Thailand. As a human rights lawyer with TLHR, Ms. Charoensiri provides legal assistance in high-profile human rights cases on a pro-bono basis. In a period of only one year, she was charged with no fewer than four offences related to her professional activities. If she is found guilty of these four offences, she faces at least ten years imprisonment. The police also initiated a case against her, charging her with "providing false information" because she had filed a complaint against the police. If that case is pursued, she could be sentenced to a maximum of five years in prison.

# Thailand

*Thai lawyers run the gauntlet*



*“Authorities know they are being watched”*

The circumstances under which human rights lawyers in Thailand do their work are extremely difficult and risky, according to Milena Latuputty of the Southeast Asia focus group. Milena spoke to several Thai lawyers on behalf of Lawyers for Lawyers.

She believes that June’s precarious position is a good example of the situation faced by Thai lawyers operating along the thin line between the administration of justice and politics.

For instance, “political gatherings with five or more people are prohibited”, she says. “Lawyers attending in the interest of their clients are even at risk. But that can also apply to lawyers who organise training sessions on human rights, for example.”



## Support for June

Lawyers for Lawyers also campaigned for June in 2017. We wrote letters to the Thai authorities and accompanied her when she was required to report to the police and the public prosecutor in Thailand. Milena accompanied June to a hearing, together with representatives from human rights organisations and embassies.

Lawyers for Lawyers submitted a report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee in 2017 regarding the situation of lawyers in Thailand.

On the day the 2017 Award was presented, Lawyers for Lawyers also organised a seminar titled “The Voice of Rights, about lawyers and freedom of expression”. Lawyers Mark Stephens (United Kingdom), June (Thailand), Jorge Molano (Colombia) and Didar Erdem (Turkey) came together to share their experiences with the participants regarding the theme.

# UN Side Event Geneva

*The independence of the legal profession*

On 16 March 2017, the Law Society of England and Wales and Lawyers for Lawyers, using their consultative ECOSOC status, organised a side event at the United Nations in Geneva titled “The independence of the legal profession”.

This event was organised as a side event to the 34th session of the Human Rights Council, and was in part sponsored by representatives from the Netherlands, Paraguay and Australia.

The keynote speaker was Diego Garcia-Sayán, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers. He stressed the importance of the UN “Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers”, emphasising the fact that lawyers must be able to conduct their profession without fear of outside interference and/or intimidation, and without being identified with their clients.

Garcia-Sayán also discussed a few of the priorities on which he will be focusing attention during his term in office, including “corruption and the role played by non-state actors in undermining the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary”.

Attorneys from Turkey, Cameroon and Azerbaijan discussed their experiences regarding the threats they are exposed to while conducting their profession.



# Turkey

*State of emergency*

During the UN side event in Geneva, lawyer Ayse Bingöl Demir from Turkey discussed the situation in her country since the failed coup in 2015. Existing laws have been changed by decree. Many lawyers and judges have been detained, prosecuted and dismissed.

Reports indicate that some 350 lawyers were incarcerated in 2017. Many hundreds of others are being investigated or are currently being prosecuted. Conversations with their defenders are taped and/or there are prison guards present.

In 2017, Lawyers for Lawyers attended several hearings against Turkish lawyers. In March, July and December 2017, Lawyers for Lawyers



*“The rule of law has been de facto destroyed.”*

Lawyer Ayse Bingöl Demir

and Fair Trial Watch observers attended the trials of 46 lawyers suspected of involvement in terrorism, simply because they, or lawyers from their office, have represented PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan at one point or another. That case has been ongoing since July 2012.

## Ramazan Demir

Ramazan Demir has been assisting journalists and lawyers, among others, since 2009. He was one of the lawyers who assisted the 46 colleagues charged with membership of a terrorist organisation after having acted as counsel at one point or another for Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK). Ramazan has already been criminally prosecuted a number of times for his professional work. A criminal investigation started in 2016 brought him five months of pre-trial detention.



# Turkey

*Ramazan Demir presented with IBA Award*

“This award gives me the strength and courage to continue the fight. It shows that our voices are being heard. Even though sometimes you feel like no one can hear. It convinces me that there is still hope.” This was the response from human rights lawyer Ramazan Demir in an online interview with Lawyers for Lawyers after receiving the International Bar Association’s Human Rights Award in Sydney on 13 October 2017.



*„This recognition is enough to blot out the clouds, turning the skies back to blue for a while”*

The IBA Award’s jury praised Demir for his “significant personal endeavours during his defence work in extremely challenging and threatening circumstances”. Lawyers for Lawyers nominated Ramazan for this distinguishing award. “This recognition is enough to blot out the clouds, turning the skies back to blue for a while,” said Ramazan. “It gives those of us who are still alive fresh air filled with zeal.”

# China

*Day of the Endangered Lawyer focuses on crackdown in China*

The Day of the Endangered Lawyer, held for the seventh time on 24 January 2017, focused on the situation of lawyers in China.

In cooperation with The Hague Bar (Haagse Orde) and the Young Bar of The Hague (Jonge Balie Den Haag), Lawyers for Lawyers and the foundation The Day of Endangered Lawyers organised a seminar at which Kit Chan, director of the China Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group, discussed the deteriorating situation for lawyers in China.

An unprecedented and coordinated wave of arrests began in July 2015, leaving a large number of human rights activists, lawyers

and law firm staff members under home detention or under arrest. Some for a number of hours or days; others disappeared for months.

Two years later, on 9 July 2017, the count is up to 300 lawyers and human rights activists who have fallen prey to what is now known as the “709 crackdown”, referring to the date on which the Chinese authorities unleashed the initial arrests. The situation continued to deteriorate in 2017. Several lawyers lost their licences to practise and a number of trials were conducted against lawyers. Those found guilty included lawyers Jiang Tianyong and Xie Yang. In March 2017, Lawyers for Lawyers and twelve other NGOs voiced their serious concerns about this in a letter to the Chinese authorities.



## Pandas enjoy better protection than lawyers

Within the context of “Panda Diplomacy”, China lent two pandas to Ouwehands zoo. The two protected young bears arrived at Schiphol Airport on 12 April 2017. No effort or expense was spared to make the pandas feel at home. Such treatment can only be

dreamed about by the many lawyers incarcerated in China. Lawyers in China are now an endangered species. Lawyers for Lawyers wrote an op-ed article explaining this in the national newspaper Parool.





# Vietnam

*'Propaganda against Vietnam'*



In June 2017, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) called for the immediate and unconditional release of the prominent Vietnamese human rights lawyer Nguyen Van Dai. It did so after Media Legal Defense Initiative, Lawyers for Lawyers, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, PEN International and Viet Tan collectively submitted a petition to the working group.

Nguyen Van Dai was arrested on 16 December 2015 on his way to a meeting with European Union (EU) representatives within the context of the annual EU-Vietnam Dialogue on human rights. He was accused of "making propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam".

Nguyen Van Dai was refused access to a lawyer for a considerable period of time. Despite his poor health, he also received no adequate medical care.

In November 2017, Media Legal Defense Initiative submitted a follow-up document to WGAD, also on behalf of Lawyers for Lawyers, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, PEN International and Viet Tan.

\*Nguyen Van Dai was released in May 2018 and exiled to Germany.

## Lobby in Brussels

In December 2017 the European Parliament adopted a resolution denouncing the continuous harsh campaign against freedom of speech in Vietnam. It did so shortly after representatives of Reporters Sans Frontières, Lawyers for Lawyers and Viet Tan travelled to Brussels on 22 and 23 November to lobby about the situation in Vietnam and spoke with seven members of the European Parliament.



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## UPR Mid-term report

In preparation for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Vietnam in 2019, Lawyers for Lawyers has written a mid-term report together with the Law Society of England and Wales and Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada.

## UN-activities 2017

Lawyers for Lawyers submitted in total **4** UPR reports to the Human Rights Council. We did this for Ukraine, Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation and Colombia.

Lawyers for Lawyers submitted **2** reports to the Human Rights Committee under the ICCPR for Thailand and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Lawyers for Lawyers delivered **3** oral statements to the Human Rights Council and **1** to the Human Rights Committee.

Lawyers for Lawyers organised **1** side-event.

Lawyers for Lawyers wrote **1** mid-term report on Vietnam.

# Democratic Republic Congo

## *Failing policy*

In 2017, Lawyers for Lawyers made an oral statement to the United Nations Human Rights Committee regarding the situation of lawyers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Earlier, we had also submitted a report to the Committee.

A few excerpts from the statement, which was read aloud by our board member Nienke van Renssen. She visited the capital city of Kinshasa in 2015 together with six other Lawyers for Lawyers representatives:

*"Fundamental to improving human rights for the people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a justice system that provides due process, equality of arms and allows lawyers to work independently without fear of harassment or intimidation (...). Lawyers for Lawyers has been informed that lawyers in the DRC are subjected to threats, intimidation and interference by members of police agencies, the military and even the judiciary, in connection to their legitimate activities. Our report provides concrete examples thereof.*

*Lawyers are sometimes even arbitrarily detained and subjected to criminal proceedings because of the exercise of their professional activities. In particular, lawyers who are involved in politically sensitive cases endure difficulties in carrying out their professional activities without undue intervention (...).*

*Lawyers for Lawyers calls on the Committee: to strengthen its previous recommendations for the DRC to respect and protect the activities of lawyers, to call on the DRC to refrain from any form of harassment and persecution of lawyers and interference with their defence of clients and to respect and promote the independence of the DRC bar associations and strengthen their capacity".*



*„I would like to thank everybody from Lawyers for Lawyers for the intervention in my case. If I would not be supported by you I would most certainly be convicted by now and judicial harassment would persist.*

*Your help is invaluable”*

Advocaat Oleg Volchek



## Belarus

*Charged with “participating in a peaceful protest”*

**Belarus lawyer Oleg Volchek was convicted to thirteen days in prison in 2017 for participating in a demonstration. Later this was converted into a fine of 575 Belarus roubles, about €260.**

A few weeks after participating in peaceful demonstrations, Oleg Volchek was charged with “participating in a prohibited peaceful meeting”. The district court of Frunzensky sentenced him to thirteen days in prison on 21 March 2017. He filed a complaint and requested a new investigation. On 31 March the court of appeal in Minsk set aside the judgment and ordered the district court of Frunzensky to start a new investigation. Shortly afterwards, however, the district court found him guilty once again and upheld the punishment.

Throughout all of the proceedings, Oleg and his lawyer were not informed about the process, making it impossible for them to prepare a defence. Lawyers for Lawyers wrote two letters to the authorities to support him. Ultimately, his punishment was converted into a fine.

Oleg Volchek has thanked Lawyers for Lawyers for the support during his trial.





# Dam tot Damloop

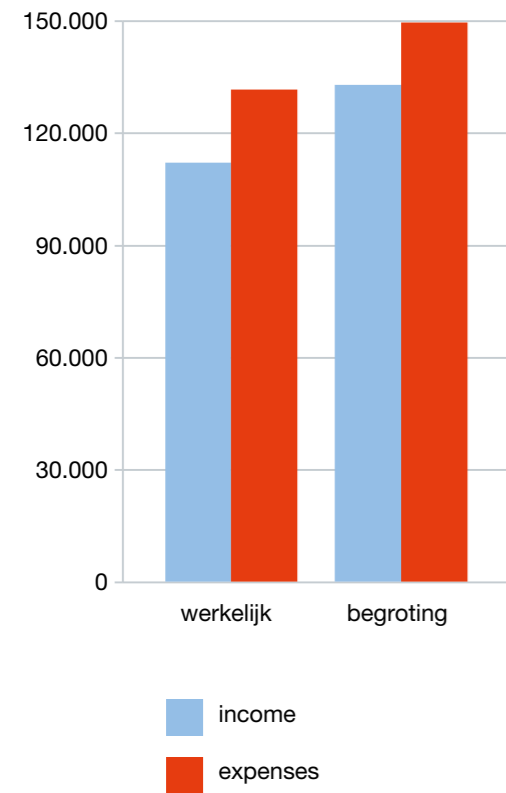
*Lawyers running for charity*



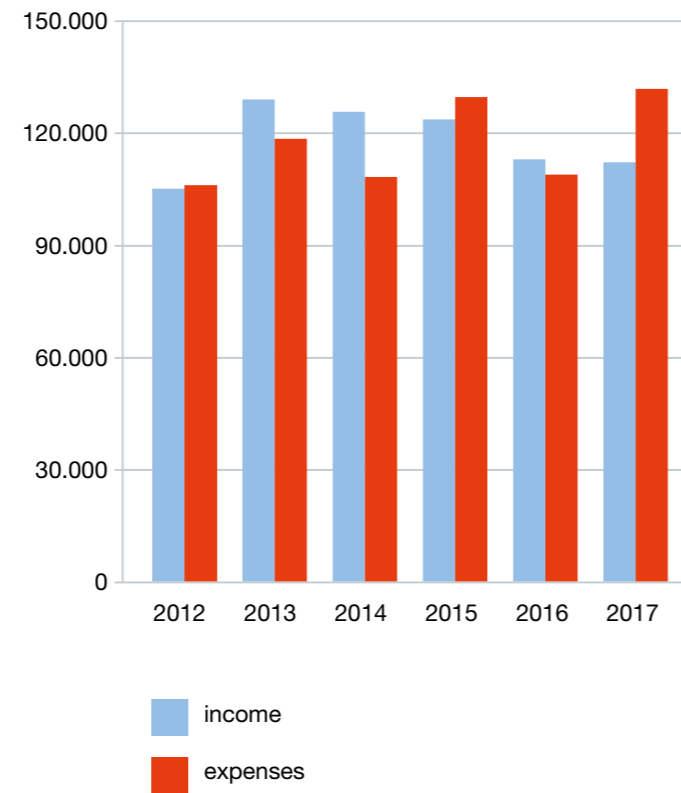
Nearly fifty lawyers sponsored Lawyers for Lawyers by participating in the Dam to Dam Run in Lawyers for Lawyers' name on 17 September 2017. These sporty lawyers collectively raised a total of more than 8,000 euros for Lawyers for Lawyers. A large contribution to the projects we are working on. This is the second sports event of this type in which we have participated. But it has already been pencilled into our diaries for the coming years.

# Financial accountability

## results and budget 2017

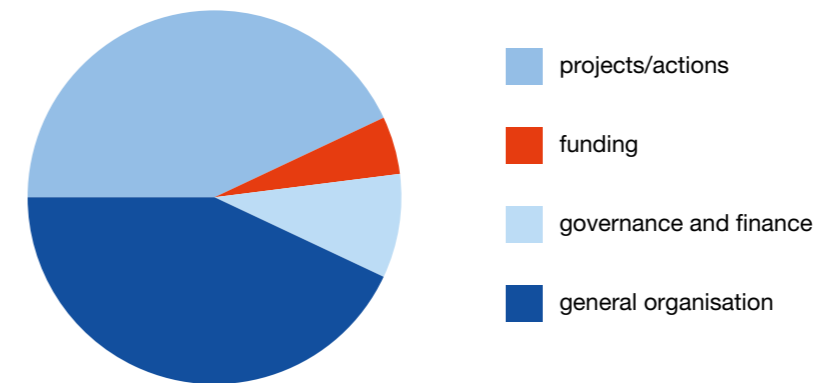


## income and expenses 2012 – 2017



## distribution working hours in percentages 2017

(excluding work hours volunteers)



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# Remuneration policy

## attendance fees

Boardmembers and other lawyer-volunteers receive no fee attendance money or other allowances for the work they perform for Lawyers for Lawyers.

## personnel

To support the Executive Director, in 2017, Lawyers for Lawyers had one legal assistant and two on-call assistants.

## reimbursement of expenses

If a Lawyers for Lawyers employee performs work at the request of the board for which expenses for travel and accommodation are incurred, these costs will, within reason, be reimbursed.

The foregoing also applies to board members and other Lawyers for Lawyers volunteers who perform work at the board's request. Other than this, board members and volunteers receive no compensation whatsoever for these trips and any lost income and time off work is at their own expense.

# Contact



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Lawyers for Lawyers was granted Special Consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council in July 2013.

**Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)** is an independent and non-political Dutch foundation and was founded in 1986. Lawyers for Lawyers supports lawyers and organizations of lawyers that are being oppressed worldwide.

[www.lawyersforlawyers.org](http://www.lawyersforlawyers.org)

