



Organization: Lawyers for Lawyers

Item: 6

Date: 30 June 2022

Speaker: Ms. Julia Smakman

Oral statement Uganda to the 50th Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Lawyers for Lawyers, NGO in special consultative status

Mr President,

Lawyers for Lawyers welcomes Uganda's stated commitment to the protection of human rights, and its recognition of the important role NGO's hold in advancing democracy. However, we are concerned that Uganda has refrained from accepting any of the numerous recommendations concerning the protection of human rights defenders, including lawyers.ⁱ

This is particularly worrying, considering a fundamental aspect of the protection of human rights, and by extension the rule of law, is the effective functioning of an independent legal profession. Lawyers must be able to carry out their professional duties without harassment, intimidation, or improper interference. In light of the many problems faced by the Ugandan legal community, the continued absence of measures to adequately address such issues affects lawyers' ability to fulfil their professional duties.

Such issues include the harassment of lawyers, a lack of access to clients, lack of lawyer-client confidentiality, identification of lawyers with their clients, and the situation of lawyers working for NGOs. We have also received reports of lawyers facing harassment or persecution due to their involvement in human rights, LGBTQ+, environmental and politically sensitive cases.

Therefore we urge Uganda to:

- Implement the recommendations with regards to the protection of human rights defenders without delay;
- Take effective and immediate measures to combat the harassment and persecution of lawyers due to their work; and
- Take effective and immediate measures to guarantee lawyers' access to their clients, confidential communications with these clients, and to prevent lawyers from being identified with their clients.

Thank you, Mr. President.

ⁱ Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Uganda, 21 April 2022, A/HRC/50/11/Add.1.
Noted recommendations:

125.105 End arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances, drop politically motivated charges and investigate allegations of State harassment and violence against civil society and human rights defenders (Ireland);

125.131 Promote an open civic and political space and uphold the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly by repealing all laws and policies that restrict the activities of human rights defenders (Australia);

125.136 Ensure respect for freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, in particular by putting an end to human rights violations perpetrated against members of the political opposition, civil society organizations and human rights defenders (France);

125.137 Create a safe environment in which to exercise the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, aligning the legislation with international law and preventing attacks and intimidation against human rights defenders, journalists and civil society actors (Italy);

125.138 End the intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders, civil society organizations and journalists and ensure that they can exist and operate freely and independently (Netherlands);

125.139 Protect freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, by adapting the laws restricting those freedoms to international standards and by combating impunity for attacks targeting journalists, human rights defenders and peaceful political actors, in line with target 16.10 of the Sustainable Development Goals (Switzerland);

125.140 Protect human rights defenders, civil society actors and journalists (Luxembourg);

125.141 Take concrete steps to protect the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and ensure that human rights defenders, civil society actors, political parties, journalists and the media can operate freely and independently without fear of reprisals (Norway);

125.142 Ensure the protection of human rights defenders, journalists, members of the opposition and other civil society actors, allowing them to carry out their work freely (Spain);

125.147 Take immediate measures to ensure that civil society organizations, human rights defenders and journalists can operate in a safe environment and free from acts of intimidation or reprisals, and that all such complaints are duly investigated, including through the revision of the restrictive provisions of the Penal Code (Uruguay);

125.148 Investigate thoroughly, transparently, independently and effectively allegations of attacks against human rights defenders, civil society actors, bloggers, journalists and others before, during and after the 2021 presidential election and hold those responsible to account (Belgium);

125.149 Continue efforts towards the adoption of the bill on human rights defenders (Côte d'Ivoire);

125.150 Work on specific legislative measures to end the harassment of human rights defenders, civil society actors and journalists (Estonia);

125.151 Adopt the human rights defenders protection bill (Ireland);