



Organization: Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

Item 3: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Date: 15 March 2023

Speaker: Brian Samuels

Oral Statement to the 52nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC), the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), and Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L), with endorsement by OVD-Info.

Applause for human rights lawyers under pressure in Russia and other countries

Mr. President,

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, and Lawyers for Lawyers, join the Special Rapporteur's celebration¹ of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders,² with endorsement by OVD-Info.

We join the Special Rapporteur's tribute to defenders, emphasizing the courage of lawyers who uphold human rights despite repression. Lawyers in China, Türkiye, Iran, and elsewhere struggle to ensure that their countries uphold human rights obligations, despite risks of harassment, judicial persecution, arbitrary detention, and torture. Many lawyers in the Philippines and Colombia risk their lives upholding rights, while those who threaten or attack them enjoy impunity.

In Russia, lawyers keep courageously denouncing human rights violations and providing legal aid to those facing bogus charges. Russia has intensified its punishment of legitimate dissent since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, even charging a lawyer with an offence for using the word "war" in court.³

We join the Special Rapporteur's appreciation of countries with policies, mechanisms or guidelines to protect defenders at home⁴ or abroad.⁵ We urge all States to adopt and consistently implement robust laws and policies to protect human rights lawyers and defenders everywhere.

Thank you.

¹ Human Rights Council, Success through perseverance and solidarity: 25 years of achievements by human rights defenders. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, A/HRC/52/29, available at: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/52/29>.

² UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Declaration on Human Rights Defenders), available at:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/Translation.aspx>.

³ Add reference

⁴ E.g. Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Peru. Report of the Special Rapporteur, para 110, supra note 1.

⁵ E.g. Canada, the European Union, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Report of the Special Rapporteur, para 109, supra note 1.