



**Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada**

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



**The Law Society**  
of England and Wales

**55th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council  
Agenda Item 6: UPR Outcomes: Russian Federation**

25 March 2024

**Joint Oral Statement**

Mr President,

Lawyers for Lawyers, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, the Law Society of England and Wales, and Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada continue to be deeply concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in the Russian Federation. We deplore that the Russian Federation accepted none of the recommendations<sup>i</sup> made pertaining to the rights of lawyers at its 4<sup>th</sup> UPR.

Protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms requires effective access to legal services provided by an independent legal profession. A justice system that provides due process for rights holders and allows lawyers to work independently without fear of harassment or intimidation, is fundamental to advancing human rights.

Lawyers in the Russian Federation working on sensitive cases are subjected to attempts by investigative authorities to harass and disrupt their work. Lawyers face threats, intimidation, and (physical) attacks in connection with their legitimate work. In addition, some lawyers are subjected to criminal or disciplinary proceedings related to their professional legal duties, resulting in disbarment or lengthy prison sentences.

Authorities in these cases have failed to carry out prompt and thorough investigations into the threats and attacks. Impunity of these acts have a severe "chilling effect", resulting in lawyers refusing to represent clients in sensitive cases, out of fear of becoming the target of harassment. This severely compromises the universal right to effective legal representation and access to justice for all.

National legislation unduly restricts the exercise of democratic human rights, including the rights of lawyers. The 'foreign agents' law, 'undesirable organisation' law, as well as censorship laws, which have been heavily criticised by various international institutions, are increasingly and wrongfully being applied to lawyers and lawyers' organisations. This makes it virtually impossible to continue practising law in the Russian Federation.

Whilst we would welcome the Russian Federation's stated commitment<sup>ii</sup> to fulfilling its obligation to promote civil and political rights, these words will continue to ring hollow unless the government repeals or reforms legislation designed to restrict these rights – recommendations it has explicitly refused to accept.

We therefore urge the Russian Federation to reconsider and accept the recommendations pertaining to the rights of lawyers and to take immediate measures to prevent any harassment against lawyers effectively, publicly condemn them at all levels and promptly and thoroughly investigate them to end impunity. Thank you.

*This statement was delivered by:*

**Tara Fiechter**

**Programme Officer**

**Lawyers for Lawyers**

[t.fiechter@lawyersforlawyers.nl](mailto:t.fiechter@lawyersforlawyers.nl)

---

<sup>i</sup> Addendum to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of the Russian Federation, 21 December 2023, A/HRC/55/14/Add.1.

*Rejected recommendations on the rights of lawyers:*

35.110 Refrain from any form of harassment and review the detention of all journalists, media workers, human rights defenders, cultural figures, lawyers and political opposition representatives with regard to the compatibility of their detention with international human rights law (Cyprus).

35.111 Refrain from any form of harassment and review the detention of all journalists, media workers, human rights defenders, lawyers and political opposition representatives with regard to the compatibility of their detention with international human rights law (Greece).

35.113 End repression and violence against lawyers, journalists, human rights defenders and political opponents (Luxembourg).

35.116 End acts of harassment, intimidation, unwarranted prosecution, poisoning and violence against, and the killing of, lawyers, journalists, human rights defenders and opposition politicians (Liechtenstein).

<sup>ii</sup> Addendum to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of the Russian Federation, 19 December 2023, A/HRC/55/14/Add.1.

*Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review:*

19. The Russian Federation [...] is committed to fulfilling its obligations to promote civil and political rights and to create the conditions for the development of civil society and for interaction between State structures and non-governmental organizations within the framework of the national legislation in force. At the same time, the Russian Federation strongly rejects the recommendations regarding a need to amend the normative acts regulating these legal relations. In particular, Russia does not accept the recommendations concerning the repeal of the legislation on foreign agents and undesirable organizations, as the legislation contains no unlawful restrictions on the rights of civil society representatives and it would be inappropriate to revise it at this time. In addition, Russia rejects the recommendations concerning restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association in Russia and the persecution of opposition representatives, journalists and human rights defenders, as these recommendations are based on false or incorrect assertions and do not correspond with the legal provisions, law enforcement practice and the main directions of State policy in the relevant areas. The recommendations demanding the release of persons detained in accordance with Russian law and/or held in custody under a court order are essentially an attempt to interfere with the administration of justice and have therefore also been rejected.