

2023 Annual Board Report Lawyers for Lawyers

Introduction

In 2023 Lawyers for Lawyers has continued further professionalize our approach to organizational development to enhance the effectiveness, potential, and capacity of our people, processes, and resources in achieving our mission. We have done this by drafting a new strategic plan for 2024-2028, by engaging with a new bookkeeper and accountant, and by updating our onboarding policies and HR policies.

1. About Lawyers for Lawyers

1.1 General

Lawyers play a vital role in the protection of the rule of law and human rights. It is the responsibility of lawyers to protect and establish the rights of citizens from whatever quarter they may be threatened. Their work is indispensable for ensuring effective access to justice for all.

To fulfil their professional duties effectively, lawyers should be able to practice law freely and independently, without any fear of reprisal. Around the world, however, lawyers are harassed, threatened, attacked or worse for simply doing their job.

Lawyers for Lawyers is an independent, non-profit, civil society organization, based in the Netherlands. We are lawyers who promote the common values of lawyers and their contribution to the justice system. Around the world, we stand up for colleague-lawyers under threat.

Established in 1986, Lawyers for Lawyers has more than 30 years of experience in providing emergency support and assistance to lawyers in danger and creating awareness of the importance of the independent functioning of the legal profession to the protection of citizens' rights.

1.2 History

Lawyers for Lawyers has its roots in a solidarity campaign for lawyers in Argentina who 'disappeared' or were detained without trial under the military juntas from 1976-1983. The campaign was initiated by a Dutch lawyer and cartoonist, Willem van Manen, in the context of an international congress of lawyers hosted in Buenos Aires.

It showed that international solidarity of the legal profession can play an important role in order to defend and protect colleague-lawyers from attacks, especially since lawyers are bound by universal core values underpinning their profession.

Inspired by the lack of an independent lawyers' organization dedicated to raising international awareness and recognition of the specific role of lawyers in the protection of the rule of law and human rights and responding to immediate threats to their safety and ability to perform their professional duties effectively, Lawyers for Lawyers was established in 1986.

The creation of Lawyers for Lawyers was supported by the Dutch sections of Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists (NJCM), the Netherlands Bar Association and the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights at University Utrecht.

1.3 Lawyers for Lawyers penguin logo

The first chair of Lawyers for Lawyers was Willem van Manen. Van Manen was not only a lawyer, but also a cartoonist. He designed the Lawyers for Lawyers penguin-logo, based on his famous series of penguin lawyers' cartoons.

2. Mission, Vision, Core Values and Goals

2.1 Mission

Promote and protect the independence of lawyers

Lawyers for Lawyers promotes and preserves the independence of the legal profession worldwide and defends the professional rights of lawyers to provide legal services safely and independently, without fear of reprisal. We safeguard lawyers' role in protecting the rule of law and human rights and ensuring effective justice for all by acting wherever lawyers are under threat.

In doing so, we refer to internationally recognized human rights laws and standards, including the [UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers](#).

2.2. Vision

Every lawyer can practice law independently without fear of reprisal

We strive for a world where lawyers can practice law freely and independently to effectively fulfil their role in upholding the rule of law and the protection of human rights. Lawyers should be able to do their job without improper interference or fear of reprisal. Always and everywhere. Also, when that does not suit the government, the bar association, or the establishment.

2.3 Core Values

Put lawyers under threat at the heart of our work

When we work to promote and protect the independence of lawyers, we are committed to:

- Put lawyers under threat at the heart of our work.
- Provide support to meet expressed needs by lawyers whose professional guarantees, immunities, and privileges are violated.
- Analyse root causes of why lawyers face reprisals, guided by local lawyers and other stakeholders.
- Identify the most effective ways to achieve tangible impact and lasting progress.
- Act independently, objectively, professionally, and with integrity.
- Leverage resources through collaboration and coordination with other actors working toward common goals.
- Improve outcomes through the creation of solidarity within the community.

3. Strategies, programs and activities

To achieve our mission, vision, and goals, we conduct three strategic **programs**: Defend, Empower, and Influence. Through these programs, we implement projects and activities to **support lawyers** at risk worldwide and **raise awareness** of the importance of the independent functioning of lawyers for the protection of the rule of law and human rights and fundamental freedoms to which all persons are entitled and to ensure effective access to justice for all.

1. DEFEND

We **defend** lawyers around the world whose professional guarantees, immunities, or privileges are violated or jeopardized, including through forms of reprisals against them for simply doing their job, and **ensure accountability** where such acts occur.

In 2023 we contributed to this goal by:

- Providing tailor-made support to individual lawyers at risk, guided by the lawyers concerned or their representatives.
- Monitoring and highlighting violations of lawyers' rights.
- Conducting advocacy on targeted impunity cases.
- Building networks and alliances to act in coordination and solidarity.

2. EMPOWER

We **empower** lawyers and associations of lawyers to fulfil their role in upholding human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In 2023 we contributed to this goal by:

- Sharing best practices on core values and ethics underpinning the legal profession.

3. INFLUENCE

We **advocate** for laws, regulations, and practices that provide or reinforce effective protections for the independent functioning and security of lawyers in accordance with internationally recognized laws and standards at global, regional, and national levels.

In 2023 we contributed to this goal by:

- Engaging with global and regional bodies and their mechanisms to advocate for standards, resolutions, and recommendations that strengthen the independence and security of lawyers.
- Lobbying governments and professional associations of lawyers to adopt, implement, and enforce effective legal protections, including effective legal remedies against improper interferences, and change laws, regulations, and practices that encroach on the independence of lawyers.
- Promoting the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and other guiding principles recognising the independence of the legal profession as an essential component of the rule of law.
- Informing the public about what lawyer independence is, how it affects peoples' lives or what life might be like without it, and what governments should do to ensure the independent functioning of lawyers in accordance with international standards.

4. Methodology & Impact 2023

Lawyers for Lawyers has a strong track record in acting quickly and effectively to support lawyers in danger. Our international network and the way we operate, enable us to be flexible and amendable to fast-changing situations and developments.

Lawyers for Lawyers are practicing lawyers and human rights experts. We are therefore particularly well

placed to monitor and highlight violations of lawyers' rights and threats to their independence and to raise awareness of the harmful consequences thereof for upholding the rule of law and the protection of human rights.

Our board of directors, staff members and lawyer-volunteers have deep knowledge and expertise of the laws, standards and ethics underpinning the legal profession, the concept of the rule of law as well as international human rights laws and mechanisms. They also know how to apply these laws, concepts and mechanisms in practice.

4.1 Who we support - Where we work

Lawyers for Lawyers supports lawyers at risk in all continents of the world, especially lawyers who work in challenging environments.

We stand with lawyers who have the formal status of lawyers in accordance with domestic laws and are bound by recognized standards and ethics of the legal profession. At the same time, we may include lawyers who exercise the functions of lawyers but are not or not any longer formally recognized as such, for example because access to the legal profession has been refused to them or they have been suspended or disbarred on improper grounds as a reprisal of their work.

On the individual level we prioritize support to lawyers who are in imminent danger or acutely vulnerable. However, since our resources are limited, we are forced to make choices. These choices are based upon our capacity, expertise, and networks, as well as potential opportunities and impact. Also relevant is whether support is already or can be better provided by other organizations.

4.2 What we do - How we collaborate

In addition to emergency support and rapid assistance to lawyers in immediate danger, we provide a range of tools and preventive support to defend and protect lawyers from attacks and improper interference and to strengthen their international recognition and legal protection. At the same time, we empower lawyers and associations of lawyers to support, safeguard, and advocate for the independence of the legal profession on a more lasting basis at the domestic level.

We promote respect for the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers. In doing so, we act in collaboration or coordination with international bar associations, lawyers' organizations and other civil society actors.

Lawyers for Lawyers is a member of the BMO (*Breed Mensenrechten Overleg*), a coalition of human rights and development organizations based in the Netherlands.

We also engage with governments and international and regional intergovernmental institutions and their mechanisms. In 2013, Lawyers for Lawyers was granted consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), providing us access to this Council and its many subsidiaries bodies, to the Human Rights Council, to the various human rights mechanisms of the UN, as well as to special events organized by the President of the General Assembly.

4.3 How we make an impact

Lawyers for Lawyers acknowledges that it is often hard to tell whether our activities have contributed to or resulted in reducing or preventing attacks and restrictions against lawyers or improving legal protections, and if so, to what extent. When it comes to supporting lawyers, we define success in terms of making a

positive difference for individual lawyers. We make a positive impact, when lawyers feel morally supported, when we offer a source of strength in times of need, or when their personal situation changes positively, e.g. they are released from prison, travel bans are lifted, disciplinary or criminal proceedings are withdrawn, etc. Our impact is also positive when lawyers feel empowered to support their colleague lawyers at home.

When it comes to structural support, we define success in terms of progress, e.g. is there an increased number of recommendations made by United Nations human rights mechanisms, strengthening the independence of lawyers and the legal profession that were originally issued by Lawyers for Lawyers or by organizations we are collaborating with or by governments we have engaged with; is there an increase in the number of governments we have engaged with, accepting those recommendations; are those supported recommendations implemented effectively; and do they result in positive changes for lawyers discharging their professional duties.

When defining performance indications for specific projects, we make a distinction between what outcomes may be reasonably expected, given our circle of influence, and what outcomes would be best in terms of achieving our mission, vision and goals.

To understand our impact, we monitor and evaluate the results of our activities on an on-going basis.

4.4 Impact examples 2023

In 2023, we have supported 126 lawyers in 39 countries.

Support to individual lawyers

In 2023, the Lawyers for Lawyers Award was presented to lawyer Claudia Gonzalez Orellana from Guatemala. As a result of defending the lawyers and prosecutors who previously defended the right to a life free of corruption and impunity, Claudia González is the subject of harassment and intimidation. She has faced multiple instances of judicial harassment. Despite this, Claudia is currently using her more than 20 years of experience to defend nine lawyers, all of whom worked on high profile anti-corruption cases for several years. The Lawyers for Lawyers Award honours lawyers who have made significant contributions to the protection of the rule of law and human rights in challenging environments and is presented every two years. Through this biannual Award, Lawyers for Lawyers generates public recognition for their work.

In 2023 we released many statements in support of individual lawyers at risk. Zimbabwean lawyers Douglas Coltart and Tapiwa Muchineripi were arrested on 4 September 2023. Lawyers for Lawyers issued a statement to call on the Zimbabwean authorities to drop the charges against the lawyers, which happened in January 2024.

In 2023, we commenced the Environmental Lawyers Campaign. This important campaign focusses on the work of environmental lawyers from around the world. The campaign was launched on 19 May 2022 during a seminar and aims to raise awareness about the increasing attacks against lawyers working on environmental cases. Monthly articles introducing environmental lawyers from different countries and their work are published on L4L's website. Interviews with lawyers from Bangladesh, Armenia, Mexico, Democratic Republic Congo, Peru and South Africa have been published in 2023. These lawyers have worked on a range of environmental issues, from replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy to land extortion, and have all faced difficulties in their work. In 2023 we also started drafting a report on the findings of our research into the situation of environmental lawyers around the world. This report will be presented in 2024.

Moreover, in December 2023, L4L organized a greeting card campaign. On 10 December - international Human Rights Day – L4L invited supporters to write a greeting card to an imprisoned lawyer. The greeting cards are meant as a sign of support and solidarity to lawyers serving a (long) prison sentence from their colleagues from the Netherlands.

Furthermore, we continued to support lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah from Sri Lanka. Even though Mr. Hizbullah was released on bail on 9 February 2022, after spending almost two years in pre-trial detention. Mr. Hizbullah is a minority rights advocate and legal counsel for Muslim victims of human rights violations in Sri Lanka, the trial against him still continues. He was arrested on 14 April 2020 on unsubstantiated terrorism charges. Mr. Hizbullah was released on bail by the Court of Appeal after continuous international pressure. As stated by Mr. Hizbullah's family: *"The role played by the international community in raising concerns with respect to Hejaaz's incarceration had an immense impact in facilitating his release. We are extremely grateful for your interventions and support."* L4L continues to support his case and has pressured the Sri Lankan authorities to drop the charges against him.

In 2023, L4L has conducted multiple trial monitoring missions to Turkey. In Turkey, there is a pattern of lawyers being identified with their clients and consequently being criminalized and prosecuted for fulfilling their professional duties. A large number of cases against lawyers and bar associations is currently pending in the Turkish courts. Amongst others, L4L representatives attended multiple hearings in the trials against the board members of the Izmir Bar Association, and hearings in the cases against individual lawyers. The board of the Izmir Bar was acquitted in April 2024. The trials against bar associations that are outspoken on human rights issues are an increasingly pressing and concerning issue. Lawyers from Turkey have stated that they notice better adherence to fair trial standards by the judges when international observers are present in the court rooms.

On the sidelines of the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference, Lawyers for Lawyers, co-hosted a side event on Belarussian Lawyers. The event served to elaborate on the plight of the legal profession in Belarus, to introduce the [Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers](#) (BAHRL), a new voice of the legal profession in Belarus, and to discuss opportunities to overcome the current challenges. Belarussian lawyer [Natalia Matskevich](#) moderated the panel. In her opening remarks she provided an overview of the difficulties [Belarussian lawyers](#) have been facing since the presidential elections in 2010 and [the context](#) in which this happens. The [rule of law crisis](#) in Belarus and the [situation of its lawyers](#) has reached rock bottom following the 2020 presidential elections.

Within our empower program, we have organized an online meeting for lawyers all around the world, to share knowledge, experiences and good practices and to create an international support network. Topics addressed during this meeting included the protection of the LHBTI+ community, fair trial rights violations and arbitrary disbarment of lawyers. Four lawyers from different countries were invited to share their stories on those topics.

Structural support

In 2022, we submitted **11 reports** and **20 oral statements** to the United Nations. This included UPR (mid-term) reports on Egypt, the Russian Federation, Colombia and Azerbaijan. In the sessions that have taken place thus far in 2023 on these countries, attention has been paid and recommendations have been made with regards to the protections of human rights defenders, including lawyers.

Furthermore, in 2023 Lawyers for Lawyers has launched the report "Lawyer-Client Confidentiality in a Digitalized Society". The report reflects on the worrisome trend of infringements of the legal professional privilege and confidentiality (LPPC), particularly in the context of digital communications. The aim of this

report is to create awareness about the threats to LPPC in the digital age and to reiterate the importance of our commitment to protect this principle as part of protecting the rule of law. Our analysis of the current legal framework and case studies relating to LPPC show that the protection of LPPC requires our attention.

5. Board, staff and volunteers 2023

5.1 Board

Lawyers for Lawyers has a Board of Directors comprised of practicing lawyers and human rights experts.

Board members in 2023:

Irma van den Berg - President

Maike de Jong – Secretary

Jan de Koning - Treasurer (from 1 March 2023)

Jeroen Brouwer – Member

Sander Oudshoorn – Member

Judith Lichtenberg – Member (until 30 August 2023)

5.2 Volunteers

Lawyers for Lawyers' volunteers are essential to fulfil our mission. They also significantly outnumber paid staff. In 2023, Lawyers for Lawyers had a pool of 72 highly motivated and skilled volunteers, consisting mainly of practising lawyers, as well as a management assistant. Since we had many more lawyers signing up as a volunteer, we have started a waiting list for new volunteers.

In 2023, we continued to strengthen our onboarding and training program, including necessary policies and procedures. We have made changes to our volunteer policy and developed a volunteer program, leveraging volunteers' strengths and interests, and transforming their opportunities for engagement in a more tailormade approach. Some of the staff members were trained in 'organizing', a method to successfully campaign, build a progressive movement and ultimately create change. We are now in the process of determining how we can apply this method to the volunteer management at Lawyers for Lawyers.

5.3 Staff

In 2023 the total FTEs of the office of Lawyers for Lawyers to 2,7 FTE. Furthermore, the work of the staff was supported by 3 legal interns who work 8 hours a week. In 2023, an interim director was employed on a freelance basis to cover the maternity leave of the executive director.

6. Funding and Financial resources 2023

Lawyers for Lawyers is supported entirely by financial donations and in-kind support, mainly from individual lawyers, law firms, lawyers' associations and other organizations related to the legal profession. We raise funds by cultivating relationships and partnerships in the legal sector and through third- party events. We sometimes also receive royalties from an author or composer for each copy of a legal book that has been sold or fees for a service that has been provided, such as a legal training.

Lawyers for Lawyers has been recognized as a charity by the Central Bureau on Fundraising (CBF), i.e. "CBF-erkend goed doel". Lawyers for Lawyers is also tax-exempted under Dutch law. It qualifies as a Public

Benefit Organisation (ANBI status).

The reserves of Lawyer for Lawyers are at a level that is considered to be justified by the Herkströter Committee (Commission on Capital Standards for Charities), i.e. a continuity reserve of a maximum of one and a half times the annual turnover.

At the end of 2022, we received a large donation which makes it possible for our organization in the coming five years to further professionalize our approach to organizational development to enhance the effectiveness, potential, and capacity of our people, processes, and resources in achieving our mission. The board of Lawyers for Lawyers designated this donation as a reserve to 'increase capacity' of our organization and in 2023 a plan was written on how to spend this donation to reach this goal. This includes hiring extra staff in 2024.

In 2022, the board of Lawyers for Lawyers decided that we will be exploring new funding opportunities for certain projects and activities under our Empower program, including from government bodies, to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. In 2023, we have looked at possibilities for this kind of funding with a coalition of other civil society organizations. In 2024 we will continue to engage with this coalition to research the possibility of applying for grants from, amongst others, the European Union and private foundations. The board has decided in 2023 to mainly focus the fundraising efforts in 2023 on the partnerships with law firms. With the support of a professional fundraiser (the interim director) we were able to secure partnerships with a number of new firms. We were also able to increase the donations of private individuals. Due to the absence of the executive director and the limited time of the interim director, it was not possible to also focus our fundraising efforts towards non-profit organizations, such as Bar Associations. We therefore were not able to raise the income from not for profit organizations that we had budgeted. This is why the income in 2023 is less than was in the budget of 2023.

In 2023, extra costs were incurred due to the employment of an interim director on a freelance basis to cover the maternity leave of the executive director. The interim director is a fundraising professional and strategic manager who has dedicated her time at Lawyers for Lawyers working on the professionalization of the fundraising strategy and organizational processes, and less on our defend, empower and influence pillars. This means that in 2023 the expenditures on organizational costs and fundraising are higher than in previous years, and the output on our programs and the lawyers that we were able to support are lower than in previous years. The leave of the executive director was, in connection to unforeseen circumstances, longer than expected. Due to this, the costs incurred by the employment of the interim director were much higher than expected and budgeted for. This has led to a negative financial result in 2024.

7. 2024 and beyond

7.1 Our focus in 2024 - 2028

The board of Lawyers for Lawyers has updated the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 in 2023, and has produced a strategic plan for 2024-2028 which will be followed in 2024. The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to inform our continued journey to be an internationally recognized expert in promoting and safeguarding the independence of individual lawyers and the legal profession across the world, serving as a catalyst for a safe and enabling environment for lawyers.

In the next four years, we will focus on two key priorities. First, we will continue to strengthening our work in support of lawyers under threat. We will do so by further enhancing, aligning, and expanding our Defend,

Empower, and Influence programs, and through ongoing collaboration and alliances' building with stakeholders.

Throughout the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2024 – 2028, we will monitor and evaluate our progress and results and capture lessons learned. We will solicit and act upon feedback from lawyers at risk, board members, staff members, volunteers, and other stakeholders, and be adaptive to changing developments and demands as appropriate.

The strategic plan 2024-2028 is available on our website.