



Ms. Svetlana Volodina
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3 December 2024

Re: Appeal hearing in disciplinary case against lawyer Aleksey Ladin

Dear President Ms. Volodina, members of the Council of the Russian Federal Bar Association (RFBA),

Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L) is writing to express its grave concern about the recent disbarment of lawyer **Aleksey Ladin** by the Tyumen Regional Bar Association on 25 July 2024, ahead of the appeal hearing before your Council on 9 December 2024.

Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L) is an independent and non-political foundation which seeks to promote the proper functioning of the rule of law by pursuing freedom and independence of the legal profession, in accordance with internationally recognised norms and standards. We support lawyers worldwide who face reprisal. L4L was granted Special Consultative status with the United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Council in 2013.

We are concerned that the proceedings unduly interfere in his work as lawyer and serve to impair the exercise of his human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, as well as his clients' right to access to justice.

According to our information, the Council of the Tyumen Regional Bar Association disbarred lawyer Aleksey Ladin on 25 July 2024, following the Qualification Commission's conclusion that he had violated the Code of Professional Ethics. Disciplinary proceedings against Aleksey Ladin had been [pending](#) since 4 December 2023, when the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation submitted a motion to the Tyumen Regional Bar alleging that he had violated the Code of Professional Ethics of the Russian Bar Association. The motion related to Aleksey Ladin's sentencing in [two administrative cases](#) before the Kyivskiy District Court of Simferopol on 13 October 2023, resulting in 14 days of administrative detention for the 'display of prohibited symbols' on his social media pages and a fine of 45,000 RUR (440 EUR) for 'discrediting the Russian army', allegedly violating Article 20.3(1) and Article 20.3.3.(1) of the Russian Code of Administrative Offences respectively.

In both cases, Aleksey Ladin was prosecuted for the exercise of his right to freedom of expression, protected under international and Russian law. Earlier this year, various UN Special Procedures mandates sent a [joint communication](#) to the Russian Government expressing their concern regarding the proceedings against Mr. Ladin related to the exercise of his professional activities. It was also noted that the penalty of disbarment and guilty verdicts from Crimean courts may be used to pressure Mr. Ladin to stop his professional activities in favour of Crimean Tatars, Ukrainian civilian prisoners and other vulnerable groups of defendants in criminal cases. ¹

¹ Joint Communication, Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers; Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, RUS 2/2024, 4 April 2024.



The criminal and disciplinary proceedings against Aleksey Ladin, having led to his preliminary disbarment, highlight the critical importance of upholding the principles outlined in the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers ('UN Basic Principles'). These principles are vital in ensuring that lawyers can fulfil their professional duties and express their views without the looming threat of reprisals. In this context, three of these principles hold specific significance.

Principle 16 of the UN Basic Principles states that "Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; [...] and (c) shall not be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any actions taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards, and ethics".

Principle 18 stipulates that "Lawyers shall not be identified with their clients, or their clients causes as a result of discharging their functions".

Furthermore, Principle 23 states that "Lawyers, like other citizens, are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association, and assembly".

Suspensions or revocations of lawyer licenses as an act of reprisal for the exercise of their legitimate rights and freedoms do not only impact on the exercise of the rights of the lawyers, but also on the rights of their clients to be represented by the lawyer of their choosing.² The UN Special Rapporteur has repeatedly stressed that disbarment 'should only be imposed in the most serious cases of misconduct' and 'only after a due process in front of an independent and impartial body granting all guarantees to the accused lawyer', in line with Principles 27, 28, and 29 of the UN Basic Principles.³ No matter the form, such authorities must be "free from any influence or pressure from the legislative or the executive branches of power or any other party".⁴

In numerous cases, including the case of Aleksey Ladin, the Russian authorities have sought to instrumentalize disciplinary bodies to interfere with the work of lawyers, particularly those dealing with cases against the State or representing causes or clients that are unpopular with the Russian authorities. In this regard, the recently [approved](#) amendments to the law establishing the bar association in the Russian Federation, which grants the Ministry of Justice the power to request disciplinary sanctions against lawyers and control qualification examinations, are deeply worrisome.⁵ [UN Special Rapporteurs](#) have previously expressed concern over these and other measures, which further undermine the independence of the legal profession and could be used to target lawyers involved in sensitive cases in the Russian Federation.

Such politically motivated disciplinary actions risk corrosion of the ability of the justice system to fulfil its essential democratic role, public trust in the justice system, and install a chilling effect on lawyers to pursue cases that challenge the State authority and protect fundamental democratic rights.⁶

² Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 32, Article 14: Right to equality before courts and tribunals and to a fair trial, CCPR/C/GC/32, 23 August 2007, para 34; Principle 12 of the United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems.

³ Report by the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, A/73/365, paras 71 and 73; and A/71/348, para 96.

⁴ Ibid, A/73/365, para 67.

⁵ Law No. 83-FZ, amending the Law on Advocacy and the Legal Profession (Federal Law No. 301952-8), entered into force on 22 April 2024.

⁶ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, A/56/62, para 50.



In view of the above, L4L respectfully urges the Russian Federal Bar Association to:

- Revoke the decision to disbar Aleksey Ladin, as it unduly interferes with his legitimate activities lawyer and deprives his clients of legal representation, in accordance with international law and internationally recognized principles on the role of lawyers, particularly the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.
- Take all necessary actions to shield all lawyers in Russia and Russian-occupied territories, including Aleksey Ladin, from harassment and undue interference, including unjust disbarment and restrictions to the right to freedom of expression.
- Issue a formal statement condemning the prosecution of lawyers based on their clients' activities and/or for political reasons. This condemnation should extend to operational measures against lawyers in connection with their professional activities and any violation of their lawful exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

We thank you for your attention to this urgent matter and look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Lawyers for Lawyers



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