



**LAWYERS FOR
LAWYERS** 
ANNUAL REPORT 2015

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Rule of Law

The Rule of Law is and remains a precious asset. Many countries around the world have laws but no rule of law. Consequently, in those countries the word of the executive power becomes the law. And it is particularly in those countries that lawyers are often, sometimes literally, under fire, because they stand up for people who invoke their rights, while the government should in fact be respecting those rights. That very same government also often gives little space to lawyers who are exercising their profession. It is not uncommon that those lawyers are identified with their clients. Governments are increasingly using 'terrorism' as the magic word. The fight against terrorism apparently justifies forgetting about the rule of law and identifying the lawyer with his or her client and even accusing him or her of terrorist activities. In Turkey, for instance, this has been common practice for years. Dozens of lawyers whose clients are suspected of terrorist acts are now themselves facing prosecution and imprisonment for aiding and abetting terrorism. Meanwhile, a great number of lawyers representing these accused lawyers are in turn prosecuted themselves.

Here, in the Netherlands, we should not believe that per definition we are better than that, and that such treatment only happens to lawyers in faraway countries. In 2015, Lawyers for Lawyers for the first time in its existence had to file a complaint against the Dutch government, which had

assumed the right to tap telephones of lawyers who were representing terrorism suspects. Suddenly, the protection of communications between lawyers and clients we had known for ages, no longer existed. Fortunately, the Dutch Courts ended this practice and fully adhered to the principle of the Rule of Law; the lawyers we stand up for across the world are often not that fortunate.



Phon van den Biesen,
President of Lawyers for Lawyers

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Phon van den Biesen".

L4L Award 2015

Seminar 'lawyers are not their clients'

'Difficult' lawyers are increasingly being accused of subversive or terrorist activities because they represent clients who are accused of such activities. The [seminar](#) held on the occasion of the [L4L Award 2015](#) therefore paid special attention to Article 18 of the [Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers](#), which reads: 'Lawyers shall not be identified with their clients.'



A keynote speaker was Cees Flinterman, a human rights professor emeritus and former member of the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations. Other speakers

included Cees Korvinus, an Amsterdam lawyer, who spoke about the arrest in 1980 of Advokatenkollektief Amsterdam-Noord on suspicion of sedition; Ayse Bingol, a Turkish-Kurdish lawyer, who spoke about the case against 46 Turkish-

Kurdish lawyers suspected of terrorist activities; and Alice Nkom, a Cameroon lawyer, who stands up for the rights of homosexuals and has been having problems as a result.

31 lawyers were nominated for the L4L Award 2015; 10 of them were imprisoned at the time.

L4L Award for Jorge Molano

'By granting Jorge Molano the prize, the jury wishes to commend his immense personal courage and stamina and draw attention to the harrowing human rights situation in Colombia', the jury of the *L4L Award 2015* wrote in its report. The Colombian human rights lawyer [Jorge Molano](#) acts on behalf of victims of power abuse and corruption and managed to get numerous generals and politicians behind bars with his persistence. He is constantly threatened, but the Colombian government is not doing enough to protect him.



De *L4L Award* is awarded every other year to a lawyer or group of lawyers who work to promote the rule of law and human rights in an exceptional way and are threatened because of their work. Lawyers from all over the world can be nominated.



Khalil Maatouk

[Khalil Maatouk](#) (55), a Syrian lawyer, was shortlisted by the jury. He defended thousands of journalists, human rights activists and political prisoners until he himself was arrested in October 2012. It is unclear what the charges against him are, but there are grounds for believing that his arrest was connected with his work as a lawyer. Khalil Maatouk suffers from lung disease but is denied any medical care in prison. His daughter attended the Award ceremony, while his colleague and good friend Anwar al Bunni sent a video message. 'Khalil is always smiling but I am so worried about him. We don't know his whereabouts. I hope this attention will help.'



Pu Zhiqiang

The third person shortlisted by the jury was nominee [Pu Zhiqiang](#), a Chinese lawyer, who has been involved in the Chinese human rights movement ever since the student protests at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Pu Zhiqiang acted in high-profile cases involving the right of free speech and openly called for reform of the political system. He was arrested in December 2013 after having attended a memorial service for the Tiananmen Square protests. In December 2015 he was given a three year suspended prison sentence, on the grounds that he had, among other things, 'picked quarrels' and 'incited ethnic hatred'.

L4L Award Jury:
“Needless to say, that human rights lawyers should be free to do their legitimate work of supporting those who are considered enemies of the state.”

Saudi-Arabia

*Waleed Abu al-Khair,
nestor of human rights*

On 6 July 2014, Waleed Abu al-Khair, a human rights lawyer, was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment, a travel ban of equal duration and a fine of SR 200,000 (approximately EUR 45,000). On 15 February 2015 this sentence was confirmed by the Court of Appeal. The charges against him included ‘striving to overthrow the state and the authority of the King’ and ‘criticizing and insulting the judiciary’.



Waleed Abu al-Khair did not appeal against the judgment because he did not recognise the authority of the court. Waleed Abu al-Khair was the first person sentenced under the new anti-terrorism law of 2014. Cases that fall under the scope of this law are heard by a specialist terrorism court.

Waleed Abu al-Khair is nestor of the human rights movement in Saudi Arabia and a critic of the autocratic Saudi regime. He was the founder of the *Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia* and opened his house for

diwanahs, discussions about reforms of the political system. He acted as the lawyer for Samar Badawi, the activist who stood up for the right of women to drive, and whom he later married. He also defended her brother, blogger Raif Badawi, who was sentenced to ten years imprisonment and 1,000 lashes because of his critical blogs.

This year **L4L**, together with 5 other organisations, filed a petition with the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) of the United Nations. On 10 December 2015, the International Human Rights Day, **L4L** also organized a number of campaigns for Waleed.



Samar Badawi: “Ever since the Arab Spring, the government is scared to death of people demanding their rights.”

Russian Federation

UN Human Rights Committee

Russian lawyers who deal with controversial cases are increasingly subject to threats, physical attacks and other forms of harassment. This year **L4L** asked the [Human Rights Committee](#) of the United Nations in Geneva for attention for their situation.



This Committee assesses periodically whether States comply with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). It forms its opinion, among other things, on the basis of information presented by external parties such as **L4L**, and reports in its concluding observations.

L4L board member Judith Lichtenberg: “We found a sympathetic ear in Geneva. The substantive assessment by the Committee is of high quality and the questioning was thorough.”

In an [oral statement](#) and a [submission](#) **L4L** emphasized that the Russian Federation fails to protect lawyers and ensure the right of effective legal representation. **L4L** board member Judith Lichtenberg drew the Committee’s attention to the numerous attempts to bar lawyers from trials or to demand that they act as witnesses in cases against their own clients.

WIKIPEDIA COMMONS



UN activities 2015

L4L submitted a total of **3** UPR submissions with the UN Human Rights Council. We did this for Swaziland, Tajikistan and Thailand.

L4L submitted **2** reports to the UN Human Rights Committee under the ICCPR for Colombia and Azerbaijan.

L4L submitted **4** statements to the UN Human Rights Council about Saudi Arabia, China, Kazakhstan and Iran and **1** to the UN Human Rights Committee about the Russian Federation.

L4L hosted **1** side event during the UPR session of Turkey.

L4L filed **1** petition with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

Democratic Republic Congo

Connect2protect

Connect2protect was developed by L4L in collaboration with the foundation *Justice & Peace* (formerly *Justitia et Pax*). This projects couples lawyers from the EU with lawyers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The purpose of the project is to support local human rights defenders, take action where required, increase their (international) profile and thus contribute to their safety and enhance the independent position of lawyers in Congo.

Seven lawyers from L4L travelled to Kinshasa, the capital of Congo, in June to meet their 'buddy.' Nienke van Renssen, one of these lawyers, kept a [blog](#) of her experiences in the Congo. She describes the rudimentary legal system. The lawyers also attended a hearing of a military court in a prison where four agents were tried on suspicion of murdering a human rights activist and his chauffeur. The Congolese lawyers who represented the family of the victims in this case encountered difficulties as a result. Before representatives of the European Union, the Dutch lawyers argued in favour of the international community monitoring court cases.

Support

L4L supports threatened lawyers in various ways. L4L lobbies for threatened lawyers in The Hague, Brussels, Geneva and New York, and also lobbies the authorities of the country concerned. L4L publishes articles and draws attention to the UN [Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers](#) and organises fact finding missions, trial observation missions and letter-writing campaigns to the authorities of countries all over the world.

Nienke van Renssen: 'The mere fact that these police officers were prosecuted at all is a miracle.'



Turkey

Lawyers under pressure

L4L organized **3** trial observation missions to Turkey in 2015

UN Side event

On 27 January 2015 L4L, during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Turkey by the UN Human Rights Council, organised a [side event](#) about how the fundamental rights of lawyers and journalists were being breached in Turkey. Lawyer Ayse Bingol discussed the problems lawyers encounter when carrying out their work. Other speakers at the event included Tayfun Ertan (a journalist from Turkey) and Marietje Schaake (Member of the European Parliament for D66). Irma van den Berg of L4L acted as the moderator at the event which had a high attendance rate, both by diplomats as well as by civil society representatives.

Trial monitoring

In the trial against 46 Turkish-Kurdish lawyers suspected of terrorist activities –a trial L4L has been monitoring since its start in 2012- [two hearings](#) were held in 2015, but there were no further developments. Parallel to this case is the one against 44 Turkish-Kurdish journalists. Ramazan Demir, a human rights lawyer, acts in both cases on

behalf of several suspects (he is also the lawyer of the Dutch journalist Frederike Geerdink). He was himself prosecuted after allegedly insulting the public prosecutor in his pleadings. L4L attended the hearing in this case. Ramazan Demir was [acquitted](#) on 9 April.

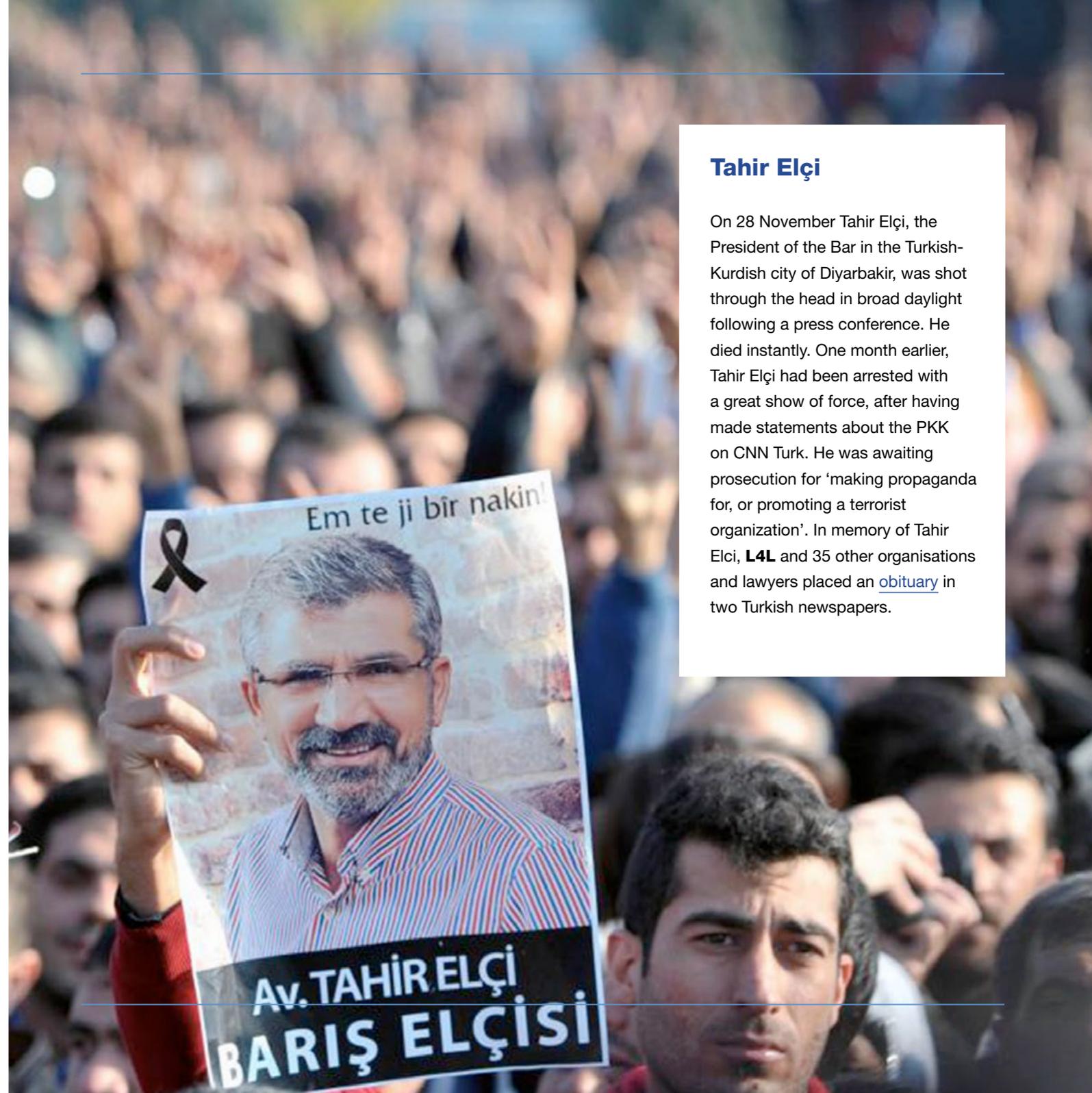
Petition Dutch House of Representatives

In the summer of 2015, the battle between the Kurdish PKK and the Turkish government flared up again. Several cities in East-Turkey were sealed off completely by the Turkish army. Turkish lawyers reported large-scale violations of human rights in those cities; it was also made impossible for them to do their work. Following these events, L4L and Fair

Trial Watch presented a [petition](#) to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs on 7 October, requesting it to urge the Turkish government to set up an independent investigation into the state of affairs, to refrain from disproportionate force and to ensure that lawyers could do their work without being obstructed.

Tahir Elçi

On 28 November Tahir Elçi, the President of the Bar in the Turkish-Kurdish city of Diyarbakir, was shot through the head in broad daylight following a press conference. He died instantly. One month earlier, Tahir Elçi had been arrested with a great show of force, after having made statements about the PKK on CNN Turk. He was awaiting prosecution for ‘making propaganda for, or promoting a terrorist organization’. In memory of Tahir Elci, L4L and 35 other organisations and lawyers placed an [obituary](#) in two Turkish newspapers.



AMNESTY WRITER ANTONIUMBA/LANDOV

Iran

Threatened state control

26 February 2015 was the Day of the Lawyer in Iran. On this day **L4L** wrote a [letter](#) to President Rohani –himself a lawyer- with the urgent request to review the cases of seven detained lawyers. **L4L** suspects these lawyers were sentenced because they had represented certain clients.



Concerns over new lawyers bill Iran

In March, **L4L** President Phon van den Biesen, expressed our concerns about the new Lawyer Bill in Iran to the Human Rights Council in Geneva. According to this bill, lawyers will be supervised by a Supervisory Committee, the members of which will be appointed by the Minister of Justice. This Committee would be responsible for the training of lawyers, and issue and revoke licences. **L4L** considers this

a serious threat to the independence of lawyers in Iran: supervision of the legal profession should be exercised by the professional group itself.

Together with *Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada* **L4L** [recommended](#) that the bill should be compared carefully with the Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and amended accordingly.

China

Crackdown

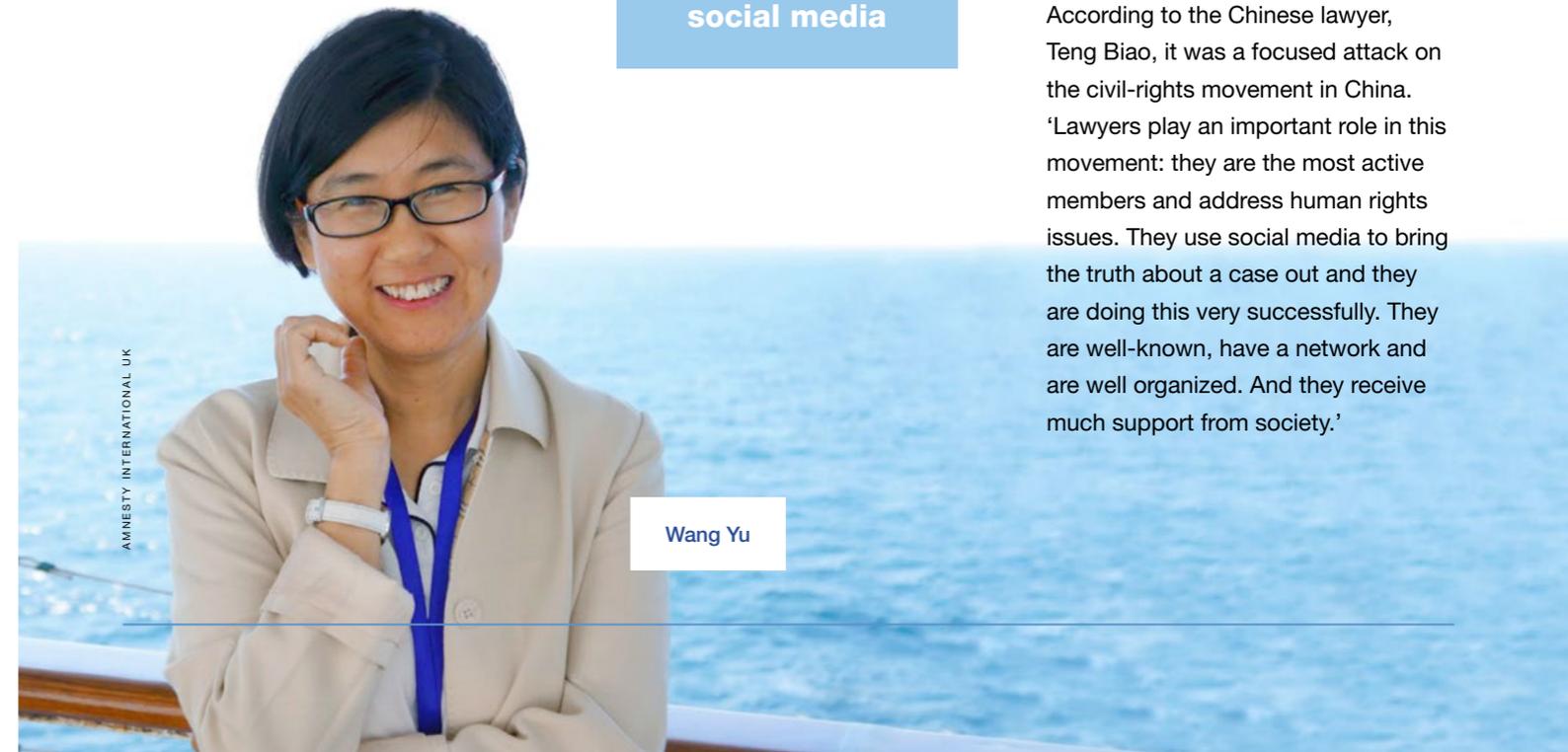
Teng Biao: "It is an honor to stand up for human rights. So the deterrent effect will not last long."

On 9 July Wang Yu, a Beijing human rights lawyer, suddenly disappeared from the radar. What followed on 21 July was an unprecedented crackdown, with human rights lawyers, their staff and family members (at least 242 in all) being arrested or ordered to appear at the police station for questioning.

Most of them were released again but given a gag order. Most of these lawyers had signed a petition previously, condemning the disappearance of Wang Yu and urging the government to release her. In an open letter to President Xi Jinping, 26 organisations, including **L4L**, [condemned](#) this seemingly well-coordinated waive of arrests.

According to the Chinese lawyer, Teng Biao, it was a focused attack on the civil-rights movement in China. 'Lawyers play an important role in this movement: they are the most active members and address human rights issues. They use social media to bring the truth about a case out and they are doing this very successfully. They are well-known, have a network and are well organized. And they receive much support from society.'

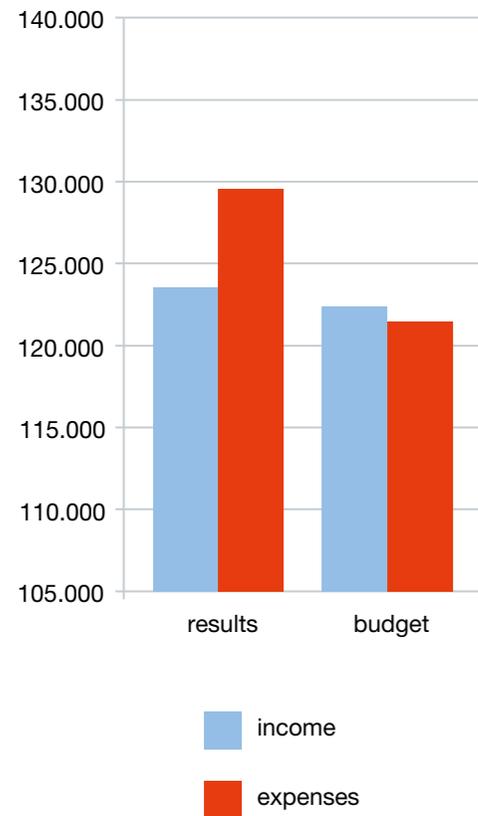
Civil rights and social media



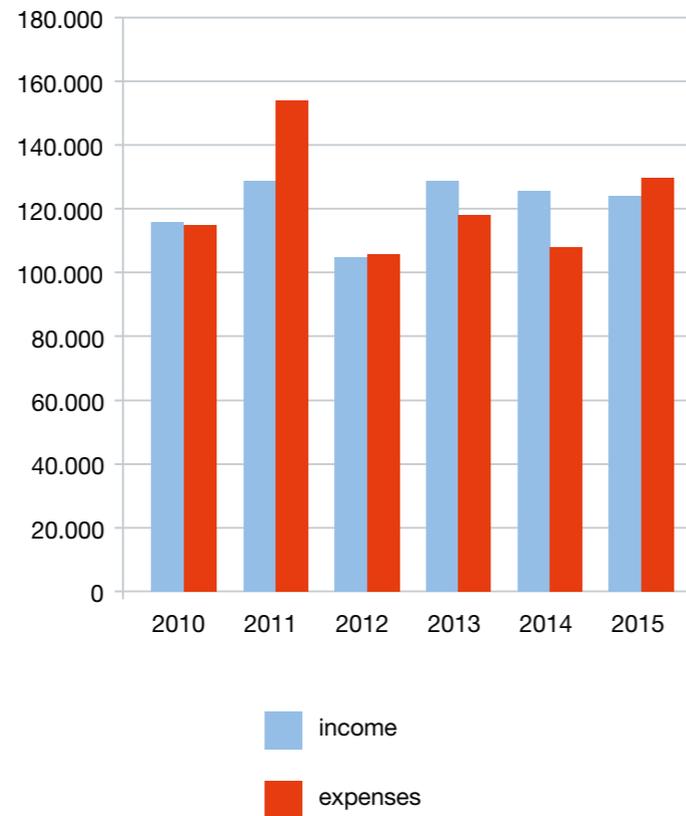
Wang Yu

Financial accountability

results and budget 2015

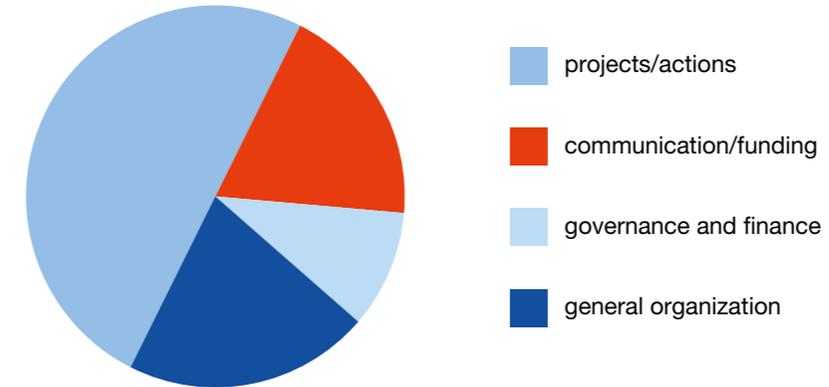


income and expenses 2010 - 2015

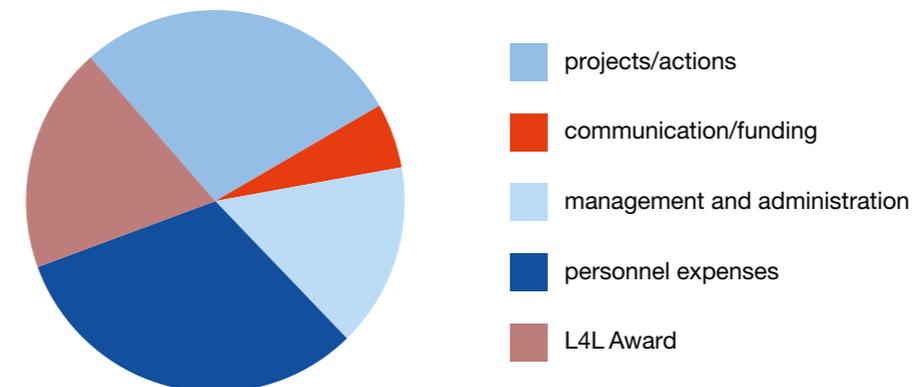


distribution hours of work 2015

(percentage, excluding work hours volunteers)



expenses 2015 (excluding work hours volunteers)



Key figures

In 2015, **L4L** took action for, in total, **154** individual lawyers.

64 in Turkey, **12** in Africa, **8** in the Russian Federation, **7** in the Gulf States, **19** in Eurasia, **8** in South East Asia, **9** in China, **10** in Iran/Syria, **12** in Europe en **5** in Latin-Amerika.

In 2015 **L4L** cooperated with fifty lawyers, who work in ten focusgroups: South East Asia, China, Turkey, Latin-America, Russian Federation, Eurasia, Africa, Philippines, Iran/Syria, Gulf States.

L4L asked attention for the situation of lawyers in **30** countries:

Armenia	Indonesia	Paraguay	Thailand
Azerbaijan	Iran	Russian Federation	Turkey
China	Cameroon	Saudi Arabia	United Arab Emirates
Colombia	Kazakhstan	Soedan	
Congo	Lesotho	Spain	Vietnam
Egypt	Maldives	Swaziland	
Philippines	Moldova	Syria	
Honduras	Myanmar	Tajikistan	
India	Ukraine		

The Board of **L4L** comprised of 7 (former) lawyers: Phon van den Biesen, Irma van den Berg, Bernadette Ficq, Joost Italianer, Judith Lichtenberg, Tony Vermeulen en Robert Crince le Roy.

During the course of 2015, Joost Italianer en Tony Vermeulen were succeeded by Harald Wiersema en Maarten 't Sas. In 2015 ten boardmeetings took place.

In 2015
L4L was engaged
in **32**
written
interventions.

In 2015 **L4L**
cooperated with at least
70 organisations
in, among other things,
joint statements.

Remuneration policy

fee attendance money

Board members receive no fee attendance money or other allowances for the work they perform for **L4L**, except for the expenses referred to below.

allocation personnel costs

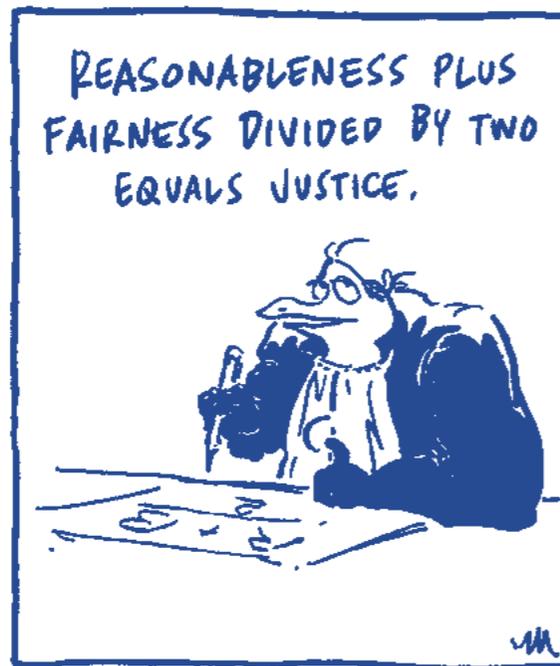
Of the personnel costs, 50% is allocated to 'Projects', 21% to 'General Policy and Management', 19% to Funding and Communication' and 10% to 'Board and Finances'.

expenses

If an employee of **L4L** carries out work at the request of the Board and travel or accommodation expenses are incurred, these costs will be reimbursed within reason. If a Board member or another **L4L** volunteer carries out work at the request of the Board and travel or accommodation expenses are incurred, these costs will be reimbursed within reason. In every other respect they receive no reimbursement whatsoever for these trips, and any loss of income or holiday days taken up are for their own account.

If the Board decides that the above-mentioned activities need to be undertaken, it will also determine how many people are entitled to be reimbursed for their travel or accommodation expenses.

To support the Executive Director and the focus groups, **L4L** has two on-call assistants.



Contact



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L4L was granted Special Consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council in July 2013.

Lawyers for Lawyers (**L4L**) is an independent and non-political Dutch foundation and was founded in 1986.

L4L supports lawyers and organizations of lawyers that are being oppressed worldwide.

www.lawyersforlawyers.org