



The Law Society  
of England and Wales

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

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



## **61<sup>st</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Council**

### **Item 6: UPR Outcome of Belarus**

**18 March 2026**

### **Joint oral statement**

**Mr. President,**

While we welcome Belarus' participation in its fourth UPR cycle, Lawyers for Lawyers, the Law Society of England and Wales, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, and Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, regret its lack of commitment to human rights, as demonstrated by the low acceptance of recommendations on key issues and the designation of many as 'already implemented'. This stands in stark contrast with realities on the ground.

We remain deeply concerned about the ongoing crackdown on lawyers in Belarus, who continue to face persecution simply for carrying out their professional duties. Belarus did not support any of the recommendations that would meaningfully strengthen the independence and safety of lawyers or fair trial guarantees, and it categorically rejected recommendations calling for the release of political prisoners.

We further regret that Belarus has characterised recommendations on the prohibition of torture and freedom of expression as 'already implemented', despite extensive and credible evidence of continuing violations.

While the release of lawyer Maxim Znak in December 2025 after more than five years in prison was a welcome development, he should never have been imprisoned, and his forced departure from the country underscores the continued hostility faced by legal professionals. We are gravely troubled that five lawyers remain imprisoned on fabricated charges, reflecting a wider pattern of arbitrary detention and systematic harassment targeting those who defend human rights and uphold the rule of law.

Lawyers forced into exile also continue to face intimidation and harassment, further eroding what remains of legal independence in Belarus. Such reprisals violate international standards, including the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

We urge Belarus to immediately end reprisals against Belarusian lawyers and release all lawyers detained for their legitimate professional work. We call on Belarus to reconsider its position, take concrete steps to fully implement these recommendations, and engage in genuine reform to ensure access to justice and fair trial guarantees for all.

Thank you.

*This statement was delivered by:*

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