



### **United Nations Human Rights Council 57<sup>th</sup> Session**

#### *Agenda Item 4: Interactive Dialogue with the International Independent Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela* Joint Oral Statement

**The International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute, The Law Society of England and Wales and Lawyers for Lawyers** express serious concern at the state of the rule of law and human rights in Venezuela.

In the aftermath of the recent presidential election, the violent crackdown on protesters and human rights defenders, including lawyers, journalists and opponents of the Maduro administration, has worsened. Individuals seeking to exercise their civil and political rights, including the right to peaceful protest, have been persecuted and detained. Over 2,400 people have been arrested in connection with protests, including 114 children. Prosecutors have charged hundreds of them under broad and vague incitement to hatred and anti-terrorist laws.

Recognising that judicial independence is an essential pillar of the rule of law, we condemn executive interference in, and use of, the judiciary as an instrument of repression, resulting in a declining justice system. This significantly restricts the actions that lawyers can take to perform their professional duties and enforce their clients’ rights and demonstrated the impossibility of relying on the domestic justice system to seek justice, remedy and accountability.

Lawyers play an essential role in the administration of justice and are necessary for the effective guarantee of the right to a fair trial by an independent and impartial court, as well as the right to an effective remedy and reparation. Many lawyers have also been subject to legal harassment, by association with the clients they represent.

We ask this Council to:

- Keep making efforts to ensure accountability for grave violations in Venezuela, including by continuing human rights monitoring and renewing the mandate of the FFM.
- Call on the Venezuelan government to:
  - Release all arbitrarily detained individuals, including those detained on politically motivated grounds.
  - End any undue interference of the executive branch in judicial system, and take effective action to protect lawyers against any threats, judicial harassment or other arbitrary actions.
  - Meaningfully and effectively cooperate with the FFM, the UN and the ICC.

*This statement was delivered by:*

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