



Organization: Lawyers for Lawyers

Item 3: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers

Date: 26 June 2023

Speaker: Julia Smakman

Oral Statement to the 53rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L), the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, and The Law Society of England & Wales, NGOs in special consultative status, endorsed by The 29 Principles and the National Union of People's Lawyers, NGOs without consultative status.

Halt continued arrests and harassment of lawyers in China and the Philippines

Mr President,

We welcome this opportunity to interact with the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers. Unfortunately, attacks and harassment against members of the legal profession are still widespread, which shows the continued relevance of this mandate.

Recently, Chinese lawyers have been subjected to a second wave of repression. Many of these lawyers were involved in the original 709 crackdown in 2015ⁱ and are now targeted again in 2023 - leading to it being referred to as the 709 crackdown 2.0. In recent months, lawyers have been arbitrarily arrested, sentenced to long prison sentences, subject to continuous surveillance, and other restrictions of their freedoms, including Yu Wensheng, Ding Jiayi, Xu Zhiyong, Zhou Shifeng, Li Hepingⁱⁱ, and Wang Quanzhang. Lawyer Yu Wensheng and his wife Xu Yan are currently under arrest on suspicion of picking quarrels and provoking trouble. We condemn these recent acts of harassment against prominent human rights lawyers and are alarmed at the further deterioration of the situation of the legal profession in China.

Meanwhile, in the Philippines attacks against lawyers have increased significantly in recent years. In particular, lawyers working on terrorism and drug-related cases are at risk. Between 2016 and April 2023, a total of 69 lawyers have been killed. Additionally, lawyers in the Philippines report being branded by State authorities as 'terrorists' without any substantial proof of unlawful conduct, or 'communists' to delegitimize their professional activities. These lawyers subsequently often face threats and attacks.ⁱⁱⁱ

We remain concerned about the situation of lawyers in China and the Philippines, which requires our ongoing attention.

Thank you.

ⁱ L4L, ‘Joint statement on the sixth anniversary of the ‘709 crackdown’, 9 July 2021.

<https://lawyersforlawyers.org/joint-statement-on-the-sixth-anniversary-of-the-709-crackdown/>.

ⁱⁱ The 29 Principles, ‘Joint Statement - Urgent Call to Lift Travel Restrictions And Safeguard Human Rights of Li Heping And His Family’, 22 July 2023.

ⁱⁱⁱ L4L, ‘UPR submission Philippines’, 31 March 2022. <https://lawyersforlawyers.org/upr-submission-philippines/>.