



Human Rights
Institute

**UN Human Rights Council, 55th Session
Geneva, Switzerland**

Item Agenda 4: Interactive Dialogue on the Situation of Human Rights in 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** welcome the UN High Commissioner's update on the human rights situation in Venezuela.

The independence of legal professionals, as guardians of the rule of law, is indispensable for the operation of a judicial system that ensures fair trials and due process. We remain concerned at the persistent and pervasive attacks on the legal profession and legal institutions in Venezuela and condemn the government's undermining of the separation of powers, with impunity.

Repression and control of the judiciary significantly restricts the actions lawyers can take to discharge their professional responsibilities and enforce their clients' rights. The lack of guarantees related to the independence of the legal profession has a direct and adverse impact on human rights protection, access to justice and accountability efforts as a whole.

The concerning state-led strategy of intimidation and violence has created a chilling effect aimed to prevent lawyers from carrying out their professional functions including effective representation of their client in court proceedings, filing case documents or case advocacy before international mechanisms, like this very Council.

Stigmatisation of, and public threats against, the legal profession often trigger other serious human rights violations, such as arbitrary arrests for political reasons. We express serious concern at the situation of lawyer and human rights defender, Rocio San Miguel, accused by the Attorney General of being involved in an alleged plot to kill government officials, including the President. Rocio remains in incommunicado detention after her arrest on 9 February 2024 and restricted from access to legal representation of her choice.

We call on the High Commissioner and this Council to:

- Demand the immediate and unconditional release of Rocio San Miguel and all those arbitrarily detained for political reasons,
- Monitor all actions aimed at limiting the free, independent, and safe exercise of the legal profession, including executive interference in the judicial system and the undue criminalisation of lawyers.

This statement was delivered by:

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