



**KEEP YOUR HANDS  
OFF THE LAWYERS**

**International  
Day of the Endangered Lawyer**

**24<sup>th</sup> January 2025  
15th Edition – BELARUS**

 <p>Rechtsanwaltskammer Berlin</p>		
		
		
		
		
		

		
		
 <p>Deutscher<b>Anwalt</b>Verein</p>	 <p>The Law Society of England and Wales</p>	 <p>ADWOKATURA POLSKA</p>
		

# **International Day of the Endangered Lawyer**

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## **Executive Summary**

Since 2010, the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer has been observed annually on 24 January, organised by the Coalition for the Endangered Lawyer, a global network of national and international legal organisations and bar associations. The day aims to draw attention to the plight faced by lawyers in the exercise of their profession in a particular country each year, and to urge action by government officials, international institutions, civil society, the media and the public.

In 2025, the Day of the Endangered Lawyer spotlights the persecution of lawyers in Belarus, who face pervasive systematic harassment and interference with their professional activities. Following the Presidential election and mass protests in 2020, a crackdown by the government has resulted in the targeting of lawyers, human rights defenders, journalists, and dissidents. The evidence in this report documents a persistent and disturbing trend in Belarus where legal practitioners face escalating criminal sanctions, arbitrary detention, and systemic interference in their professional duties.

Vague and overbroad national security laws are being used to silence critics of the government and those upholding the rule of law. Thousands of people have been subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, and prosecution, and have been sentenced to onerous prison terms following unfair trials. There are also reports of widespread torture and other ill-treatment, as well as cases of enforced disappearance.

Constitutional and legislative changes have further eroded the independence of the judiciary and legal professional bodies. Such amendments have tightened the executive branch's control over the judiciary and the legal profession. Accordingly, the fundamental principle of the separation of powers has been extinguished.

The Ministry of Justice exerts substantial influence over the regulation of the legal profession. The Belarus Republican Bar Association and territorial bar associations lack independence and, rather than protecting and supporting their members, are being used by the Ministry of Justice to crack down on lawyers who take on human rights and other politically sensitive cases. Lawyers have faced harassment, arrest, and detention, as well as disciplinary measures, simply for doing their job. As well as impacting on the rights of individual lawyers, this has a chilling effect on access to justice and rule of law for the people of Belarus.

The Belarusian state's actions contravene both national laws and international standards. This includes misusing ethical standards to sanction lawyers for their professional and public expressions, stifling dissent and curbing lawful advocacy. The process of terminating a lawyer's licence in Belarus notably lacks transparency, representation, and impartiality. The arbitrary nature of these disciplinary proceedings undermines the independence of the legal profession and fosters an environment where lawyers are forced to operate under the constant threat of losing their professional status. This systemic assault is aimed at silencing the legal community and inhibiting lawyers' ability to effectively uphold the most basic tenets of democracy and human rights.

There is a critical need for reform and strict adherence to legal principles that protect the independence and professional activities of lawyers to restore fairness and justice within the legal system in Belarus.

This report sets out the applicable legal framework, including international instruments like the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and relevant conventions to which Belarus is a signatory, as well as governing national legislation, requirements to practise, disciplinary procedures, and the functioning of bar associations. In addition, the report details individual cases of lawyers who have been subjected to persecution by the state and the specific ways in which they have been targeted.

Finally, the report outlines a series of demands and recommendations to improve the situation for lawyers in Belarus, including:

1. Lawyers must be free to perform their professional duties without intimidation, harassment, or interference.
2. Lawyers must not be associated with their clients' cases or causes.
3. Lawyers must have the right to establish and join independent self-governing professional associations to safeguard their interests.
4. Everyone must have the right to access legal services and lawyers of their choice to defend their rights and professional associations must be empowered to ensure that everyone has equal and effective access to legal services.
5. Disciplinary proceedings against lawyers must be overseen by impartial bodies—whether within the legal profession, an independent authority, or a court—and subject to challenge by the lawyer concerned before an independent and impartial court or tribunal established by law.
6. Entry into and continued practice in the legal profession must be free of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, political opinion, or any other status.
7. The safety of lawyers who face threats as a result of fulfilling their professional duties must be ensured.
8. Lawyers must not face legal repercussions for statements made in good faith while representing their clients.
9. Lawyers must be free to engage in public discussions and to join or form national and international organisations without fear of repercussions.
10. Anyone charged with a criminal offence must be informed of the charges immediately and must have access to a lawyer of their choice.
11. Ensure lawyers have unrestricted access to all relevant information and documents for effective legal representation, across all courts and offences.
12. All courts and administrative bodies must recognise the right of lawyers to represent their clients.
13. All lawyers disbarred due to political motivations must be immediately and unconditionally reinstated, and all lawyers imprisoned for political reasons must be immediately and unconditionally released.

#### **List of Signatories:**

1. Berlin Bar Association
2. Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE)
3. Defense Sans Frontière (Defense Without Borders) (DSF-AS)

4. European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights (ELDH)
5. European Criminal Bar Association (ECBA)
6. European Democratic Lawyers (AED)
7. Geneva Bar Association
8. Institut des Droits de l'Homme des Avocats Européens (IDHAE)
9. Institut des droits de l'homme du barreau de Bruxelles - Institute for HR of the Brussels Bar
10. Institut des Droits de l'Homme du Barreau de Bordeaux
11. International Association of Young Lawyers (AIJA)
12. International Association of People's Lawyers (IAPL)
13. International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
14. International Criminal Bar
15. International Observatory for Lawyers in Danger (OIAD)
16. Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)
17. Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
18. New York City Bar Association
19. Ordine degli Avvocati di Venezia (Venice Bar Association)
20. Republican Lawyers Association, Germany (RAV)
21. Syndicat des Avocats pour la Démocratie, Belgium (SAD)
22. The Defence Commission of the Barcelona Bar Association
23. The Federation of European Bars
24. The Foundation of the Day of the Endangered Lawyer
25. The German Bar Association (Deutscher Anwaltverein)
26. The Law Society of England and Wales
27. The National Bar Council of Poland
28. Institute for the Rule of Law of the International Association of Lawyers (UIA-IROL)
29. Unione delle Camere Penali Italiane (UCPI)