**Bar Council condemns targeting of lawyers at home and abroad**

Today (Friday 24 January 2025) is the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer and the focus this year is on the persecution of lawyers in Belarus. Our colleagues in the country are facing pervasive, systematic harassment and interference with their professional activities. Lawyers face arrest and detention, as well as disciplinary measures, simply for doing their job. The Bar Council of England and Wales offers its support to colleagues in Belarus who have been targeted.

Some barristers in England and Wales also face threats, harassment, and intimidation at the hands of state and non-state actors from around the world. The Bar Council is concerned by the rising reports from members who have faced different forms of attack and threats because of their international legal work.

Targeted attacks, reported to the Bar Council, include:

* Cyber harassment including threatening or impersonating emails, repeated and sustained hacking attempts, death threats and rape threats, threats to family members via email or social media, and 'privilege phishing' which attempts to seek to persuade those who are targeted to divulge sensitive information.
* Physical surveillance including being followed or photographed at international events.
* Threats made by politicians.
* Named lawyers traduced in the media, both state- and privately-owned media outlets.
* Reprisals for engaging or cooperating with various individuals or entities at the United Nations.

These threats are not just an attack on the legal profession, they also have a chilling effect on access to justice and the rule of law.

**Barbara Mills KC, Chair of the Bar Council,** said: “The Bar Council is supporting our members and colleagues abroad who face multiple attacks and threats. In 2025 we want to see a renewed emphasis placed on promoting the important role of independent legal practitioners and adherence to the rule of law. The Bar Council of England and Wales condemns all acts of intimidation and the targeting of lawyers who are simply carrying out their work and upholding our professional ethics, often when acting in the public interest.”

**Hugh Mercer KC, Chair of Bar Council's International Committee,** said: “There must be no impunity for governments or non-state actors who continue to harass and intimidate lawyers carrying out their professional duties whether at home or abroad. Our global legal profession is made up of individuals united by an interest in the legal system, the rule of law and access to justice. It is now more important than ever to seek to achieve global support for the safety of lawyers and the promotion of the UN's Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers as a standard safeguard for all lawyers. We also look forward to the adoption by the Council of Europe in May 2025 of a new European Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer to provide enhanced protection for legal professionals carrying out their daily work.”

**Ends.**

Notes for Editors:

[The International Day of the Endangered Lawyer](https://dayoftheendangeredlawyer.eu/), marked annually on 24 January, was first established in 2010. The date was chosen because of the Massacre of Atocha when four lawyers and their co-worker were murdered in Madrid in 1977. Each year the [Coalition for the Endangered Lawyer](https://url.uk.m.mimecastprotect.com/s/Im4TCy873INAXyvUMhySxUGo1?domain=url.uk.m.mimecastprotect.com/), a network of national and international legal organisations and Bar associations use the day to draw attention to the plight faced by lawyers as a result of their work.

[The United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-role-lawyers), adopted on 7 September 1990, includes:

Principle 16, according to which Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognised professional duties, standards and ethics;

Principle 17, provides that “[w]here the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities”.

Principle 18, provides that “[l]awyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions”.

Principle 23, which enshrines that lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organisations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognized standards and ethics of the legal profession.

[The Bar Council of England and Wales](http://www.barcouncil.org.uk/) is the voice of the barrister profession. We lead, represent and support the Bar in the public interest, championing the rule of law and access to justice. Our nearly 18,000 members – self-employed and employed barristers – make up a united Bar that aims to be strong, inclusive, independent and influential.

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