



Organization: Lawyers for Lawyers

Item: 6

Date: 30 June 2022

Speaker: Mr. Leroy Niekoop

Oral statement Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) to the 50th Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Lawyers for Lawyers and the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, NGO's in special consultative status

Mr. President,

We welcome the decision of Venezuela to accept some of the recommendations made at its third UPR related to the protection of human rights defenders and lawyers.¹ We call upon Venezuela to effectively implement these recommendations without delay.

A fundamental aspect of the rule of law and an effectively functioning justice system is access to legal representation by an independent legal profession. Lawyers must be able to carry out their professional duties without harassment, intimidation or improper interference.

In Venezuela, lawyers are often faced with improper interference by the authorities, including surveillance, and are subjected to or threatened with prosecution when working on politically sensitive cases. Multiple lawyers or their family members have had to leave the country in response to the threats they receive.

Moreover, lawyers have reported being hindered in their ability to prepare an adequate defence for their clients, by not being provided with essential case documents or are prevented from visiting their clients.

Concerns about further possible criminalization of the legitimate professional activities of lawyers have increased after the International Cooperation Law bill, that seeks to limit NGOs' ability to access resources including foreign funding, was presented in the National Assembly.

We urge Venezuela to:

- Effectively implement all supported UPR recommendations without delay;
- Take immediate measures to safeguard the independence of lawyers and provide protection against any form of undue interference with their work.

Thank you, Mr. President.

ⁱ Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Venezuela, 1 June 2022, A/HRC/50/8/Add.1. Supported recommendations that are being implemented or have been implemented according to Venezuela:

31.124 Undertake independent, thorough and prompt investigations into all cases of human rights violations, particularly extrajudicial killings, attacks against journalists and human rights defenders, and bring perpetrators to justice (Austria);

31.171 Ensure that human rights defenders are protected from harassment, criminalization and persecution, and adopt policy for the protection of human rights defenders (Slovenia);

31.175 Provide an enabling democratic environment for activities of political opposition, journalists and human rights defenders (Ukraine);

31.186 Ensure a free environment that enables the work of civil society organizations and adopt a policy for the protection of human rights defenders (Côte d'Ivoire);

31.189 Establish a free and enabling environment for the work of civil society organizations and ensure that human rights defenders and civic activists are not persecuted, harassed or publicly stigmatized (Czechia);

31.200 Take measures to foster a safe, respectful and enabling environment for civil society and human rights defenders, especially women human rights defenders, free from persecution, intimidation and harassment (Latvia);

31.213 Enhance efforts to expand civic and democratic space, with a special focus on the protection of journalists, human rights defenders and political actors from intimidation and attacks (Republic of Korea).

Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Venezuela, 5 April 2022, A/HRC/50/8/Add.1. Noted recommendation:

31.210 Guarantee that NGOs, journalists, trade unionists and human rights defenders can carry out their work without risk of persecution, and remove the legal requirement for NGOs to register with the National Office Against Organized Crime (Norway).