

Statement on the conviction of Belarusian lawyer Yuliya Yurhilevich

Yuliya Yurhilevich has practiced law for 18 years and has defended human rights activists as well as victims of politically motivated prosecutions. According to information held by the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) Yuliya Yurhilevich was accused of “repeatedly aiding extremist activity”. On 26 July 2023, Yuliya was sentenced to six years imprisonment.

According to information held by CCBE, Yuliya was accused of sharing information with the journalist Pavel Mazheika about her disbarment and about a court case. Pavel is a well-known figure in Belarus working for independent news outlets, among them Belsat TV, which has been labeled “*extremist*” by the Belarusian authorities. While the shared information was already widely available to the public through government websites, both Yuliya and Pavel were accused and sentenced for “*promoting extremist activities*”. Both Yuliya and Pavel pleaded not guilty but have been sentenced to six years imprisonment.

Before Yuliya was sentenced to six years in prison on 26 July 2023, she was first disbarred by the regional bar association of Hrodna in February 2022, for “*systematic violation of the law*”.

Appeal to the Belarusian authorities

Lawyers play a vital role in upholding the rule of law and the protection of human rights and their work is indispensable for public confidence in the administration of justice and to ensure access to justice for all.

Lawyers for Lawyers would like to draw your attention to the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, particularly Article 16, 18 and 23, which state:

16. Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (...) and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

18. Lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions.

23. 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 organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization. (...)

The Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) [has already urged](#) the president of Belarus to do everything in his power to restore the freedom of Yuliya Yurhilevich and to drop all charges against her. Further, the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers drew attention to [gross violation](#) of the norms of international law in connection with the prosecution and has demanded the immediate release of Yuliya Yurhilevich.

In view of the above, Lawyers for Lawyers respectfully urges the Belarusian authorities to overturn Yuliya Yurhilevich's conviction and to reinstate her to the bar.