



The Law Society
of England and Wales



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Human Rights
Institute

55th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

19 March 2024

Item 4: Interactive dialogue on the interim oral update of the High Commissioner on the situation of human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and in its aftermath

Joint Oral Statement

The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, Lawyers for Lawyers and the Law Society of England and Wales condemn the escalating pattern of retaliation against lawyers for representing the political opposition and protesters and for upholding the rule of law.

One year has passed since the sentencing of Viasna leaders, Bialiatski, Stefanovic, and lawyer Labkovich following unfair trials and in retaliation against their human rights work.

Since August 2020, at least 134 lawyers have been deprived of their right to practice and 40 lawyers have faced arbitrary detention due to their human rights work and exercising their freedom of expression and association.

We draw particular attention to the case of lawyer Maksim Znak, arbitrarily detained since September 2020. Since 2022 held incommunicado in penal colony No. 3 near Viciebsk, denied access to his family, lawyer, and independent medical personnel.

In May 2022, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found the arrest and detention of Mr. Znak to be arbitrary and considered his treatment as an act of retaliation for his activism and requested his immediate release.

We recall that Belarus has ratified and is therefore bound by, inter alia, the UN Convention against Torture and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

We urge Belarus to immediately release all individuals arbitrarily detained, including lawyers, and cease their further persecution, immediately stop torture and incommunicado detention, including of Maksim Znak, and ensure that all detained persons have access to a lawyer, healthcare professionals and family.

This statement was delivered by:

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