

## 2024 Annual Board Report Lawyers for Lawyers

### Introduction

In 2024, Lawyers for Lawyers took significant steps to further professionalize our organization, strengthening our ability to achieve our mission. We focused on enhancing our people, processes, and resources by expanding our team, refining our onboarding policies, implementing new HR strategies, and drafting a *directiestatuut*. Additionally, we undertook a complete renewal of our communication and our ICT. With a new strategy, website, logo, and house style, alongside improved working methods, we made substantial progress in how we engage with our audience. This report reflects on these developments and our continued commitment to strengthening our organization for the future.

### 1. About Lawyers for Lawyers

#### 1.1 General

Lawyers play a vital role in the protection of the rule of law and human rights. It is the responsibility of lawyers to protect and establish the rights of citizens from whatever quarter they may be threatened. Their work is indispensable for ensuring effective access to justice for all.

To fulfil their professional duties effectively, lawyers should be able to practice law freely and independently, without any fear of reprisal. Around the world, however, lawyers are harassed, threatened, attacked or worse for simply doing their job.

Lawyers for Lawyers is an independent, non-profit, civil society organization, based in the Netherlands. We are lawyers who promote the common values of lawyers and their contribution to the justice system. Around the world, we stand up for colleague-lawyers under threat.

Established in 1986, Lawyers for Lawyers has more than 30 years of experience in providing emergency support and assistance to lawyers in danger and creating awareness of the importance of the independent functioning of the legal profession to the protection of citizens' rights.

#### 1.2 History

Lawyers for Lawyers has its roots in a solidarity campaign for lawyers in Argentina who 'disappeared' or were detained without trial under the military juntas from 1976-1983. The campaign was initiated by a Dutch lawyer and cartoonist, Willem van Manen, in the context of an international congress of lawyers hosted in Buenos Aires.

It showed that international solidarity of the legal profession can play an important role in order to defend and protect colleague-lawyers from attacks, especially since lawyers are bound by universal core values underpinning their profession.

Inspired by the lack of an independent lawyers' organization dedicated to raising international awareness and recognition of the specific role of lawyers in the protection of the rule of law and human rights and responding to immediate threats to their safety and ability to perform their professional duties effectively, Lawyers for Lawyers was established in 1986.

The creation of Lawyers for Lawyers was supported by the Dutch sections of Amnesty International and

the International Commission of Jurists (NJCM), the Netherlands Bar Association and the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights at University Utrecht.

### **1.3 Lawyers for Lawyers penguin logo**

The first chair of Lawyers for Lawyers was Willem van Manen. Van Manen was not only a lawyer, but also a cartoonist. He designed the Lawyers for Lawyers penguin-logo, based on his famous series of penguin lawyers' cartoons.

## **2. Mission, Vision, Core Values and Goals**

### **2.1 Mission**

#### **Promote and protect the independence of lawyers**

Lawyers for Lawyers promotes and preserves the independence of the legal profession worldwide and defends the professional rights of lawyers to provide legal services safely and independently, without fear of reprisal. We safeguard lawyers' role in protecting the rule of law and human rights and ensuring effective justice for all by acting wherever lawyers are under threat.

In doing so, we refer to internationally recognized human rights laws and standards, including the [UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers](#).

### **2.2. Vision**

#### **Every lawyer can practice law independently without fear of reprisal**

We strive for a world where lawyers can practice law freely and independently to effectively fulfil their role in upholding the rule of law and the protection of human rights. Lawyers should be able to do their job without improper interference or fear of reprisal. Always and everywhere. Also, when that does not suit the government, the bar association, or the establishment.

### **2.3 Core Values**

#### **Put lawyers under threat at the heart of our work**

When we work to promote and protect the independence of lawyers, we are committed to:

- Put lawyers under threat at the heart of our work.
- Provide support to meet expressed needs by lawyers whose professional guarantees, immunities, and privileges are violated.
- Analyse root causes of why lawyers face reprisals, guided by local lawyers and other stakeholders.
- Identify the most effective ways to achieve tangible impact and lasting progress.
- Act independently, objectively, professionally, and with integrity.
- Leverage resources through collaboration and coordination with other actors working toward common goals.
- Improve outcomes through the creation of solidarity within the community.

## **3. Strategies, programs and activities**

To achieve our mission, vision, and goals, we conduct three strategic **programs**: Defend, Empower, and Influence. Through these programs, we implement projects and activities to **support lawyers** at risk worldwide and **raise awareness** of the importance of the independent functioning of lawyers for the

protection of the rule of law and human rights and fundamental freedoms to which all persons are entitled and to ensure effective access to justice for all.

## 1. DEFEND

We **defend** lawyers around the world whose professional guarantees, immunities, or privileges are violated or jeopardized, including through forms of reprisals against them for simply doing their job, and **ensure accountability** where such acts occur.

In 2024 we contributed to this goal by:

- Providing tailor-made support to individual lawyers at risk, guided by the lawyers concerned or their representatives.
- Monitoring and highlighting violations of lawyers' rights.
- Conducting advocacy on targeted impunity cases.
- Building networks and alliances to act in coordination and solidarity.

## 2. EMPOWER

We **empower** lawyers and associations of lawyers to fulfil their role in upholding human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In 2024 we contributed to this goal by:

- Sharing best practices on core values and ethics underpinning the legal profession.
- Providing interactive training sessions and resource materials on international human rights law and international, including regional, mechanisms for the protection of human rights.

## 3. INFLUENCE

We **advocate** for laws, regulations, and practices that provide or reinforce effective protections for the independent functioning and security of lawyers in accordance with internationally recognized laws and standards at global, regional, and national levels.

In 2024 we contributed to this goal by:

- Engaging with global and regional bodies and their mechanisms to advocate for standards, resolutions, and recommendations that strengthen the independence and security of lawyers.
- Lobbying governments and professional associations of lawyers to adopt, implement, and enforce effective legal protections, including effective legal remedies against improper interferences, and change laws, regulations, and practices that encroach on the independence of lawyers.
- Promoting the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and other guiding principles recognising the independence of the legal profession as an essential component of the rule of law.
- Informing the public about what lawyer independence is, how it affects peoples' lives or what life might be like without it, and what governments should do to ensure the independent functioning of lawyers in accordance with international standards.

## **4. Methodology & Impact 2024**

Lawyers for Lawyers has a strong track record in acting quickly and effectively to support lawyers in danger. Our international network and the way we operate, enable us to be flexible and amendable to fast-changing situations and developments.

Lawyers for Lawyers are practicing lawyers and human rights experts. We are therefore particularly well placed to monitor and highlight violations of lawyers' rights and threats to their independence and to raise awareness of the harmful consequences thereof for upholding the rule of law and the protection of human rights.

Our board of directors, staff members and lawyer-volunteers have deep knowledge and expertise of the laws, standards and ethics underpinning the legal profession, the concept of the rule of law as well as international human rights laws and mechanisms. They also know how to apply these laws, concepts and mechanisms in practice.

### **4.1 Who we support - Where we work**

Lawyers for Lawyers supports lawyers at risk in all continents of the world, especially lawyers who work in challenging environments.

We stand with lawyers who have the formal status of lawyers in accordance with domestic laws and are bound by recognized standards and ethics of the legal profession. At the same time, we may include lawyers who exercise the functions of lawyers but are not or not any longer formally recognized as such, for example because access to the legal profession has been refused to them or they have been suspended or disbarred on improper grounds as a reprisal of their work.

On the individual level we prioritize support to lawyers who are in imminent danger or acutely vulnerable. However, since our resources are limited, we are forced to make choices. These choices are based upon our capacity, expertise, and networks, as well as potential opportunities and impact. Also relevant is whether support is already or can be better provided by other organizations.

### **4.2 What we do - How we collaborate**

In addition to emergency support and rapid assistance to lawyers in immediate danger, we provide a range of tools and preventive support to defend and protect lawyers from attacks and improper interference and to strengthen their international recognition and legal protection. At the same time, we empower lawyers and associations of lawyers to support, safeguard, and advocate for the independence of the legal profession on a more lasting basis at the domestic level.

We promote respect for the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers. In doing so, we act in collaboration or coordination with international bar associations, lawyers' organizations and other civil society actors.

Lawyers for Lawyers is a member of the BMO (*Breed Mensenrechten Overleg*), a coalition of human rights and development organizations based in the Netherlands.

We also engage with governments and international and regional intergovernmental institutions and their mechanisms. In 2013, Lawyers for Lawyers was granted consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), providing us access to this Council and its many subsidiaries bodies, to the Human Rights Council, to the various human rights mechanisms of the UN, as well as to

special events organized by the President of the General Assembly.

### **4.3 How we make an impact**

Lawyers for Lawyers acknowledges that it is often hard to tell whether our activities have contributed to or resulted in reducing or preventing attacks and restrictions against lawyers or improving legal protections, and if so, to what extent. When it comes to supporting lawyers, we define success in terms of making a positive difference for individual lawyers. We make a positive impact, when lawyers feel morally supported, when we offer a source of strength in times of need, or when their personal situation changes positively, e.g. they are released from prison, travel bans are lifted, disciplinary or criminal proceeding are withdrawn, etc. Our impact is also positive when lawyers feel empowered to support their colleague lawyers at home.

When it comes to structural support, we define success in terms of progress, e.g. is there an increased number of recommendations made by United Nations human rights mechanisms, strengthening the independence of lawyers and the legal profession that were originally issued by Lawyers for Lawyers or by organizations we are collaborating with or by governments we have engaged with; is there an increase in the number of governments we have engaged with, accepting those recommendations; are those supported recommendations implemented effectively; and do they result in positive changes for lawyers discharging their professional duties.

When defining performance indications for specific projects, we make a distinction between what outcomes may be reasonably expected, given our circle of influence, and what outcomes would be best in terms of achieving our mission, vision and goals.

To understand our impact, we monitor and evaluate the results of our activities on an on-going basis.

### **4.4 Impact examples 2024**

In 2024, we have supported 198 lawyers in 38 countries. We have published 134 written interventions.

#### Impact examples Defend

- On 23 May, Lawyers for Lawyers attended a hearing at the 5th High Criminal Court of Diyarbakır, Turkey, in the trial against the former president of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, Mehmet Emin Aktar. The hearing on 23 May 2024 was short-lived; after a plea by Mr Aktar's lawyers, which included the presentation of a [legal opinion](#) by Lawyers for Lawyers Foundation on lawyers' rights on the relevant provisions of the ECHR and ICCPR (including on freedom of expression in the context of counter-terrorism), the prosecutor requested more time to prepare his final opinion prior to sentencing. Mr Aktar was acquitted after the second hearing in the trial.
- After a nomination by Lawyers for Lawyers, Tajik human rights lawyer Dilrabo Samadova was [shortlisted](#) for the 2024 Martin Ennals Award (MEA) in recognition for her outstanding human rights work. The MEA honours courageous individuals who champion fundamental rights in either high-risk under-reported contexts and a special focus on those who work with or inspire youth to defend democratic freedoms and the rule of law. The finalists are selected by a jury of ten of the world's leading human rights NGOs.
- In February 2024, Lawyers for Lawyers released a statement on the arrest and detention of Palestinian human rights lawyer Diala Ayesh. Diala Ayesh was released in January 2025.

#### Impact examples Empower

- In September 2024, representatives of Lawyers for Lawyers gave a training to the Ethical Commission of the Georgian Bar Association (GBA) in Tbilisi, Georgia. The training focused on the organization of the Dutch Bar Association compared to the Georgian Bar Association, disciplinary proceedings and freedom of expression of lawyers. The GBA communicated on their official channels that they highly valued the training and the ability to discuss with colleagues working on the same topics from the Netherlands.

#### Impact Examples Influence

- In 2024, we submitted more than **11 reports** and **20 oral statements** to the United Nations. This included UPR (mid-term) reports and treaty body reports. In the sessions that have taken place thus far in 2024 and 2025 on these countries, attention has been paid and recommendations have been made with regards to the protections of human rights defenders, including lawyers.
- On 7 and 8 February 2024, six members of the [European Economic and Social Council](#) (EESC) visited the Netherlands under the auspices of the [Ad hoc group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law](#) (FRRL). The delegation met with several representatives of civil society, the media and legal professions, as well as the Dutch authorities, during six thematic meetings. Lawyers for Lawyers was invited to meet with the FRRL-group delegates during the session on the 'Rule of Law' on 8 February. In the meeting, L4L highlighted concerns regarding the increased threats faced by Dutch lawyers, including harassment, discrediting public rhetoric and infringements of lawyer-client confidentiality. A report that was prepared by the FRRL-group based on the received input. In the report, which covers a total of five themes (including freedom of association and assembly, non-discrimination, and the rule of law), the FRRL-group reflects on the concerns raised by participants about the degradation of the rule of law in the Netherlands. Besides highlighting the negative effects of budgetary cuts on the quality of- and access to justice, the report notes that the general polarisation of Dutch society had led to increased pressure on judges and lawyers.
- In recent years, Lawyers for Lawyers has received many reports about harassment from lawyers representing clients with an LGBTIQ+ identity or are perceived as such. Around the world, lawyers are being threatened because of their work on these cases. To raise awareness on this issue and support these lawyers, Lawyers for Lawyers has initiated the 'Access to Justice Campaign'. This campaign was launched on 16 May 2024 at an event at the Rode Hoed in Amsterdam, which was co-organised by the Amsterdam Bar Association. One component of the Access to Justice Campaign is a research to the specific difficulties lawyers face when assisting clients with LGBT+ identities. Lawyers for Lawyers interviewed 30 lawyers from 12 different countries in 2024. The increased attention to this theme led to many interesting conversations with important stakeholders, that we were able to base our further activities under this campaign in 2025 on.

## **5. Board, staff and volunteers 2024**

### **5.1 Board**

Lawyers for Lawyers has a Board of Directors comprised of practicing lawyers and human rights experts.

Board members in 2024:

Jeroen Brouwer - President  
 Maaïke de Jong – Secretary  
 Jan de Koning - Treasurer  
 Maaïke Bomers – Member (from 1 March 2024)  
 Sander Oudshoorn – Member  
 Jan Leliveld – Member (from 1 September 2024)

## **5.2 Lawyers for Lawyers network**

The lawyers that dedicate their time and expertise to Lawyers for Lawyers on a pro-bono basis are essential to fulfil our mission. They also significantly outnumber paid staff. In 2023, Lawyers for Lawyers had a pool of 75 highly motivated and skilled volunteer-lawyers, consisting mainly of practising lawyers, as well as a management assistant.

In 2024, the board of Lawyers for Lawyers decided to introduce a new policy for the cooperation with lawyers and law firms. This new policy establishes a network of lawyers committed to providing pro bono support to the mission of Lawyers for Lawyers. The *goal of the network* is to create a sustainable and effective network of lawyers who can provide support for colleague lawyers all around the world who are facing difficulties in connection to their professional activities.

Objectives:

- Provide a pool of lawyers who can support colleague lawyers through a range of activities
- Raise awareness of L4L's mission within the legal community and encourage pro bono participation.
- Build partnerships with law firms and law associations to enhance the network's reach.
- Ensure high-quality, effective support for lawyers at risk
- Foster a culture of solidarity amongst lawyers worldwide

With this new system, which was launched in January 2025, we continued to strengthen our onboarding and training program, including necessary policies and procedures.

## **5.3 Staff**

In 2024, the FTE's of the Lawyers for Lawyers office increased significantly. This has to do with the hiring of a manager partnerships and relations on a freelance basis. Due to the medical leave of one of our staff members, we also worked with a programme officer on a freelance basis. From 1 January 2025, the Lawyers for Lawyers team consisted out of an executive director, a manager partnerships and relations, two programme officers, one junior programme officer and a working student fundraising and communication. The total FTE of the team is 5,7 FTE (from 1 January 2025, increasing through 2024 from 2,7 FTE). Furthermore, the work of the staff was in 2024 supported by 2 legal interns per semester, and one for the summer, who intern at our organization for 24 hours a week.

## **6. Communication**

In 2024 we undertook a complete renewal of our communication. With a new strategy, website, logo, and house style, alongside improved working methods, we made substantial progress in how we engage with our audience. While we still lack a dedicated communications staff member, we have been able to make informed choices about our communication channels and methods, ensuring greater impact and visibility.



## 7. Funding and Financial resources 2024

Lawyers for Lawyers is supported entirely by financial donations and in-kind support, mainly from individual lawyers, law firms, lawyers' associations and other organizations related to the legal profession. We raise funds by cultivating relationships and partnerships in the legal sector and through third-party events. We sometimes also receive royalties from an author or composer for each copy of a legal book that has been sold or fees for a service that has been provided, such as a legal training.

Lawyers for Lawyers has been recognized as a charity by the Central Bureau on Fundraising (CBF), i.e. "*CBF-erkend goed doel*". Lawyers for Lawyers is also tax-exempted under Dutch law. It qualifies as a Public Benefit Organisation (ANBI status).

The reserves of Lawyer for Lawyers are at a level that is considered to be justified by the Herkströter Committee (Commission on Capital Standards for Charities), i.e. a continuity reserve of a maximum of one and a half times the annual turnover.

At the end of 2022, we received a large donation which makes it possible for our organization in the coming five years to further professionalize our approach to organizational development to enhance the effectiveness, potential, and capacity of our people, processes, and resources in achieving our mission. The board of Lawyers for Lawyers designated this donation as a reserve to 'increase capacity' of our organization and in 2023 a plan was written on how to spend this donation to reach this goal. This included hiring extra staff in 2024.

In 2022, the board of Lawyers for Lawyers decided that we will be exploring new funding opportunities for certain projects and activities under our Empower program, including from government bodies, to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. In 2023 and in 2024, we have looked at possibilities for this kind of funding with a coalition of other civil society organizations. In 2025 we will continue to engage with this coalition to research the possibility of applying for grants from, amongst others, the European Union and private foundations.

The board has decided in 2023 to mainly focus the fundraising efforts in 2023 on the partnerships with law firms. We aimed at hiring a new staff member tasked with the fundraising at the beginning of 2024. However, we were only able to find a suitable candidate in September 2024. With the new manager partnerships and relations, we were able to secure partnerships with a number of new firms. We were also able to increase the donations of private individuals. Through some unforeseen events where private individuals raised funds for Lawyers for Lawyers, the income from private individuals was much higher than we had budgeted. We were able to raise in total

In 2024, our overall expenditures were slightly different from our initial budget projections. Due to the later-than-planned hiring of a new staff member in September instead of January, our personnel costs were lower than budgeted.

At the same time, we invested in professionalizing our ICT infrastructure to enhance communication security. This included purchasing new hardware devices and migrating to a new ICT system. However, the migration costs exceeded our initial estimates, resulting in higher-than-budgeted expenditures under 'office costs.'



Our spending on the *Defend* and *Influence* programs remained largely in line with expectations. However, some activities under the *Empower* program were postponed to 2025, leading to lower-than-planned expenditures in that area.

## **8. 2024 and beyond**

### **7.1 Our focus in 2024 - 2028**

The board of Lawyers for Lawyers has updated the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 in 2023, and has produced a strategic plan for 2024-2028 which will be followed in 2024. The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to inform our continued journey to be an internationally recognized expert in promoting and safeguarding the independence of individual lawyers and the legal profession across the world, serving as a catalyst for a safe and enabling environment for lawyers.

In the next four years, we will focus on two key priorities. First, we will continue to strengthening our work in support of lawyers under threat. We will do so by further enhancing, aligning, and expanding our Defend, Empower, and Influence programs, and through ongoing collaboration and alliances' building with stakeholders.

Throughout the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2024 – 2028, we will monitor and evaluate our progress and results and capture lessons learned. We will solicit and act upon feedback from lawyers at risk, board members, staff members, volunteers, and other stakeholders, and be adaptive to changing developments and demands as appropriate.

The strategic plan 2024-2028 is available on our website.