



The Law Society
of England and Wales



INTERNATIONAL
OBSERVATORY
OF LAWYERS



Human Rights
Institute

Joint Statement on the unwarranted search of legal offices and the continued systematic persecution of lawyers in occupied Crimea

The Law Society of England and Wales, Alliance for Lawyers at Risk, Lawyers for Lawyers, International Bar Association Human Rights Institute, Federation Des Barreaux D'Europe, and the International Observatory for Lawyers in Danger strongly condemn the unwarranted search of two legal offices in Simferopol on 11 December 2025 and the continued systemic persecution of lawyers in occupied Crimea.

On 11 December 2025, officers from the Crimean Centre for Countering Extremism and special police units forcibly entered and searched two offices in Simferopol used by legal professionals Edem Semedlyaev, Emil Kurbedinov, and Nazim Sheykmambetov, Elvina Semedlyaeva, Rustem Kyamilev, and Lilia Hemedzhy. At the time of the raid, Edem Semedlyaev, Nazim Sheykmambetov, Lilia Hemedzhy, and Rustem Kyamilev were inside the office. The officers prevented Emil Kurbedinov from entering and initially refused to explain the basis for the search. They later claimed to have a warrant issued by the Supreme Court of the Republic of Crimea.

Reports indicate that both searches were carried out with serious procedural violations. The search warrant relied on vague allegations that some of the lawyers were involved in offences under Articles 205.5, 205.1, and 199 of the Russian Criminal Code, relating to terrorism and tax evasion. No further details were provided to justify these accusations. Officers confiscated legal materials, including documents protected by legal professional privilege, and prohibited those present from leaving the premises or making phone calls. Several hours after refusing him entry, the security forces took Emil Kurbedinov to the second office, where another search was underway. These searches appear to specifically target lawyers known for their human rights work within the Crimean Tatar community.

This is not the first time that these legal professionals, known for their human rights work, have been subjected to such harassment.

In November 2024, the undersigned organisations, together with two other organisations issued a joint [statement](#) expressing concern over the violent raid of the home of Lilia Hemedzhy, and Rustem Kyamilev. On 7 November 2024, security forces searched their home without informing them of their rights or the reasons for the search, seized their phones and legal documents, and used physical and psychological intimidation against them and their children. After the search, Rustem Kyamilev was taken to the Crimean Centre for Countering Extremism, where two administrative reports were filed against him for posts on his personal Facebook page. One of the posts contained Ukrainian state symbols, which the Centre for Countering Extremism falsely attempted to present as symbols of the Right Sector organisation, a Ukrainian nationalist organisation banned in Russia since 2014. The Kyiv District Court of Simferopol found him guilty under Part 1 of Article 20.3 of the Russian

Code of Administrative Offences and sentenced him to 10 days in prison and a RUB 50,000 fine under Part 1 of Article 20.3.3. Nazim Sheykmambetov, Lilia Hemedzhy, and Rustem Kyamilev have also been arbitrarily disbarred from the Chechen Bar Association, in a move considered as retaliation for their human rights work in Russian-occupied Crimea.

The search of the offices and the seizure of legal materials on 11 December 2025, and the previous raid in November 2024, are contrary to the principle of lawyer-client confidentiality, which is protected under both national and international law. Under Article 8 of the Federal Law "On Legal Practice and the Bar in the Russian Federation", which the Russian de facto authorities apply in Crimea, searches of a lawyer's office or residence may only be conducted on the basis of a court order, and materials protected by 'attorney secrecy' under Russian law benefit from special legal safeguards. This obligation is reinforced by Principle 22 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (Basic Principles) which states that '*Governments shall recognize and respect that all communications and consultations between lawyers and their clients within their professional relationship are confidential*'.

Such actions against lawyers in occupied Crimea are part of a broader, systematic pattern in which legal professionals working on human rights and politically sensitive cases, face interference and harassment. Since 2014, reports indicate that at least 13 lawyers in Crimea have been subjected to harassment by the Russian de facto authorities, including arbitrary searches, detentions, administrative arrests, fines, and politically motivated disbarments. In addition to hindering the ability of the targeted lawyers to work, these sustained pressures have a broader, chilling effect on the legal profession in Crimea. They create a climate of fear among legal professionals, reducing the number of lawyers willing to take on sensitive cases. This in turn limits the ability of individuals to access legal assistance, undermining their right to access to justice.

Furthermore, the authorities must respect Principle 16 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers ('Basic Principles'), which states that '*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*'.

In addition, as a State party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Russian Federation, including while acting through its occupying authorities in Crimea, has the extraterritorial obligation to refrain from any unlawful, excessive or arbitrary use of force during law enforcement operations, to ensure that no-one is subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention or is deprived of their liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedures as are established by law, and to ensure that anyone charged with a criminal offence is brought to trial in proceedings which meet international fair trial standards.

In view of the above, the undersigned organisations call on the responsible authorities to:

- Refrain from any actions that may constitute harassment, persecution, or undue interference in the work of lawyers, including unwarranted searches of their offices and residences, violations of legal professional privilege and disciplinary or criminal proceedings on improper grounds, such as the nature of the cases in which the lawyer is involved.
- Return the confiscated legal materials to the legal professionals without delay.

- Halt any further harassment of Edem Semedlyaev, Emil Kurbedinov, Nazim Sheykmambetov, Elvina Semedlyaeva, Rustem Kyamilev, and Lilia Hemedzhy.
- Reinstate the membership in the Chechen Bar Association of Nazim Sheykmambetov, Lilia Hemedzhy, and Rustem Kyamilev.
- Guarantee that all lawyers and human rights defenders in Russia and territories under the effective control of the Russian Federation, including Crimea, are able to carry out their legitimate professional activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment, arbitrary arrest, deprivation of liberty, or other arbitrary sanctions.

Signatories:

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