

## UN experts urge Belarus to stop interfering in the legal profession

*UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*

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**GENEVA** – UN experts\* today denounced the designation of the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers (BAHRL) as an “extremist formation” and called on Belarus to end repression against independent lawyers.

“The undue interference and restrictions placed on the legal profession in Belarus risk opening the door to systematic violations of the right to a fair trial and to equality before the law in the entire country,” the experts said.

They recalled that the Belarusian anti-extremist legal framework is incompatible with international human rights law, stressing that the designation of BAHRL as “extremist” amounted to a violation of the right to freedom of association of its members. “We urge, once again, the Belarusian authorities to repeal the category of ‘extremism’ in national law and bring its national counterterrorism and counterextremism legal framework in line with international law”, the experts said.

BAHRL was established in 2023 by disbarred Belarusian attorneys in exile to offer legal counselling on the risks of staying in Belarus and in absentia trials and to provide assistance with submitting complaints to international human rights bodies and mechanisms. In August 2025, Belarusian executive authorities designated BAHRL as an “extremist formation” and its members as individuals “involved in extremist activities”, exposing them to a risk of criminal prosecution. Some lawyers were allegedly designated as BAHRL members by mistake.

“We fear that BAHRL may have been labelled as extremist as a reprisal for its engagement with international human rights bodies and mechanisms and we call on Belarusian authorities to rescind this designation and refrain from initiating criminal proceedings against its members,” the experts said.

Large-scale violations of civil and political rights in Belarus since 2020 have been accompanied by systematic [persecution](#) of lawyers in retaliation for defending civil society actors, protestors or political figures. According to reports received by Special Procedures, over the past five years, the number of attorneys in the country has decreased by 597 individuals to a total of 1603, and 14 lawyers have faced criminal prosecution.

Seven lawyers are currently serving prison sentences, including Maksim Znak and Vitali Braginiec, both subjected to arbitrary detention according to opinions issued by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Znak has also been a victim of an enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention since 9 February 2023.

**\*The experts:**

- Mr. Nils Muižnieks, [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus](#);
- Ms. Mary Lawlor, [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#);
- Ms. Gina Romero, [Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association](#);
- Ben Saul, [Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism](#);
- Ms. Margaret Satterthwaite, [Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers](#);
- Ms. Ganna Yudkivska (Chair-Rapporteur), Mr. Matthew Gillett (Vice-Chair on Communications), Ms. Miriam Estrada Castillo (Vice-Chair on Follow-Up), Mr. Mumba Malila, and Mr. Ethan Hee-Seok Shin, [Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#);
- Ms. Gabriella Citroni (Chair-Rapporteur), Ms. Grażyna Baranowska (Vice-Chair), Ms. Aua Baldé, Ms. Ana Lorena Delgadillo Pérez, and Mr. Mohammed Al-Obaidi, [Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#)