



Joint Statement on the continued harassment of Russian lawyer Aleksey Ladin

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Lawyers for Lawyers, the International Observatory for Lawyers (OIAD), The Law Society of England and Wales (LSEW), the European Association of Lawyers for Democracy & Human Rights (ELDH), the Union of International Lawyers' Institute for The Rule of Law (UIA-IROL), the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) condemn the continued harassment against human rights lawyer Aleksey Ladin.

On 24 January 2024, the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer, human rights defender and lawyer Aleksey Ladin will face a disciplinary hearing by the Council of the Tyumen Regional Bar Association. The action was initiated by a motion issued by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation. Mr. Ladin has been working since 2015 to provide legal aid to Ukrainians who are alleged to have been subject to criminal prosecution by Russia on politically motivated charges. Since 2017, he has been based in Russian-occupied Crimea, mostly representing Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar political prisoners.

This is the latest in series of instances of harassment and prosecution from the authorities against Mr. Ladin. On 13 October 2023, the Kyivskiy District Court of Simferopol sentenced him to 14 days of administrative detention for allegedly displaying prohibited symbols on his social media pages. The Facebook post in question, a photo of a drawing made by one of his clients, displayed elements of Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar national emblems with the slogan "We are not the terrorists and we are not the extremists." The court found the "taraq tamga" (the emblem on the Crimean Tatars' flag) in the picture to be a symbol of a known Crimean volunteer paramilitary unit, Noman Çelebicihan Crimean Tatar Volunteer Battalion. The drawing had no relation to the battalion. Mr. Ladin was prosecuted for the exercise of his right to freedom expression, protected under international and Russian law.

The upcoming disciplinary hearing is based on the sentence of administrative detention handed down on 13 October 2023, as the Ministry of Justice alleges that Mr. Ladin violated the Code of Ethics of the Russian Bar Association, which is based on the Federal Law "On the Bar Association and its activities in the Russian Federation." The Ministry of Justice affirms that they received this information from the Centre to Counteract Extremism in Crimea on 3 November 2023.

Lawyers play a vital role in upholding the rule of law and the protection of human rights guaranteed under international law, including the rights to an effective remedy and fair trial guarantees, and the right of freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. Their work is indispensable for public confidence in the administration of justice by safeguarding due process rights and ensuring access to justice for all. To fulfil their professional duties effectively, lawyers should be able to practice their profession safely and should be free from improper interference, fear of reprisals, and illegitimate restrictions, in compliance with international standards.

The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers 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’ [16]. They also hold that ‘lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients’ causes as a result of discharging their functions’ [18] and that ‘lawyers, like any other citizens, are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly’ [23].

In view of the above, the undersigned organisations call on the Tyumen Regional Bar Association, the Russian Federal Bar Association and the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation to:

- Immediately drop the disciplinary proceedings against human rights lawyer Aleksey Lapin, as he is being targeted as a result of his peaceful and legitimate activities;
- Ensure that any legitimate disciplinary proceedings against lawyers shall be conducted fairly and independently, in accordance with international standards;
- Refrain from any actions that may constitute harassment, persecution, or undue interference in the work of lawyers, including disciplinary or criminal proceedings on improper grounds, such as the nature of the cases in which the lawyer is involved;
- Guarantee that all lawyers in Russia and Russian-occupied 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.