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PRESS RELEASE

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Egyptian Human Rights Lawyer Mohamed El-Baquer and Polish Initiative “Wolne Sądy” Selected Recipients of the 2022 UIA/LexisNexis Rule of Law Award

The UIA Governing Board has decided to confer **the 2022 UIA Rule of Law Award in cooperation with LexisNexis jointly on Mr. Mohamed El-Baquer**, an Egyptian human rights lawyer and the Founder and Director of Adalah Center for Rights and Freedoms, and **“Wolne Sądy” (Free Courts)**, an initiative established by a group of lawyers to defend and promote the independence of the judiciary in Poland.

▪ **Mohamed El-Baquer: an Egyptian Lawyer Arbitrarily Detained for his Legal Defense Work**

As a lawyer, Mr. Mohamed El-Baquer has a longstanding commitment to providing pro bono legal support and actively defending human rights defenders, ethnic and religious minorities, and civilians tried before military courts. A founder and Director of the Adalah Center for Rights and Freedoms, he has been involved in a number of impactful legal and human rights initiatives throughout his career, including the Front to Defend Egypt's Protesters and No to Military Trials for Civilians.

On September 29, 2019, Mr. El-Baquer was arrested while representing one of his clients, the blogger and activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, before the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP), and was questioned with regard to the same case, resulting in a series of arbitrary charges. While in detention, the SSSP brought another case against Mr. El-Baquer with similar charges, a practice commonly referred to as “rotation”. In November 2020, Mr. El-Baquer's name was added to the terrorist list for five years despite a lack of evidence or verdict justifying this decision, which resulted in dire consequences for him, both personally and professionally. After over two years in pretrial detention, and Mr. El-Baquer was sentenced by an Emergency State Security Court (ESSC) to four years in prison for “spreading false news using a social networking site”, a decision that cannot be appealed.

Since his arrest, Mr. El-Baquer has faced extensive and continuous due process, fair trial and other human rights violations.

“With this Award, we would like to recognize Mr. El-Baquer's unrelenting dedication to protecting those most vulnerable and for seeking to effect lasting changes in Egypt, by courageously challenging human rights violations and authoritarianism through his work and the peaceful exercise of his fundamental freedoms, despite the overwhelming risks that Egyptian human rights lawyers currently have faced and continue to face in such cases”, commented Ms Jacqueline R. Scott, Director General of UIA-IROL.

The UIA hopes that this Award conveys to Mr. El-Baquer and his family a renewed and strong message of international support, as the UIA-IROL joins once more the repeated calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Mr. El-Baquer and the end of all repressive practises and harassment against him, including unfounded, abusive and arbitrary prosecution. The UIA invites the international legal community to continue to advocate for our colleague's release.

▪ **“Wolne Sądy” (Free Courts Foundation): A Polish Initiative to Defend the Independence of Judges**

Wolne Sądy or Free Courts Initiative was informally launched in July 2017 by Polish lawyers Sylwia Grzegorzczuk-Abram, Maria Ejchart-Dubois, Paulina Kieszkowska-Knapik, and Michał Wawrykiewicz, on the wave of civil protests opposing the breaches of the Rule of Law and in defence of independence of the judiciary. The Foundation was established in 2020 to support initiatives and educational activities in defense of the Rule of Law.

By using innovative means, such as short films, video content and podcasts disseminated on social media, Wolne Sądy seeks to educate the public and raise awareness about the importance for every citizen of having a wholly independent judiciary. The Foundation has also published on its website and on social media a significant number of position papers, legal opinions, reports and information papers on current developments regarding Rule of Law, is the organization is also actively involved in many collaborative projects with NGOs and/or judges aimed at defending and upholding the Rule of Law in Poland, such as the “Komitet Obrony Sprawiedliwości” (Justice Defence Committee).

In addition, the Wolne Sądy’s lawyers engage in strategic litigation before domestic and European courts and provide legal representation to activists, judges, and prosecutors who have been discriminated against or harassed because of their independence. Representatives of the Foundation regularly meet with representatives of European institutions and participate in conferences to provide information with respect to the state of the Rule of Law in Poland and rulings of Polish and international courts.

“We salute the consistent efforts of the Wolne Sądy Initiative since it is a remarkable example of how the legal profession can creatively assume its crucial role in upholding human rights and the Rule of law including beyond lawyers’ activity in courts. Wolne Sądy demonstrates that lawyers can act as a driving force in imaginatively informing, growing awareness and, hopefully, mobilizing the civil society especially where the Rule of Law is under attack, as is the case in Poland,” said Ms Scott.

“On behalf of LexisNexis, I’d like to offer my sincere Congratulations to Egyptian Human Rights Lawyer Mohamed El-Baqer and the Polish Initiative “Wolne Sądy,” joint recipients of this year’s UIA/LexisNexis Rule of Law Award. We were privileged to partner with the UIA to jointly establish this award in 2016, to honor an individual or organization for their dedication and commitment to advancing the Rule of Law. The Rule of Law is not just a ‘nice to have’, it is an absolute necessity for success; it is essential for the improvement of individuals’ lives and society.” Nigel Roberts, VP and Secretary, LexisNexis Legal & Professional.

The 2022 UIA Rule of Law Award in cooperation with LexisNexis will be formally presented at the UIA Congress to be held from October 26 to 30, 2022 in Dakar, Senegal.

More about the UIA

UIA is the global and multi-cultural organisation for the legal profession, established in 1927 and now with members in 110 countries, which provides professional development, learning, promotes the rule of law, defends the independence and freedom of lawyers worldwide, and emphasizes friendship, collegiality and networking among members.

About LexisNexis Legal & Professional

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