



KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THE LAWYERS

Statement and Petition Based on the Report of the International Coalition for the Day of the Endangered Lawyer 2026 (United States of America)

We, the undersigned lawyers, bar associations and legal organisations issue this statement in response to the findings of the Report of the International Coalition for the Day of the Endangered Lawyer (DEL), 16th Edition – United States of America, published on 24 January 2026.

This petition is grounded in serious concern over the documented and escalating pattern of interference with the independence of lawyers, law firms, bar associations, prosecutors, and judges in the United States. These developments, as detailed in the Coalition's report, raise profound questions regarding compliance with international legal standards governing the role and protection of lawyers and the functioning of the justice system.

I. The Role of Lawyers and the Rule of Law

The independence of the legal profession is not a professional privilege; it is a cornerstone of the rule of law and a prerequisite for access to justice, fair trial guarantees, and the effective protection of human rights. International law is unequivocal on this point.

The United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and other authoritative international instruments establish that lawyers must be able to perform their professional duties without intimidation, harassment, improper interference, or retaliation, and must not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes.

Lawyers play a critical public function: they act as intermediaries between individuals and the State, safeguard procedural fairness, and ensure that power is exercised within legal limits. When lawyers are targeted for fulfilling this role, the harm extends far beyond the profession itself—it undermines democratic governance and weakens public confidence in the justice system.



II. Findings Giving Rise to Grave Concern

The Coalition's report documents a systematic and coordinated pattern of measures affecting the legal profession in the United States throughout 2025, including but not limited to:

- Executive orders and presidential memoranda explicitly targeting named law firms and lawyers for their past or present legal representation, advocacy, or pro bono work;
- Retaliatory administrative measures such as the withdrawal of security clearances, denial of access to federal facilities, and review or cancellation of government contracts;
- Pressures placed on law firms through so-called “compliance arrangements,” raising concerns of coerced alignment and erosion of professional independence;
- Surveillance, questioning, and harassment of lawyers at borders and through administrative channels, including demands that risk breaching attorney-client privilege;
- Politicisation of prosecutorial and judicial functions, including dismissals, forced resignations, disciplinary threats, and intimidation directed at prosecutors and judges perceived as insufficiently aligned with executive preferences;
- Attacks on professional self-governing bodies, including efforts to marginalise or delegitimise bar associations and weaken their role in protecting professional standards;
- A chilling effect on legal representation in sensitive fields such as immigration, public defence, Palestine solidarity, LGBTI+ rights, protest defence, and civil liberties advocacy.

Taken together, these measures do not constitute isolated incidents. They form a pattern that creates a climate of fear, uncertainty, and anticipatory self-censorship within the legal profession, discouraging lawyers from taking on cases, clients, or arguments that may attract political or administrative retaliation.

III. International Legal Implications

The developments described in the report give rise to serious concerns regarding violations of international legal obligations binding upon the United States, including under the ICCPR. In particular, they implicate:



- The right to a fair trial and effective legal representation (Article 14 ICCPR);
- Freedom of expression and association of lawyers acting in their professional and public capacities (Articles 19 and 22 ICCPR);
- The obligation of States to protect lawyers from reprisals related to their legitimate professional activities.

The targeting of lawyers for representing unpopular clients, challenging government action, or engaging in rights-based advocacy is incompatible with the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers. Moreover, sanctions and measures affecting lawyers' ability to cooperate with international justice mechanisms raise additional concerns regarding respect for international accountability frameworks and the global administration of justice.

IV. Broader Consequences

The erosion of safeguards for lawyers does not occur in isolation. It has cascading effects:

- It restricts access to justice for marginalised and vulnerable communities;
- It weakens judicial independence and prosecutorial integrity;
- It narrows the space for civil society and democratic participation;
- It sets a dangerous precedent that may be replicated beyond national borders.

When a State long regarded as a proponent of constitutionalism and the rule of law tolerates or normalises such practices, the consequences resonate internationally and risk undermining global human rights standards.

V. Our Demands

In light of the above, we call upon the authorities of the United States to:

1. **Immediately cease** all forms of retaliation, intimidation, or interference directed at lawyers, law firms, prosecutors, judges, and professional associations on the basis of their legitimate professional activities;
2. **Revoke or remedy** executive and administrative measures that undermine the independence of the legal profession, including restrictions on access, security clearances, contracts, and professional participation;
3. **Guarantee the independence** of prosecutorial and judicial institutions and refrain from political interference in disciplinary or appointment processes;



4. **Respect and protect** the autonomy and self-governing role of bar associations and professional bodies;
5. **Ensure adequate funding and structural support** for public defence and legal aid systems, in accordance with international standards;
6. **Reaffirm commitment** to international human rights mechanisms and standards relevant to the protection of lawyers and the administration of justice.

VI. Call to the International Community

We further call upon international and regional legal institutions, bar associations, human rights organisations, United Nations mechanisms, States, and civil society actors to closely monitor the situation, express solidarity with affected legal professionals, and use all available mechanisms to uphold international standards protecting the independence of the legal profession.

Silence and inaction in the face of these developments risk entrenching a model in which legal advocacy is treated as a political liability rather than a democratic necessity.

Conclusion

Protecting lawyers is inseparable from protecting justice itself. The findings of the Day of the Endangered Lawyer 2026 report demand a clear and collective response. The independence of the legal profession must be defended—not selectively, not conditionally, but universally.

Keep your hands off the lawyers!