Global Legal and Rule of Law Community Stands in Solidarity with Lebanese Lawyer Nizar Saghieh

Joint Statements · Lebanon · 19 April 2023

We, the undersigned bar associations, lawyers, judges, and civil society organizations committed to the rule of law, join from across the globe to denounce the Beirut Bar Association's recent actions, and to express our solidarity with Lebanese lawyer Nizar Saghieh as he comes under targeting for his exercise of free expression and for his legal defense work.

On March 3, 2023, the Council of the Beirut Bar Association issued a unanimous decision to amend the code of ethics regulating the work of lawyers without prior debate or justification. The amendment, which constitutes a severe violation of the right to freedom of expression, stipulates that lawyers will only be allowed to participate in a conference or legal seminar, or provide an interview or information to a media outlet, social media outlet, website, or group after soliciting and receiving the permission of the Bar Association President to do so. The amendment, which has since been released in an updated code of ethics booklet, is an alarming overreach in violation of Lebanese domestic and international legal obligations that gives disproportionate oversight to the Bar Association President; egregiously curtails legal defense work, particularly impact, strategic, and rights litigation which require public engagement, campaigning, and advocacy; and threatens to have reverberating impacts on citizen's access to justice. Thirteen Lebanese lawyers, including executive director of the Legal Agenda Nizar Saghieh, have submitted appeals to challenge the decision. The Beirut Court of Appeals will issue a determination in the case on May 4, 2023.

In recent weeks, the Council of the Beirut Bar Association summoned Saghieh for questioning without providing justification for his summons; he is set to appear before it on Thursday, April 20. There are serious concerns that this action is intended to lead to Saghieh's disbarment. Since the summons, Saghieh has also become the target of a harassment campaign on social media, which raises concerns on the potential for escalation.

Saghieh has a long history of defending individual rights; providing a legal defense for activists and journalists; and leading legal battles to bring about transparency and combat corruption. He has provided critical support for the family members and victims of the Beirut Port Explosion. In addition, he serves as the executive director of the Legal Agenda, a Beirut-based nonprofit which leverages research, media, activism, and litigation "to instigate positive legal change while ensuring its socially fair implementation."

This targeting is believed to be in reprisal for Saghieh's appeal challenging the Bar Association's overreach, his outspoken stances, and effective legal work to hold the powerful to account.

Summoning Saghieh is intended to silence him and has the potential to chill legal defense work at-large and eat away at access to justice for Lebanese citizens and residents more generally.

We, the undersigned, call on the Beirut Bar Association to withdraw the recent amendments to the code of ethics and to stand on the side of independent legal defense work in the country. We additionally call on the Beirut Bar Association to immediately withdraw its summons, halt all arbitrary disciplinary proceedings against Saghieh, and bring to an end this targeting.

Signatories

Civil Society Organizations and Bar Associations

- Access Now
- ADLI
- Alternative Press Syndicate (Nakaba Badila)
- Amnesty International
- Arab Reform Initiative
- ARTICLE 19
- Association Tunisienne de Défense des Libertés Individuelles
- Business and Human Rights MENA Region
- Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance
- Committee for Justice
- Egyptian Human Rights Forum (EHRF)
- EuroMed Rights
- Human Rights Watch
- HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
- Impunity Watch
- International Commission of Jurists
- IPSI
- Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH)
- MENA Rights Group
- Monitoring Committee on Attacks on Lawyers, International Association of People's Lawyers (IAPL)
- Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)
- Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
- Ruwad Al Houkouk (Frontiers Rights)
- Samir Kassir Foundation

- SMEX
- Solidarity Law Cooperative
- Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research
- Tamkeen for Legal Aid and Human Rights
- The Khalifa Ihler Institute
- The Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE)
- The Policy Initiative
- The Public Source
- The Syria Campaign
- The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
- The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)
- Tunisian Association Defending Individual Liberties
- Tunisian Judges Association
- Union of Administrative Judges
- Women Now for Development

Individual Signatories

**Please note that individual lawyers and judges are signing onto this statement in their personal capacities. Any affiliations are listed only as an identifying descriptor.*

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