

Olga Salomatova's speech at the UN Human Rights Council 04.12.2020

(The translated text of speech)

The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights continues to observe systemic violations of the right to defense in case of Belarusian defense attorneys.

The Bar association is controlled by the Ministry of Justice; defense attorneys expressing their civil and political opinions are persecuted.

Authorities hinder defense attorney's access to clients detained on political charges, and the privacy of communication and correspondence is violated. We have observed as well that defense attorneys are systematically refused access to clients detained on administrative charges. Conveyor-belt administrative hearings, limiting defense attorneys' status and role to the minimum, have become quite widespread. Defense attorneys are not admitted to the hearings that take place in pre-trial detentions. Failure to inform defense attorneys about the place of their client's detention, the time and the place of the administrative hearing as well as the anonymity of witnesses, mostly police officers, are just a few examples of the observed violations.

Defense attorney's freedom of expression is severely restricted. Publicly expressed opinion on facts of violation of the law, use of violence by law enforcement officers, the slightest criticism of public officials result in being persecuted and harassed. Attorneys defending critics of authority are a prime target for authorities. It is sufficient to refer to the cases of defense attorneys Maxim Znak and Ilya Salei (Znak has spent 3 months in pre-trial detention); revocation of licenses of defense attorneys Alexander Pylchenko and Yulia Levanchuk; detention of a defense attorney Lyudmila Kazak, which resembled kidnapping, and the subsequent administrative penalty. It is necessary to call on Belarus to immediately stop harassment of defense attorneys and ensure conditions for professional work free from fear and intimidation.