

Russian Lawyers Call on Authorities to End Harassment of Legal Community

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Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's lawyer Igor Sergunin receives a document sitting in a cage in a courtroom in Moscow. **Dmitry Serebryakov / AP / TASS**

Russia's legal community has called on authorities to stop "harassing and intimidating lawyers and obstructing their professional activities" following the arrests of three lawyers of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

Human rights project Perviy Otdel published a [statement](#), signed by at least 365 lawyers, activists and public figures as of Monday, saying that the rights of lawyers "are systematically violated, the government prevents their defenders from working, intimidates them and initiates criminal cases [against them]."

"Defendants must have the right to defense, and defense attorneys must have the right to exercise it. This should not be hampered by any political considerations," the statement added.

A separate [petition](#), launched by a group of Russian lawyers, said: "Lawyers in Russia are

forced to carry out their professional activities in an atmosphere of fear for the life and health of themselves and their loved ones.”

It said lawyers work under the threat of “arbitrary imprisonment, systematic obstruction of legal practice and unpunished interference in it, in an atmosphere of violence and torture, intimidation and direct threats to freedom, health and life.”

It also asked Russian lawyers to go on strike from Oct. 25 to Oct. 28.

Related article: [Russia Detains 3 Navalny Lawyers](#)

The petition came as Russia raided the homes of and [arrested](#) three of Navalny's lawyers for alleged “participation in an extremist community” on Friday.

Lawyers Vadim Kobzev, Igor Sergunin and Alexei Liptser have been remanded in pre-trial detention until at least Dec. 13. They face up to six years in jail if convicted.

Navalny was [convicted](#) in August of financing extremism, forming an extremist community and inciting extremism — charges stemming from the branding of his groups as “extremist” in 2021.

On Monday, Navalny’s allies also [reported](#) that another lawyer of Navalny, Alexander Fedulov, “did not come to the court hearing and his phone was turned off.”

Fedulov later confirmed that he had left the country after the arrest of his colleagues.

“By arresting Navalny’s lawyers, the Russian authorities are violating their human rights and undermining the legal community in Russia, as well as depriving Navalny of what little protection he could have from further ill-treatment,” Amnesty International [said](#) last week.

The group added that “the arrests also send a clear message to all lawyers in Russia that performing professional duties may cost them dearly if they are representing the Kremlin’s foe.”

Russian lawmakers are considering legislation that would disbar Russian lawyers who moved abroad for a period of more than one year, the Kommersant business daily [reported](#) Monday.

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