



UNIVERSAL RIGHTS ASSOCIATION

The Universal Rights Association (URA) is dedicated to promoting human rights, justice, and equality worldwide. We work to document and raise awareness about human rights violations, advocate for legal reforms, and support victims of injustice. Through reports, international engagement, and activism, we strive to uphold fundamental rights.

UNIVERSAL RIGHTS ASSOCIATION – SPECIAL STATEMENT FOR APRIL 5 LAWYERS’ DAY

April 5 marks Lawyers’ Day in Türkiye — a day to honor those who bear the weight of justice and the rule of law.

On this important occasion, we express our deepest respect and gratitude to all lawyers who raise their voices against oppression and stand firmly with the oppressed.

Lawyers are not just legal representatives — they are defenders of human rights, guardians of justice, and the breath of freedom in societies under pressure.

UN Spotlight on Lawyers and Human Rights Defenders in Türkiye

The **United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor**, recently expressed grave concern over the situation in Türkiye:

“I am deeply concerned by the continued long-term detention in Türkiye of nine human rights defenders & lawyers, all of whom were arbitrarily arrested & convicted in unfair trials on spurious terrorism-related charges.”

— *Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur*

We extend our sincere appreciation to the experts who contributed to the related reports and the broader international advocacy for human rights in Türkiye:

- **Mary Lawlor** – UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders
- **Ben Saul** – UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism
- **Alice Jill Edwards** – UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

 <https://srdefenders.org/turkiye-expert-dismayed-by-continued-misuse-of-counter-terrorism-law-to-keep-human-rights-defenders-in-long-term-detention-press-release/>

 <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=29546>

The Legacy of April 5 in Türkiye

April 5 was designated as Lawyers' Day because it commemorates the first general assembly of the **Istanbul Bar Association** in 1878. This day symbolizes not just professional recognition—but the unwavering legacy of **free defense, independent judiciary, and the resistance of justice**.

Universal Solidarity: Lawyers at the Front Lines of Justice

Throughout history, lawyers have stood at the forefront of the struggle for justice, often placing their own safety at risk to defend the rights of others and uphold the rule of law.

In **South Africa**, legal professionals played a crucial role in dismantling the apartheid regime. Their commitment to justice transformed courtrooms into battlegrounds for human dignity and freedom. Among the many courageous defenders were:

- **Nelson Mandela** – A revolutionary lawyer who transformed the courtroom into a platform for justice and dignity. As the leader of the African National Congress (ANC), he became the living embodiment of resistance to apartheid. His unwavering commitment to equality, even after 27 years in prison, made him a global symbol of peace, reconciliation, and the moral power of law.
- **George Bizos** – A fearless advocate whose voice thundered against tyranny inside the courtroom. As Nelson Mandela's lifelong friend and legal counsel, Bizos stood firm through the most dangerous trials of the apartheid era. His eloquence and moral clarity saved lives and exposed the regime's cruelty to the world.
- **Priscilla Jana** – A formidable defender of justice whose courage defied an oppressive system. She represented countless political prisoners, including Steve Biko and Mandela, using the law not as a shield but as a weapon of resistance. Her work bridged legal defense and underground activism in the darkest days of apartheid.
- **Geoff Budlender** – A visionary in human rights law and a foundational figure in shaping South Africa's post-apartheid legal framework. His work in constitutional litigation and social justice continues to challenge inequality and ensure that the law serves the marginalized and voiceless.
- **Dullah Omar** – A principled human rights lawyer whose activism against apartheid cost him years of detention and harassment. In post-apartheid South Africa, he became the first Minister of Justice, leading the transformation of the legal system and establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- **Bram Fischer** – An Afrikaner of deep conviction who turned his back on privilege to defend ANC leaders in the Rivonia Trial. He paid the price with his freedom, dying under house arrest. Fischer remains a symbol of moral courage—a white South African who gave everything for Black liberation.
- **Ismail Mahomed** – A towering legal intellect and trailblazer who broke racial barriers in the judiciary. As the first non-white judge in apartheid South Africa and later Chief Justice, he stood as a quiet yet unwavering force for equality, fairness, and judicial integrity.
- **Albie Sachs** – A constitutional architect and lifelong fighter for justice who survived a car bomb attack in exile. His work shaped the new South Africa's Constitution, embedding human dignity and freedom at its core. Sachs turned pain into purpose and became a global icon of restorative justice.
- **Ahmed Kathrada** – A steadfast anti-apartheid activist whose dedication to freedom led him to spend 26 years imprisoned alongside Nelson Mandela. Kathrada's life was a testament to the power of perseverance, humility, and an unwavering commitment to equality and justice.

We also recognize and honor **all other South African lawyers and human rights defenders**, known and unknown, whose tireless efforts and quiet sacrifices have helped shape a more just society.

Their legacy, like that of lawyers around the world, reminds us that the pursuit of justice is a universal mission—one that transcends borders, regimes, and eras.

 In Solidarity with the Defenders of Justice

As the **Universal Rights Association (URA)**, we stand in solidarity with all lawyers who are the voice of justice—those who resist silence in the face of repression, and who defend human dignity, freedoms, and the rule of law against torture, injustice, arbitrary detention, and unlawful trials.

As we honor them today, we reaffirm our commitment to stand shoulder to shoulder with all legal professionals in the pursuit of justice.

We encourage everyone to actively support and honor human rights, not only on special occasions but as a daily commitment.

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