



Press Kit

Paris bar shelter programme for threatened lawyers

Supported by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Ecole de formation des barreaux , the Primo Levi Centre and the centre d'affaires des avocats de Paris

The COVID-19 epidemic has hit hard lawyers worldwide. Violations of the rule of law are increasingly frequent, and lawyers working on sensitive cases are now more exposed and isolated than ever. The *barreau de Paris* (Paris bar) has therefore decided to set up a hospitality and respite scheme for lawyers under threat throughout the world. The scheme is in keeping with the Paris bar's tradition of hospitality and protection.

Serious concern: working as a lawyer has never been so dangerous

Almost every day, lawyers are killed, reported missing, tortured, arrested, threatened and hounded due to their work. China, Iran, Honduras, the Philippines, Columbia, Mexico, Pakistan and Turkey are currently amongst the most dangerous countries for lawyers. Those most at risk are lawyers defending powerful interest groups in cases of the most "sensitive" nature in certain countries. "Sensitive" cases vary from one country to another, but the defence of the following can all be considered examples: the defence of journalists and bloggers, human rights activists, political opponents, trade unionists and victims of torture by state authorities. They also include cases involving the seizure of property. NGOs and international organisations have concluded that the global health crisis has brought about an increase in the abuse of rights and freedoms all over the world. Acts of violence are on the rise, and being a lawyer has never been so dangerous.

Together with journalists, lawyers are considered to have one of most dangerous professions. And yet, lawyers do not necessarily view themselves as human rights activists. They consider themselves primarily as legal professionals and therefore do not instinctively believe they qualify for programmes designed for defenders of human rights.

Aim of scheme: period of respite

This innovative scheme seeks to give lawyers the opportunity to spend some time away from their respective countries and escape the stressful and difficult situations they operate in, and to keep those most at risk away from any immediate danger. The lawyers may therefore find some respite and experience the stress-free environment provided by the French capital, whilst developing their professional networks and skills throughout their stay.

Duration and logistics

Lawyers benefiting from the scheme will be hosted for a fixed period of between two weeks and three months. It is therefore a short stay, whereby the scheme will provide temporary respite as opposed to help to those seeking exile. The programme will cover all costs and make the necessary arrangements for the lawyer's stay, from departure to returning home (travel, accommodation, living etc. costs).

First of its kind

This project is the first of its kind for lawyers. Similar schemes do exist, but they are designed for journalists, scientists and researchers, artists and, more generally, human rights activists.

Scheme beneficiaries: lawyers under threat due to their professional activities

Any lawyer in danger due to their work, in connection with sensitive cases they are working on, such as defending political opponents, journalists, those facing the death penalty, indigenous people, torture victims, LGBT persons, religious minorities, or cases involving corruption or the environment is eligible for the scheme.

Beneficiaries will be chosen based on pre-defined criteria, including how high and imminent the risks are. The scheme is open to lawyers of any country. The selection committee, consisting of key figures of the Paris bar, will select the successful candidates.

Hospitality scheme tailored to beneficiaries...

Specific arrangements will be made with the lawyers benefiting from the scheme, taking into account their personal and professional needs.

They will have a workplace separate from where they are staying, allowing them to keep abreast of their cases. The aim is to provide the lawyer with an environment in which they can carry on their professional activity in peace.

With the involvement of the *Ecole de formation des barreaux* (EFB) and the relevant departments at the Paris bar, the lawyers taking part in the programme will also be able to receive training and access various legal libraries and databases.

In addition, training on cyber security will be offered. Meetings can also be arranged with organisations, the media, NGOs, etc., depending on the lawyers' wishes and needs.

Medical and psychological support will be offered routinely, for this respite period is also a time for the lawyers to recover both mentally and physically.

A network of local volunteer "colleagues-sponsors", on hand to support lawyers taking part in the scheme, will organise social and cultural events to make their stay in Paris enjoyable as well as productive. The "colleagues-sponsors" will also follow up on the lawyers once they have returned to their home countries, to guard against the risk of isolation and to monitor their situations and other risks.

Made possible thanks to numerous partnerships

The first-rate benefits of the scheme are made possible by the many partnerships forged between the Paris bar and key public and private stakeholders. The Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs is supporting the scheme. The City of Paris is giving the lawyers access to sports and cultural facilities and providing a civic and social programme. The *Ecole de formation des barreaux* is providing access to lessons and educational resources. The Primo Levi Centre will make it possible to offer appropriate medical and psychological consultations.

The Team Business Centres are offering premises that are tailored to lawyers' professional requirements in accordance with professional ethics. We hope to continue to grow this already substantial list of supporters and partners.

Funding

For its first year, the scheme will be funded by the Paris bar. After this, other sources of funding will be sought in order to maintain and extend the programme.