

04 April 2025

## Statement from the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales

The Bar Human Rights Committee endorses today's [statement](#) by the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) pledging its strong and unwavering solidarity with the American Bar Association (ABA) as it defends the foundational principles of justice, democracy, and the rule of law.

We strongly denounce President Trump's recent executive orders targeting prominent law firms in the United States, statements attacking judges, threats against the American Bar Association and the introduction of sanctions against the International Criminal Court. These actions represent a direct assault on the rule of law and the fundamental principles of justice.

By singling out firms whose former or current members have been involved in litigation or investigations against him and judges with whose rulings he disagrees, President Trump risks undermining the independence of the legal profession and the judiciary and the lawful work of judges and lawyers. This action is contrary to the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and the UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary.<sup>1</sup> The executive orders against law firms not only jeopardise the viability of the targeted firms but also send a chilling message to all legal professionals and their clients, threatening free speech and legal advocacy. Such measures are antithetical to the values of fairness and impartiality that the legal systems in America are built upon, with which the legal system of England and Wales shares a common heritage.

We are gravely concerned by the recent actions by the United States Government against the American Bar Association. These actions, which include threats to the American Bar Association's funding, membership and its role in legal education, represent a broader attempt to undermine the legal profession and the rule of law. The ABA, along with over 50 other bar associations, has [condemned these actions](#) and called for the defence of the rule of law and the independence of the legal profession. We stand with the American Bar Association (ABA).

We reiterate our condemnation of President Trump's executive order imposing sanctions on the International Criminal Court (ICC). This order undermines international justice and accountability. The ICC plays a crucial role in prosecuting serious international crimes and

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<sup>1</sup> UN Basic Principles of the Role of Lawyers 1990, principle 16 provides that lawyers should be "able to perform their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference" and principle 18 states that lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-role-lawyers>. UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary 1985, paragraph 2 requires judges to decide matters without any restrictions, improper influences, inducements, pressures, threats or interferences. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-independence-judiciary>.

ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable, regardless of their nationality. Our previous statements can be found [here](#).

The Bar Human Rights Committee has a long tradition of speaking out against attacks on judges and lawyers around the world. We call upon all members of the legal community, as well as the broader public, to stand in solidarity against these actions against lawyers and judges and the International Criminal Court. It is imperative that we protect the integrity of our legal institutions and ensure that they remain free from political interference and intimidation.

## NOTES FOR EDITORS

The [Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales](#) (BHRC) is the independent, international human rights arm of the Bar of England and Wales, working to protect the rights of advocates, judges, and human rights defenders around the world. The BHRC's work includes sending impartial observers to monitor trials around the world, issuing public statements and letters of concern, and intervening in cases to provide expertise on international human rights law.

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On 6 February 2025, the US President signed [Executive Order 14203](#) 'Imposing Sanctions on the International Criminal Court'. The Executive Order authorises sanctions on International Criminal Court (ICC) personnel and their immediate family members and specifically imposes sanctions on ICC Prosecutor Karim A. A. Khan KC.

The [International Criminal Court](#) (ICC) is a permanent independent international tribunal established by the Rome Statute in 2002 in the Hague, Netherlands, to investigate and, where warranted, to prosecute individuals charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of aggression. The ICC serves as a vital court of last resort, intervening only when national courts are unwilling or unable to prosecute suspected criminals. The ICC aims to ensure accountability for the gravest crimes, promote justice, and deter future atrocities, thereby contributing to global peace and stability. It currently has 125 member countries.

The Executive Order states that “tangible and significant consequences” will be imposed on ICC officials, “which may include the blocking of property and assets, as well as the suspension of entry into the United States of ICC officials, employees, and agents, as well as their immediate family members” ([EO 14203](#)). The Executive Order also authorises secondary sanctions, namely sanctions against any non-US person determined to have, amongst other things, “materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material or technical support for, or goods or services to or in support of ... any person” against whom financial sanctions have been applied.

On 10 February 2025, the Acting Deputy Attorney General issued a memo instructing federal prosecutors to drop their corruption case against New York City Mayor Eric Adams. In protest against this instruction, to date, six prosecutors have resigned. In her [resignation letter](#) to US Attorney General, Danielle Sasso, then interim US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, stated that there was no legal justification for dismissing the case, and noted that the instruction “raises serious concerns that render the contemplated dismissal inconsistent with my ability and duty to prosecute federal crimes without fear or favor and to advance good-faith arguments before the courts”.

On 25 February 2025, President Trump [directed](#) the Attorney General and other agency directors immediately to suspend any security clearances held by members, partners and employees of a prominent Washington, D.C., law firm, Covington & Burling LLP, who had provided pro bono services to former Special Counsel Jack Smith, who had overseen federal criminal investigations into the events of 6 January 2021 and alleged concealment of classified documents, cases which have since been closed. The memorandum also ordered the termination of government contracts with the firm.

On 6 March 2025, President Trum issued a [similar executive order](#), imposing various measures against another US law firm, Perkins Coie LLP, whose practice includes acting for the US Democratic Party and representing clients challenging the lawfulness of government action. Executive Order 14230 includes immediately suspending security clearances of and restricting access to federal buildings by the firm’s personnel, terminating government contracts with the firm, and requiring all government contractors to disclose any business with the firm. Executive Order 14230 also orders a review of the diversity, equality and inclusion practices of “large, influential, or industry leading law firms”.

On 14 March 2025, President Trump signed another [executive order](#) targeting a third prominent US law firm, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP on the basis (i) that a partner in the firm brought a law suit against alleged participants in the events of 6 January 2021, (ii) the firm’s historic links with a former Manhattan district attorney prosecutor involved in the investigation which resulted in President Trump’s trial and conviction for falsifying business records, and (iii) its diversity, equality and inclusion policies. The executive order includes immediately suspending security clearances of and restricting access to federal buildings by the firm’s personnel and terminating government contracts with the firm.

On 25 March 2025, President Trump signed another [executive order](#) targeting a fourth prominent US law firm, Jenner & Block LLP, on the basis that it had (i) “abandoned the profession’s highest ideals, condoned partisan “lawfare,” and abused its pro bono practice” for providing legal advice and representation to certain clients, and (ii) rehired a member of Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s team (who was also subject to salacious personal criticism in the executive order). The executive order includes immediately suspending security clearances of and restricting access to federal buildings by the firm’s personnel, terminating government contracts with the firm, requiring all government contractors to disclose any business with the firm and limiting the hiring of Jenner & Block employees by government agencies.

On 27 March 2025, President Trump signed another [executive order](#) targeting a fifth major US law firm, Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP, on the basis that it had (i) “abandoned the profession’s highest ideals, condoned partisan “lawfare,” and abused its pro bono practice” for providing legal advice and representation to certain clients, and (ii) welcomed former Special Counsel Robert Mueller and two of his team members into the firm after they conducted “the most partisan investigations in American history”. The executive order includes immediately suspending security clearances of and restricting access to federal buildings by the firm’s personnel, terminating government contracts with the firm, requiring all government contractors to disclose any business with the firm and limiting the hiring of WilmerHale employees by government agencies.

On 14 February 2025, the Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issued a [memo](#) denouncing the ABA; prohibiting FTC political appointees from holding leadership roles in the ABA, participating in ABA events or renewing their ABA memberships; and announcing that the FTC will no long support any employee’s ABA membership or participation in ABA activities. In a [letter](#) dated 28 February 2025, the US Attorney General raised the prospect of revoking the ABA’s status as the accreditation body for US law schools. The ABA’s response can be found [here](#). The

ABA was founded in 1878 and is the largest voluntary professional association in the world. It is non-partisan and is committed to advancing the rule of law across the United States and globally.

On 3 March 2025, the American Bar Association (ABA) issued a [statement](#) that details the disturbing hostile environment that now exists for legal professionals in the country, which has resulted in reported personal attacks, intimidation, firings and demotions for Justice Department lawyers and assistant U.S. attorneys simply for doing their job. Other statements by the ABA can be found [here](#).