Dear Sirs,

**Lebanon: Threats and intimidation against lawyer Mohamed Sablouh**

The Law Society of England and Wales (the “Law Society”) is the professional body representing more than 200,000 solicitors in England and Wales. Its concerns include upholding the independence of the legal profession, the rule of law and human rights throughout the world. The Law Society holds special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations since 2014.

Since 2007, Mohammad Ahmad Samir Sablouh has been practising as a lawyer. He is a member of the Tripoli Bar Association and was recently nominated as its Director of the Centre for the defence of detainees' rights. He has assisted victims of torture and arbitrary detention. This year, the number of threats against him have increased for exercising his professional duties.

At a meeting of 14 April 2021, convened by the Minister of Justice of Lebanon with the heads of security agencies and members of the Beirut and Tripoli bar associations, Mr Sablouh stated that he had provided information to Amnesty International for a report on the arbitrary detention and torture of Syrian refugees, after having unsuccessfully exhausted domestic remedies. The Director of General Security allegedly responded by accusing Mr Sablouh of committing “high treason” for speaking with international NGOs.

On 15 August 2021, Mr Sablouh filed a case on behalf of his detained client for ill-treatment under the anti-torture law because his client had been severely beaten the day before by military police in the Fakhr Al Din military barracks in Beirut. Mr Sablouh requested that a forensic doctor be appointed within 24 hours, but his client was only examined over a month later, when the doctor concluded that there were no signs of torture.
On 23 September 2021, the Military Court’s Government Commissioner allegedly heard Mr. Sablouh’s client without his lawyer being present and allegedly pressured the client to sign a confession, stating that the torture allegations had been fabricated by Mr. Sablouh. On 28 September 2021, the Military Court sent a letter to the Tripoli Bar Association requesting that the immunity of Mr Sablouh as a lawyer be lifted to prosecute him. On 27 October 2021, the Tripoli Bar Association rejected that request.

In September 2021, Mr Sablouh was intimidated while defending Syrian refugees at risk of deportation to Syria and who had been detained by the General Security. General Security officers interrogated the detainees about their relation to Mr Sablouh. On 2 October 2021, a news outlet published an article about the General Security’s handling of Syrian refugees, in which Mr Sablouh and one of his clients were cited. Two days later, the General Security department responded to the article, stating that Mr Sablouh had “no right to issue judgments or distribute information that is baseless and inaccurate”.

We were informed that, on that same day, the Government’s Commissioner to the Military Court requested Mr Sablouh to come to court as he wanted to ask about one of the torture cases he had filed. Mr Sablouh feared an arrest and sent one of his colleagues. The Government’s Commissioner allegedly laughed and said: “is there any arrest warrant against Mr Sablouh?” and did not ask Mr Sablouh’s colleague any questions.

The Law Society is very concerned about this ongoing intimidation of Mr. Sablouh while he is carrying out his professional duties as a lawyer representing his clients.

The UN Basic Principles Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers state:

16. Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

18. Lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions.

The UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

9.1. In the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the promotion and protection of human rights as referred to in the present Declaration, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to benefit from an effective remedy and to be protected in the event of the violation of those rights.

3. To the same end, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, inter alia: […] (c) To offer and provide professionally qualified legal assistance or other relevant advice and assistance in defending human rights and fundamental freedoms.
Considering the above, we urge the relevant authorities to:

1. Cease all acts of intimidation, harassment, and possible prosecution or other legal action against Mr. Sablouh immediately; and
2. To ensure that Mr. Sablouh, and all other lawyers in Lebanon, can carry out their professional duties as a lawyer without undue external interference, including threats, harassment, and prosecution.

We will continue to monitor the situation of Mohamed Sablouh as well as that of other lawyers in Lebanon.

Yours sincerely,

I. Stephanie Boyce
President
The Law Society of England and Wales

Cc

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