Joint statement: Concern over the sentencing of prominent human rights lawyer Lu Siwei

Lawyers for Lawyers, Asian Lawyers Network, The Rights Practice, The Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, The 29 Principles, The Law Society of England and Wales and the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute express their grave concern over the recent sentencing of prominent human rights lawyer Lu Siwei to 11 months' imprisonment following a closed trial in Chengdu, China.

On 18 April 2025, the Chenghua District Court sentenced Lu Siwei to 11 months in prison and imposed a fine of 10,000 yuan (approximately $1,370) for the alleged offence of 'illegally crossing the border'. The proceedings were conducted behind closed doors, raising serious concerns regarding the fairness of the trial and Lu Siwei's due process rights under international law. We are advised that Lu Siwei intends to appeal the verdict. The undersigned organisations strongly emphasise the urgent need for Lu Siwei's right to an effective remedy and fair trial to be fully respected, including access to independent legal counsel in order to meaningfully challenge his conviction.

Lu Siwei, an insurance lawyer by profession, is widely known for representing clients in politically sensitive cases, including defending one of the 12 Hong Kong activists jailed for attempting to flee to Taiwan. As a result of his professional activities and work defending human rights, Lu Siwei has been subjected to persistent harassment and surveillance and to the subsequent revocation of his license to practice law in 2021, as well as the imposition of an exit ban preventing him from leaving China. In July 2023, despite holding a valid U.S. visa and Chinese passport, he was arrested in Laos while attempting to reunite with his family in the United States. Lu was detained for over a month in Laos without access to legal counsel or his family before being forcibly repatriated to China, in violation of the principle of non-refoulement under international human rights law.

We are deeply concerned that Lu Siwei's arrest, detention, and sentencing are directly linked to the peaceful exercise of his professional duties as a lawyer and his legitimate efforts to seek safety and reunite with his family. We emphasise that the charge of 'illegally crossing

the border' appears to be intended to penalise him for his human rights work, rendering his detention arbitrary under international law.

Furthermore, we remain alarmed by reports of Lu Siwei's deteriorating health while in detention. According to his wife, Lu suffers from untreated thyroid disease and worsening psoriasis due to poor detention conditions, lack of adequate nutrition, and denial of necessary medical treatment, in violation of China's obligations under the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, no one shall be subjected to arbitrary detention, and all detainees must be treated with humanity and dignity and have their rights to a fair trial respected. In addition, the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers provide that lawyers must be able to perform all of their professional duties without fear of reprisal, intimidation, or arbitrary prosecution.

In light of the above, the undersigned organisations urgently call on China's authorities to:

- Immediately ensure the unconditional release of Lu Siwei from detention and drop the charges against him in relation to his legitimate professional activities;
- Pending his appeal, ensure Lu Siwei is held in conditions that meet international human rights standards and that he receives adequate and appropriate medical care for his health conditions;
- Ensure that Lu Siwei has access to an effective remedy and timely access to independent legal counsel for his appeal, in line with international human rights standards.
- Cease all acts of harassment, intimidation, and arbitrary detention against lawyers in China;
- Uphold the rights of all lawyers to carry out their professional functions without interference and to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association, and movement.

We will continue to closely monitor Lu Siwei's situation and the broader pattern of repression against lawyers and human rights defenders in China.