Joint statement:

Travel ban and deteriorating health of human rights lawyer Lu Siwei

The Law Society of England and Wales, The Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, Lawyers for Lawyers, Asian Lawyers Network, and International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute are gravely concerned about the arbitrary travel restrictions still imposed against human rights lawyer Lu Siwei after his release from prison in August 2025, especially in context of his recent lung-cancer diagnosis. Our organisations are concerned that this travel ban has been imposed on Lu Siwei because of his legitimate work as a lawyer, something for which he has faced harassment at the hands of the Chinese authorities since January 2021.

Lu Siwei is a prominent human rights lawyer, known for representing clients in politically sensitive cases. Our organisations previously wrote to the relevant authorities to express concern about Lu Siwei's arrest after he was forcibly repatriated to China from Laos, despite holding a valid US visa and Chinese passport. We also denounced his sentencing after a closed trial, and the mistreatment and deteriorating health he suffered while in prison.

Despite being released from prison, Lu Siwei remains under strict surveillance and is subject to a travel ban, limiting his movement and preventing him from travelling to the US, where his wife and daughter live, and accessing medical treatment. Such restrictions are frequently applied to lawyers and other human rights defenders, who have been released from prison, as a further means of oppression and control. In practice, these restrictions mean that while Lu Siwei is officially "free", the reality is very different – his freedom of movement is denied and his whereabouts and communications closely monitored. As well as infringing upon an individual's daily life and rights, such restrictions can have significant implications for their well-being.

The travel ban imposed on Lu Siwei carries particularly serious consequences. It not only hinders him from reuniting with his wife and daughter but also denies him from accessing medical care in the US. After being released from prison Lu Siwei was diagnosed with early-stage lung cancer. Lu Siwei has expressed concern that if he underwent medical treatment in China he would lack any post-operative care or emotional support without access to his family.

Furthermore, his imprisonment led to the suspension of his medical insurance, leaving him unable to afford surgery, which is estimated to cost up to 60,000 RMB (approximately $8,200). Hoping to reinstate his insurance by repaying missed payments that occurred while

he was imprisoned, Lu Siwei has opted to delay surgery for six months. His treatment options and financial hardship have been compounded by his imprisonment, the revocation of his licence to practice law, and the travel ban in place.

Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, guarantees the right to freedom of movement. This includes the freedom to move and reside within a country's borders, as well as the right to leave any country, including one's own, and the right to return to one's country. Any restriction to this right must not be arbitrary and must be consistent with other human rights. We are concerned that the restrictions imposed on Lu Siwei's freedom of movement are arbitrary, fail to meet the requirements of necessity and proportionality, and are inconsistent with other rights, including the right to freedom of expression and the right to family life, guaranteed under international law.

Furthermore, according to Article 16 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, governments should "ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (…) and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognised professional duties, standards and ethics". Moreover, Article 23 of the Basic Principles provides that: "Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association, and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights." These principles are also reflected in the newly adopted Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer which will be open for accession by States worldwide once into force.

Accordingly, the signing organisations urge the Chinese authorities to:

1. Lift the travel ban imposed on Lu Siwei immediately and halt the continuing surveillance and harassment against him and any other members of the legal profession in China.
2. Ensure that Lu Siwei's freedom of movement is not arbitrarily restricted in accordance with international law, and that he can conduct his professional activities without fear of reprisals and free from undue interference.
3. Allow Lu Siwei to be reunited with his family members in the US and have timely access to the medical care of his choice.

Signatories:

Law Society of England and Wales

The Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE)

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC)

Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)

Asian Lawyers Network (ALN)

International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)