

Monday, 31 December 2018

Law Council President-elect asks Foreign Minister to stand up to China and urge justice for detained human rights lawyer

The President-elect of the Law Council of Australia has written personally to Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, urging her to make immediate diplomatic representations to China regarding human rights lawyer Wang Quanzhang.

Mr Wang was one of several hundred legal activists arrested in July 2015 as part of the "709" crackdown and is currently on trial in a closed court in China for alleged subversion of state power. [He has been detained since then without contact with his family and reportedly without legal representation for much of this time.](#)

In his letter to Senator Marise Payne, the incoming President of the Law Council, Arthur Moses SC, emphasised the matter was urgent and grave.

"The Law Council believes that Australia has an important role to play in promoting and defending the rule of law and human rights in the Asia-Pacific region," Mr Moses said.

"Accordingly, we respectfully ask the Australian Government make diplomatic representations to China as a matter of urgency to ensure a fair and transparent trial for Mr Wang."

Mr Moses said the Law Council was acutely troubled by reports that lawyers seeking to represent Mr Wang had been menaced and discouraged.

"Legal representation must be available to every citizen, not just the powerful or the popular," Mr Moses said.

"Solicitors and barristers defend the rights of all. This means that sometimes lawyers are called upon to act for unpopular persons or persons who a Government alleges to have broken the law. These lawyers should not be regarded as subversive or promoting the law being broken by merely representing a person who is accused of such matters.

"In accordance with the United Nations' Basic Principles on the Role of the Lawyers, it is vital for every nation to have an independent legal profession that can practice without fear of reprisal. This is critical to ensure that not only is justice done, justice is seen to be done.

"The Australian legal profession and the Australian community have a keen interest in promoting and defending the rule of law internationally and in encouraging a Chinese legal system that is robust, fair and impartial."

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The Law Council of Australia is the national voice of the legal profession, promoting justice and the rule of law.