



**PRESIDENCY OF THE FRENCH NATIONAL BAR COUNCIL**

**STRATEGIC ACTION REPORT**

On 17 June, the National Bar Council will assume the presidency of the OIAD.

The CNB Presidency naturally intends to build on the initiatives already in place whilst enhancing the OIAD's visibility.

Established in 2016, the International Observatory for Lawyers at Risk (OIAD) has gradually established itself as a key player in the protection of lawyers threatened in the course of their professional duties. Its work is based on a combination of alerts, operational support and international advocacy, in a context marked by a worsening of attacks on the independence of the legal profession worldwide.

The significant increase in the number of alerts regarding threatened lawyers and the proliferation of systemic crises affecting the legal profession now require a strengthening of the OIAD's intervention tools and strategic structure.

At the same time, this increase requires us, with resources remaining constant, to exercise rigorous budgetary control and make an additional effort in terms of visibility.

With this in mind, this report suggests developing six priority areas aimed at strengthening the organisation's visibility, impact and governance.

I. Celebrating the OIAD's 10th anniversary and enhancing the visibility of its actions

The OIAD is ten years old. Ten years of observing, alerting and denouncing the abuses suffered by our colleagues, but also of supporting them. We all hope that one day lawyers will no longer need the Observatory. In the meantime, celebrating this anniversary in Rome, where the Statute of the International Criminal Court was adopted 18 years ago, is a duty we must fulfil. The rule of law has never been so undermined. Regarded as an obstacle to the will of the people, the law is disparaged, and its practitioners threatened.

In this context, the protection of lawyers by the law must be our constant concern.

This anniversary must be seen as a strategic lever for communication and advocacy, particularly regarding the Convention on the Protection of Lawyers, which must be ratified not only in Europe but also by third countries where the OIAD regularly intervenes on behalf of threatened lawyers. The organisation of high-profile international events — symposia, conferences, publications — will help to highlight the OIAD's achievements and strengthen its position as a leading player.

At the same time, the development of a structured communication strategy appears essential. The visibility of the Observatory's actions depends largely on its ability to produce educational tools and reach diverse audiences beyond specialist circles. Appropriate communication should enable:

- raising awareness of the democratic issues linked to the protection of lawyers;
- encourage the mobilisation of bar associations;
- generate increased media coverage.

Finally, highlighting emblematic cases of the OIAD's interventions and sharing testimonials from supported lawyers will help to bring the organisation's work to life and strengthen its impact.

That is why we suggest the preparation of a publication dedicated to our 10 years of activity, detailing the actions carried out over the past decade, whilst highlighting the significant deterioration in the safety of lawyers.

## II. Promoting the European Convention on the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer: towards international standards

The adoption of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Legal Profession sets out a major historic step forward. As the first legally binding international instrument in this field, this text enshrines fundamental principles such as the independence of the profession, the confidentiality of communications and protection against pressure and reprisals.

The OIAD was an observer member of the Committee of Experts responsible for drafting the Convention.

The CCBE and national bar associations are responsible for monitoring and promoting the swift ratification of the Convention by European states.

The Convention is set to become an international benchmark, particularly due to its openness to non-member states of the Council of Europe and the establishment of a dedicated monitoring mechanism.

Beyond the European sphere, this Convention provides a unique opportunity to define international standards for the protection of lawyers. The OIAD, through its network and expertise, is particularly well placed to support this initiative and promote its adoption on a global scale.

Opened for signature in Luxembourg on 13 May 2025, the Convention has already been signed by 29 states.

However, there is still a long way to go before this text becomes fully effective, even as the situation of lawyers in many countries requires immediate protection.

In this context, the OIAD must position itself as a key player in its promotion and implementation, particularly at the international level. Several areas of action can be identified:

- Encouraging its ratification, particularly by the home states of the OIAD's member bar associations. To this end, we will need to work in synergy with the other international bodies responsible for this convention
- Promote the Convention and its adoption by third countries, which involves providing training to raise awareness of it amongst third countries, as well as
- Systematic invocation of the Convention's provisions in alerts, reports and Universal Periodic Reviews;
- Preparing resources on the Convention in several languages;
- Preparing an advocacy note for all our networks regarding the Convention;
- Increasing training and communication with third countries

In order to make efficient progress, the CNB will offer to set up a working group dedicated to the Convention within the OIAD, which will report to each OIAD Board meeting on the actions taken in this regard and will also maintain a dedicated page on the website.

### III. Developing fact-finding missions

Fact-finding missions are an essential tool for documenting violations of the legal profession and guiding the OIAD's advocacy work. They enable a contextualised analysis of national situations and facilitate the identification of specific needs.

It is essential to structure these missions around a shared methodology, including the preparation, monitoring and evaluation of interventions.

Strengthening these missions involves, in particular:

- Sending international delegations to countries at risk;
- Establishing a monitoring network to better document high-risk situations;
- Activating local diplomatic networks to support threatened lawyers;
- Drafting detailed reports accompanied by operational recommendations;
- Coordination with international mechanisms, particularly those of the United Nations.

These missions then facilitate the submission of reports within the framework of procedures such as the UN Universal Periodic Review, which constitute an important strategic lever in this regard.

Finally, it is essential to ensure long-term monitoring of the situations identified, in order to guarantee the effectiveness of the actions undertaken.

We propose to conduct an exploratory mission in a country where lawyers face systemic difficulties and which has not yet received international attention.

The country will be the subject of a collective decision within the OIAD Board, in light of current events.

#### IV. Strengthening budgetary control and developing new memberships

The OIAD has seen a significant increase in its activities and areas of intervention.

Over the past 10 years, the Observatory has evolved from a simple advocacy organisation into a practical tool for assisting lawyers at risk, thanks to the implementation of emergency aid, which is essential but costly.

Following two years of financial deficits, covered by reserves accumulated during the pandemic, the expansion of the OIAD's activities now requires sound financial management and a return to financial equilibrium.

In this context, several priorities must be defined:

- the introduction of budget monitoring tools to provide a clear overview of resource allocation. As the financial year straddles two presidencies of the organisation, it is essential to coordinate actions and projects by improving internal financial management procedures;
- The CNB will propose the introduction of a budget ceiling for each type of activity.
- The CNB will also propose increasing institutional partnerships to carry out operational projects at a lower cost.

Furthermore, diversifying funding sources appears essential. It is important to note that the OIAD's sole source of funding is the annual membership fees of its member bar associations. The CNB wishes to use its presidency to launch a new membership drive in France and in French-speaking countries.

#### V. Structuring support for lawyers in exile

Political crises and breaches of the rule of law are leading more and more lawyers to flee their countries. This reality requires the OIAD and the CNB to develop appropriate mechanisms to support these professionals.

The "House for Lawyers in Exile" project illustrates this development. It aims to enable lawyers forced into exile to continue practising their profession and to participate in the defence of human rights from their host country. This scheme addresses new needs arising from systemic crises, which are not covered by traditional protection mechanisms.

This new situation often requires providing long-term assistance to lawyers.

Support for lawyers in exile must therefore be structured around several key areas:



- legal and administrative support;
- material and logistical support;
- integration into the host bar associations.

The CNB suggests that the OIAD develop local institutional partnerships to help refugee lawyers succeed in their integration by setting up language and national law courses, as well as producing a guide on supporting lawyers in exile in the countries from which the member bar associations originate.

## VI. Establishing dialogue with other judicial actors

The erosion of the rule of law calls into question the independence of judges, who, like lawyers, find themselves facing threats. Establishing solidarity with these actors through missions or forums for dialogue is essential to defending legal democracy.

## VII. Reforming the OIAD's governance

The development of the OIAD requires an adaptation of its governance to ensure the effectiveness of its actions and the coherence of its operations.

The rules of procedure set out the responsibilities of the Observatory's bodies and organise the coordination of activities, notably through the role of the Permanent Executive Secretariat in monitoring alerts, communication and the coordination of missions.

In this context, several issues appear to be priorities:

- clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the various bodies;
- strengthening coordination among members;
- enhancing the involvement of OIAD members;

Having been aware of this issue for several years, the OIAD has reformed its internal regulations to highlight the expertise of member bar associations whilst streamlining the decision-making process.

Nevertheless, the CNB proposes to examine the feasibility of a statutory reform to expand the composition of the Executive Committee or to create an intermediate body between the General Assembly and the Board, thereby enabling bar associations wishing to become involved within the OIAD to do so.

The Board and the General Assembly cannot be the only forums for the involvement of OIAD member bar associations. To encourage their involvement, the CNB also proposes organising thematic meetings throughout the year within the member bar associations.



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## **Conclusion**

In the face of growing threats to the legal profession, strengthening the OIAD is a major challenge for the defence of the rule of law at the international level.

Over the past 10 years, the OIAD has demonstrated the need for coordinated, structured and strengthened action, based on the mobilisation of bar associations and international cooperation.

The OIAD's tenth anniversary should be seen not only as a time for celebration, but as a strategic turning point for sustainably expanding its work and its impact.