



THE
LAW SOCIETY
OF NORTHERN IRELAND



THE PLEDGE TO UPHOLD THE RULE OF LAW



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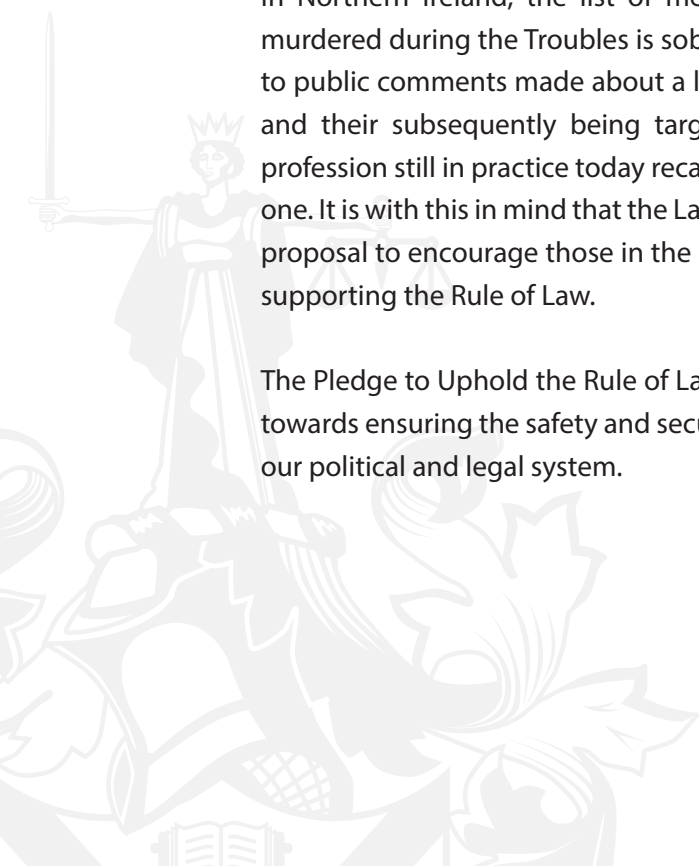
Introduction

The principle that the Rule of Law applies equally to all persons and organisations is the cornerstone of a fair and democratic society. Of the supporting pillars which support the Rule of Law, the independence of the legal profession is among the most important. Legal professionals work diligently to protect their clients' rights, hold others to account for rights' violations and ensure that individuals have access to justice, representing their clients and safeguarding a fair and impartial system.

Internationally, respect for the Rule of Law is not a given – corruption, political interference and persecution of legal professionals is unfortunately commonplace across the globe. In the United Kingdom we have the potential to take for granted the protections and freedoms afforded by the Rule of Law which is embedded in our legal and political system. Regrettably, however, recent years have seen a steady erosion of respect for the Rule of Law in our public discourse – led by dangerous and ill-informed commentary from our media and political representatives. This in turn has led to the shameful situation where threats, harassment and intimidation is aimed at legal professionals simply for carrying out their jobs.

In Northern Ireland, the list of members of the judiciary and advocates who were murdered during the Troubles is soberingly long. In some instances there are clear links to public comments made about a lawyer, linking their work to those they represented and their subsequently being targeted. Many members of Northern Ireland's legal profession still in practice today recall these times, making this matter an acutely painful one. It is with this in mind that the Law Society of Northern Ireland is putting forward this proposal to encourage those in the public domain to re-commit to respecting and fully supporting the Rule of Law.

The Pledge to Uphold the Rule of Law – and the principles which underpin it – is a step towards ensuring the safety and security of the legal profession that is the foundation of our political and legal system.





THE PLEDGE TO UPHOLD THE RULE OF LAW

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recognising the Rule of Law as the foundation of a just
and democratic society, commit to supporting and
upholding the independence of the legal profession and
the judiciary which underpin the Rule of Law.

[I/we] will uphold the principles written here
in order to ensure that those who work in the
interests of justice are not subjected to threat
or persecution.

Signed

Date

The Supporting Principles

All signatories to the Independent Rule of Law Pledge commit to supporting the following principles:

1. **Independence.** The independent legal professions are critical to our justice system and ensuring that all individuals and organisations are treated equally under the law. No action should be taken which would undermine the legal professions' independence as this would be harmful to the Rule of Law, protection of individuals' rights and access to justice.
2. **Responsibility.** Those with a public platform must act responsibly when using their platform to discuss legal cases and must be mindful of potentially harmful impacts of their statements on the parties involved or their legal advisers. They should refrain from engaging in any form of reporting or rhetoric that could lead to threats, harassment, attacks, or intimidation against members of the legal profession or their families.
3. **Fairness.** The right to a fair trial is absolute and is intrinsically linked to the right to have legal representation. Lawyers must be free to consult with their clients, without any intimidation or interference and care should be taken not to undermine the relationship or trust between the lawyer and their client. It is not fair or appropriate to equate lawyers with the actions or cause of their clients.
4. **Balance and impartiality.** Those making public statements about a legal case should have regard to presenting a balanced position – reflecting differing views of the parties involved and relevant context. Care must be taken at all times to ensure that no action is taken or statements made which have the potential to prejudice an ongoing legal case.
5. **Transparency.** Those making public statements about a legal case should be open and transparent about any related interests or conflicts – perceived or otherwise – related to the case or any relationship they have to the parties involved.
6. **Accuracy.** Reporting or discussion of legal cases must be based on accurate information. If a situation occurs where misleading information has been used, a correction and/or retraction should issue promptly, along with an apology, and with the same degree of prominence as the initial error.