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## Public Statement

### **The Law Society of Upper Canada expresses grave concern about the harassment and intimidation of lawyer Michel Togué in Cameroon**

Toronto, ON — The Law Society of Upper Canada expresses grave concern about the harassment and intimidation of lawyer Michel Togué in Cameroon.

Michel Togué is a human rights lawyer who defends clients charged with homosexuality in Cameroon, where consensual same-sex conduct is criminalized and subject to a maximum prison sentence of five years. In March 2017, he was awarded the Dutch Geuzenpenning Award for his work and advocacy on behalf of the LGBT community in his country.

It has come to the Law Society's attention that in early 2017, Michel Togué received multiple death threats as a result of his legal work on behalf of individuals who identify as LGBT. Reports indicate that when he subsequently approached Cameroon's Lawyer's Association for assistance, its president advised Michel Togué: "Stop defending the LGBT community and you won't have problems anymore." Similarly, his request for protection was denied by Cameroonian police.

Michel Togué, along with his wife and children, first began receiving death threats in the form of emails and text messages in October 2012. As the death threats against him and his family escalated, his wife and children sought asylum in the United States. Michel Togué, however, chose to remain in Cameroon to continue his work with the LGBT community.

In light of these circumstances, the Law Society urges the Government of Cameroon to comply with Cameroon's obligations under international human rights laws, including the United Nations' *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers*.

Article 16 of the *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers* states:

Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

Article 17 states:

Where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities.

Article 18 states:

Lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions.

Furthermore, Article 23 provides:

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 law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization.

The Law Society urges the Government of Cameroon to:

- a. immediately conduct a fair, impartial and independent investigation into the harassment and intimidation of Michel Togu  in order to identify all those responsible, bring them to trial and apply to them civil, penal and/or administrative sanctions provided by law;
- b. put an end to all acts of harassment against Michel Togu  and all other lawyers in Cameroon;
- c. guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Michel Togu ;
- d. ensure that all lawyers in Cameroon can carry out their professional duties and activities without fear of reprisals, physical violence or other human rights violations; and
- e. ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments.