

Free Alex Saab Delegation Attends Meeting of African Bar Association

By [John Philpot](#) and [Roger D. Harris](#)

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*An international Free Alex Saab delegation attended the annual meeting of the African Bar Association in Niamey, Niger, on Oct. 3-7. Venezuelan diplomat **Alex Saab**, who has been under arrest in Cabo Verde since June 2020 by orders of the U.S., is fighting extradition to Miami.*

His “crime” is organizing humanitarian missions to procure food and medicine for Venezuela – in violation of the illegal U.S. blockade.

The Free Alex Saab delegation was composed of Canadian **John Philpot**, a lawyer specializing in international law who represented the American Association of Jurists and regularly attends AFBAR conferences; Cabo Verdean-American **Bishop Filipe Teixeira**, who traveled to Cabo Verde in June in support of Alex Saab; Venezuelan **Laila Taj El Dine**, a diplomat to the United Nations, lawyer, university professor, and international analyst; and Venezuelan **Pedro Carvajalino**, media specialist.

African Bar Association welcomes Free Alex Saab delegation



The Free Alex Saab delegation was well received by the conference, which was attended by

many honored African leaders, including Niger **President Mohamed Bazoum**, along with former presidents of Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Some conferees were already familiar with the egregious U.S. judicial over-reach that had resulted in Saab being seized from his airplane when it made a fuel stop in Cabo Verde on its way from Caracas to Tehran.

The fifty-year-old AFBAR is a professional body uniting individual lawyers and national legal associations in Africa. The association brings together the five African sub-regional associations spread over the continent. AFBAR seeks to foster policies to better the continent's socio-economic and political development.

AFBAR President **Hannibal Uwaifo** delivered the opening address on respecting the rule of law in strong opposition to military coups. A theme running through the conference was the importance of resolving African problems in Africa, free from Western interference.

For example, AFBAR will not support cooperation with the International Criminal Court investigation of the Nigerian military and Boko Haram unless the investigation includes how Boko Haram is financed.

One participant, a young lawyer, explained that independence requires full national economic and military control. In his opinion, with a French and especially U.S. military presence in many countries, politicians may take their orders from outside powers.

Some African countries are independent, such as Algeria, which rigorously controls its own borders and its economy without neo-colonial control. However, Cabo Verde, one of the smallest and poorest countries in the world, evidently finds it difficult to resist U.S. pressure regarding Alex Saab.

Conference upholds ECOWAS Court decision to free Alex Saab

The regional Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) Court had ordered Cabo Verde to not only release Saab but also pay him \$200,000 in damages. That was on March 15 of this year, but Cabo Verde has still not complied with the court order. Nevertheless, Cabo Verde had signed and ratified the treaty creating the court, attended the hearings, is a full member of ECOWAS, and has at least one judge on the court.

As the AFBAR conference reaffirmed, it is the duty of the bar associations to advocate for the ECOWAS Court. The conference session on the ECOWAS Court explained clearly that it was not an appeals court but an international court of primary jurisdiction created by treaty. The Saab delegation was afforded full status at the session, where delegates Felipe Teixeira and Laila El Dine spoke with AFBAR President Uwaifo in attendance.

Free Alex Saab press conference and Sanctions Kill report

The international Free Alex Saab delegation held a press conference at which it presented the case for freeing the Venezuelan diplomat to local media.

John Philpot presented and distributed copies of a report on "We don't deserve this — the impact and consequences of U.S. sanctions," which more broadly addresses the unilateral coercive measures imposed on some three dozen countries, 15 of which are in Africa, that comprise a third of humanity.

Philpot, along with Rick Sterling and David Paul, authored the comprehensive report for the Sanctions Kill Coalition. A free PDF of the report is available online at tinyurl.com/f52h67ze.

At a session on contemporary legal problems and the rule of law, Laila El Dine and John Philpot presented the Alex Saab case, raising issues which go to the substance of his illegal detention. President Uwaifo once again spoke of the need to take positive action to ensure respect for the March 15 ECOWAS Court decision.

John Philpot stressed that these critical cases can be won, citing the recent release of Meng Wanzhou. She had been illegally detained by Canada for more than a thousand days in an attempt to extradite her over a transaction between a Chinese bank and Iran that allegedly was in violation of U.S. sanctions on Iran. U.S. judicial overreach can threaten diplomats and businesspersons worldwide if this tendency is not terminated.

The closing session included resolutions, followed by two press conferences, where the Free Alex Saab issue was further discussed and supported. The AFBAR press conferences, presided over by President Uwaifo, presented the Alex Saab defense issues, including respect for the ECOWAS Court decision. International delegates El Dine, Philpot, and Teixeira spoke at the second press conference.

AFBAR has taken the issue of the ECOWAS Court seriously, although the vice president of the court lamented the lack of enforcement mechanisms. Proposals were offered such as imposing sanctions against Cabo Verde officials, which would be legally constructed as a function of the regional ECOWAS community and not illegally, as with the unilateral U.S. sanctions.

Other measures, such as expelling Cabo Verde from ECOWAS and special legal procedures, were considered. A committee was formed to take this issue on actively, presided over by Chief Prosecutor of Liberia Sayma Syrenius Cephis.

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