Sylvain Savolainen

Associated Tenant
CALLED 2013



Sylvain is a senior criminal lawyer, based in Geneva, Switzerland. His areas of expertise cover criminal law, white-collar crime, international criminal law and corporate liability. He also has expertise in human rights, in particular in business and human rights issues.

As a recognised trial and criminal lawyer, Sylvain is engaged by clients that include individuals, high net worth individuals, small and medium-sized enterprises, multinationals, a leading international foundation and governments.

Sylvain's economic crime practice comprises complex multijurisdictional cases. Sylvain assisted and represented a high net worth individual accused of money laundering between the Republic of Congo, Spain, Portugal and Switzerland; a client defrauded of millions by fraudulent contracts between France and Switzerland; criminal proceedings against a private bank with an amount of more than CHF 40 million at stake; representing a company and an individual in a case of alleged money laundering in Switzerland of oil pillaging in Libya. This type of cases often arise in commercial transactions where Sylvain may be engaged to work with international and multi-disciplinary teams.

In his International Criminal Law and Human Rights practice, Sylvain is currently representing Mr Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, considered by the U.S. Government as one of the most "High Value Detainees", held in Guantánamo detention camp unlawfully and without judgement since 2006 - see UN legal Opinion obtained, a radio interview and one of the press articles-, accused of being the mastermind of the attack and bombing of the U.S. Navy war ship USS Cole on 12 October 2000. Sylvain also worked in a defence team in the war crimes case against Abdallah Banda and Saleh Jerbo before the International Criminal Court (ICC) regarding Darfur and the situation of Sudan.

He advises clients such as multinationals and foundations having their activities in challenging contexts or conflict affected contexts in assessing a situation, due diligence obligations, anticipating or dealing with a crisis and a need in the context of national or international proceedings and prelitigation. He is also consulted by the media on these issues – see for example TV interview here and here; press interviews here and here.

In general criminal law, the type of case he deals with includes rape, attempted murder, violent assault, human trafficking and child abuse.

Sylvain also has respected experience and expertise in pleading and cross-examination. In this respect, he is regularly invited to provide training to lawyers on the matter or to help individuals, such as witnesses and experts, gain confidence when giving evidence in legal proceedings (see for example radio and press interviews).

Since 2024, Sylvain has been appointed by the Swiss Government to sit among the 15 experts of Switzerland forming the Swiss Federal Commission against Racism.

He is regularly invited to speak and give lectures at international congresses as well as at various universities.

Sylvain is the Vice-President of the International Criminal Defence Commission of the UIA (International Association of Lawyers), member of the Human Rights Committee of the ECBA (European Criminal Bar Association), member of the Board of Prison Insider, member of the Advisory Committee of VOCAL (Victims of Crime Association of Lawyers), and former member of the Human Rights Commission of the Geneva Bar Association.

In 2015, Sylvain Savolainen won the first prize of the prestigious Michel Nançoz trial pleading and eloquence competition organized by the Geneva Bar. The same year, he was awarded the third prize of the eloquence competition Prix Paris-Montreal de la francophonie. In 2012, the University of Geneva awarded him the prize for best Masters in Law thesis for his work on the corporate criminal liability.

Before becoming a lawyer, Sylvain was a photographer and a reporter for ten years; he

collaborated with the international press and various national radio stations (New York Times, GEO, Figaro Magazine, Herald Tribune, La Repubblica, La Stampa, El Mundo, L'Hebdo, RTS, France Inter, France Culture).

In 2007, he received the Swiss Press Photo Award for the best feature of the year conducted abroad for his reporting on the post-war situation in Sierra Leone and international criminal justice.

Notable Cases

General Crime

Individual X, 2020

Representation and defence a Professor of University in administrative and criminal proceedings accused of sexual assault, psychological harassment, discrimination and mobbing.

Individual X, 2020-ongoing

Representation of a minor stabbed several times and hit in the head with an iron bar, who was left as dead. Criminal proceedings for attempt of murder.

Read more on 20 minutes

Individual X, 2019

Defence in criminal proceedings of a client following a car chase with the police, slaloming through traffic and driving the wrong way. Police officers injured and a police vehicle crashed into a wall and then burnt. Client charged with endangering the lives of others, obstructing the performance of an official act and various traffic offences.

Read more on:

- TdG
- TdG

Crime

International and National Economic Crime

Multinational X, Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland, 2024

Advice to a multinational in international mutual assistance in criminal matters and international administrative assistance concerning the possible production and possible seizure of documents by multiple authorities.

Individual X, Congo, Spain, Portugal and Switzerland, 2018

Assisting and defending a high net worth individual accused of money laundering between the Republic of Congo, Spain, Portugal and Switzerland.

Individual X, Criminal Proceedings against a Private Bank, 2021-ongoing

Criminal proceedings against a private bank with an amount of more than 40 million Swiss francs at stake.

Individual X, Criminal and Administrative Proceedings against a Public Service Officer, 2021-ongoing

Defence of a Public Service Officer accused of having accepted illicit advantage as part of his functions and of having favoured companies commissioned by the State.

Read more on RTS

Individual X, Fraud between France and Switzerland, 2020-ongoing

Assisting and representing in criminal proceedings in Switzerland and France a client defrauded of millions by fraudulent contracts between France and Switzerland.

International Crime

Mr Abd al-Rahim Hussein al-Nashiri, Guantanamo, UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, 2022 - ongoing

Representing Mr Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri who faces the death penalty and who was tortured and detained incommunicado for four years in different CIA's "black sites" around the world, then at the Guantánamo detention camp since 2006 where he is still detained unlawfully and without judgement. In 2022, filing a Communication to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD). The Communication was successful in obtaining Opinion N° 72/2022 was rendered finding the United States, Afghanistan, Lithuania, Morocco, Poland, Romania, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates to be responsible for torture, violations of the hardest core of fundamental rights (jus cogens), arbitrary detention and serious violations of international law.

UN Decision: Opinion N° 72/2022 of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

Read more on

- Reuters
- France 24
- Justice Info
- RTS

East Africa, 2024

Advice to a multinational operating in a conflict-affected situation. Analysis of advice on its due diligence obligations and potential risks of civil and criminal proceedings.

Russia, Central Asia, West Africa, 2024

Advice to a world leading foundation and its staff operating in challenging contexts in setting out the potential legal and practical impact following the decision of a Government.

Libya and Switzerland, 2023

Assisting and representing a company and an individual in a case of alleged money laundering in Switzerland of oil pillaging in Libya.

The Prosecutor v. Abdallah Banda and Saleh Jerbo, 2012-2013

Member of a defence team in the war crimes case against Mr Abdallah Banda and Mr Saleh Jerbo before the International Criminal Court (ICC) regarding Darfur and the situation of Sudan.

International Crime

Achievements

Memberships

- Swiss Bar Association
- Geneva Bar
- European Criminal Bar Association (ECBA)
- International Association of Lawyers (UIA)
- Victims of Crime Association of Lawyers (VOCAL)

Appointments

- Appointed by the Swiss Federal Council to sit among the 15 experts of the Swiss Federal Commission against Racism
- Member of the cross-party judicial commission designating the judicial magistrates of the Geneva canton
- Vice-President of the International Criminal Defence Commission of the International Association of Lawyers (UIA)
- Board member of Prison Insider
- Member of the Human Rights Committee of the European Criminal Bar Association
- Member of the Advisory Committee of the Victims of Crime Association of Lawyers

Publications

- Pour une entreprise, les risques à contourner les sanctions sont importants, *interview* in Bilan, 3 March 2022 Read here
- The Unsuspected Hard Law: The Binding Nature or the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights under Swiss law, in Natural Resources Exploitation: Business and Human Rights, LexisNexis, Chap. 3, 11/2018, p.42- 55
- Le respect des droits de l'homme devient un atout pour le business, interview in Bilan, 23 November 2017
- La responsabilité civile de l'entreprise en cas d'atteinte aux droits de l'homme, in Anwalts/Revue de l'Avocat, 10/2016, p. 489-496
- Business and human rights: nouvelle donne pour les entreprises et les avocats, in Anwalts/Revue de l'Avocat, 10/2016, p. 429-435
- La responsabilité pénale de la personne morale pour le crime international de pillage: regard sur les systèmes juridiques internes, in Les dossiers de la Revue de droit pénal et de criminologie, vol. 21, Bruxelles (La Charte) 2014, p. 131-150
- The Council must follow up on Myanmar, in Human Rights Tribune, 17 March 2008
- The long fight to judge Hissène Habré, in Human Rights Tribune, 9 March 2008
- *Tribunal spécial pour la Sierra Leone: quel bilan pour la justice internationale ?* in Tribune des droits humains, 11 July 2007
- *Taylor, last chance for the Sierra Leone model*, in International Justice Tribune, n° 69, 4 June 2007

Book

- Author of the photo book Calcutta with text by Jean-Claude Carrière, Infolio, 2009

Awards

- Best Master's thesis in law awarded by the University of Geneva, 2012 - Thesis on: *The criminal liability of companies for the international crime of looting: a comparison of domestic legal systems*
- 1st Prize in the Michel Nançoz trial pleading and eloquence competition of the Geneva Bar Association, 2015
- 3rd Prize of the eloquence competition of the Prix Paris-Montréal de la Francophonie, 2015
- Best photo feature of the year, category abroad, Swiss Press Photo Award, 2007 - Report on the post-war situation in Sierra Leone and international criminal justice
- Award of PhotoChina Original, Ghuizou, China, 2011 - Feature on the Afars of Ethiopia
- Best Photography, Marsiannes Film Festival of Saint-Marcellin, 1997 - Film made in Ethiopia entitled: *La partie de Kwosso*

Education

- Certificate of specialisation in legal professions - University of Geneva School of Law, 2013
- Master of Law, *summa cum laude*, University of Geneva, 2013
- Bachelor of Law, *cum laude*, University of Geneva, 2011