



Presentation of the Day of the Endangered Lawyer on the 30th of October in Valencia, Spain on the "Defence de la Defence" meeting of the UIA Congress

Dear President, dear vice Presidents, dear Members of the Board of the UIA, dear friends and colleagues,

First I want to thank Miguel Loinaz, and the UIA for the kind invitation to be able to present the-Day-of-the-Endangered-Lawyer-project to you.

I am speaking here, as representative of the European Democratic Lawyers, a federation of Lawyer associations of 7 European countries and also as representative of the European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights with also members in many European countries. Since last year the AED federation has Turkish members.

Beside that I am also speaking today as a chairman of the Day of the Endangered Lawyer Foundation, based in the Netherlands.

It was already 25 years ago when Lawyers for Lawyers invited me - and my wife and colleague Symone - to join the fact finding mission to the Philippines. In this fact finding mission we investigated the many terrible attacks on lawyers in the Philippines. We visited many regions and we heard appalling stories about lawyers who were murdered "just like that", often by unidentified gun-men on motorbikes. In our report in 1990, we urged the Government of the Philippines to take appropriate action and make serious steps to protect our colleagues better and to persecute the perpetrators.

During the mission we were received in many cities with much hospitality by the colleagues from the Philippines. We were very impressed by the way they continued to do their important human rights work every day in a very brave manner, and with a lot of humor and solidarity.

After this very motivating experience, I worked many years as coordinator of the commission "defense de la defense" of the AED (European Democratic Lawyers). We organized many manifestations, made many reports and petitions and chose many

other forms of action, to help protecting our endangered colleagues.

During the years we had to draw the sad conclusion that in many countries, all over the world the lawyers have to fulfill their professional tasks, under very dangerous and threatening circumstances. Often we felt very powerless. Especially when we realized ourselves that many more lawyers are under threat than all our organizations can support.

Maybe it is this powerless feeling that motivated us to think about the creation of a more structural way to try to "defend those who defend". We had to look for new ways, new strategies.

Finally in 2010 we decided to be more proactive in our actions and not only to react on all incidents and all aggressions to lawyers, but to create a structural focus of attention.

The Day of the Endangered Lawyer was born and this day has been already organized five times. Every year the focus is pointed on another group of lawyers, we focused on the lawyers of five countries, of Iran, Turkey, Basque country, Colombia and the Philippines. We base our work all the time on the UN-Havana Basic Principles on the role of lawyers. The coming year it is the situation of the lawyers in Honduras, which will be highlighted. We chose this year for Honduras, because the lawyers there are not heavily attacked, but these lawyers also have to work quite isolated in a situation where the rule of law seems to have disappeared. Not only the human rights of the clients and their lawyers are violated, but also the human rights of other professionals like judges, journalists and others are violated severely.

We have one clear goal, we want to make clear to the society and the Governments, that we will fight for our colleagues and that we don't accept any harassments, or persecution, or even worse.

Maybe our strong point is that we don't give up, we always continue to give special attention to the hardships of the lawyers all over the world. We also come back afterwards to the Governments and we continue to support the endangered lawyers, also in the years that our focus is on other countries.

Another strong point is that we seek to cooperate as much as possible with all relevant lawyer and human rights organizations.

For the next year, when we focus on the lawyers in Honduras, we will need your support. We need all possible support from individual lawyers of many countries, but also from lawyer

organizations. In our network we don't have good contacts with the lawyers in Honduras, so every help from your side for the next day of the endangered lawyer is great and very welcome. Help us with your network. We just succeeded to get in touch with an Hondurese lawyer and a judge and an organization of judges, but that is only the beginning.

I am very glad to be able to meet after this assembly, the previous speaker, President of the Honduran Bar Association, Maitre Valladares.

Another strong point is that really everybody is welcome to take part in the activities on the Day of the Endangered Lawyer. It's a very open project, very low level, everybody can organize in his country or city, any program or colloquium or a forum-discussion or a manifestation, to give fully attention to the difficult situation of the lawyers on the Day of the Endangered Lawyer.

Because we are a completely independent and quite neutral project we do need some funding for the yearly costs which now paid by our lawyer office, and by the AED and the ELDH. We are searching for one or two big international lawyer-offices which would be willing to financially support this project, and to which law-firms we can offer good publicity in return, if wanted so.

Last year, when the focus was on the lawyers of the Philippines, we did manifestations in 22 cities in 12 countries, for European standards it was a quite big manifestation. All over Europe and also in Asia, in Turkey and Manila. We were received in many European Embassies where - in all cities - lawyers in Robe or Toga handed over - at the same time - the same petition to the representatives of the Philippines government. Of the manifestation in Paris a small film document was made.

In spite of the fact that the Philippine Government has already often promised us to make key point of the protection of lawyers, the Government has not succeeded in any way, to protect her lawyers, judges and other professions. Very recently on the 1st of September the judge Aldaba was killed. All the time the killers "get away" with the murders without being persecuted.

There is nearly complete impunity in the Philippines for the killers of lawyers which is unacceptable. Seen the reactions from the different Ambassadors and consuls, our action in Toga made an impression to the Government.

In the future, we also want to give special attention to the cases of enforced disappearances of lawyers, which cases cause a lot of grief for the families, the colleagues and the society.

We want to memorize the case of Somchai Neelapaijit who disappeared in 2004 without a trace. Furthermore there are also lawyers who have disappeared recently in China. There are also Syrian lawyers who are kept for years incommunicado, like Khalil Ma'touq and the completely disappeared young female lawyer Razan Zaitouneh.

This Day of the Endangered Lawyer, is a good chance to make a strong point for the defense of the defenders all over the world. So please, do organize something yourself, or come to the meetings organizing with joint forces on Friday the 22nd of January at the Embassies and consulates of Honduras, or give a donation, if you cannot come. Anyway, let us make clear - in a mondial way - that our mission is: "Don't touch our colleagues".

We have received in the recent years very strong support of IDHAE, which is the International European Association of Bars and lawyers human rights institutes of 10 European cities.

Also the Dutch foundation Lawyers for Lawyers has supported our forum-discussion on the Day of the Endangered Lawyer in the last years.

**Finally I want to say that our two European lawyer organizations, the ELDH and AED, and the foundation, fully agree with the proposal of the UIA-president Miguel Loinaz to try to install - on the United Nations level - an official mondial International Day of the Endangered Lawyer, to raise awareness for the hard situation of lawyers who are under threat, with Governments, with the press and the society.**

I want to end this speech by telling you, that we show in the big hall, a small film about the celebration of the Day of the Endangered Lawyer 2014 in The Hague for the Columbian colleagues. You will find this film also on the website.

I will also hand out flyers on the side table with our website and coordinates. If you want to support us, one way or another, please join me later and we can discuss the possibilities.

Thank you very much for your attention,

Hans Gaasbeek  
Coordinator