

To defend the defenders

"The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail". Lisbon treaty, article 2.

For a long time, we believed that Human rights would be a central part of globalization. It seemed like the natural way forward in a world that was constantly progressing. However, we must admit that every day, across almost every political regime, this is not the case.

In Italy, the Government want to make a Rom's census to be able to expel all those who don't have Italian nationality. And the same Government return to the sea the boats that try to rescue refugees.

Donald Trump's America cages what they call "first age children", let's say babies.

Hungary rejects all refugees and, last week, adopted a new law that criminalizes some help given to illegal immigrants.

Poland give up the rule of law, more and more every day.

In almost every European countries, populism is proceeding.

And I speak only of Western states ...

Freedoms have become, once again, something to fight for. Human rights are blatantly criticized and those who defend them are very often scorned, even in France, as we have seen last week.

But without the compass that is human rights, Europe is nothing. Human rights have become, for lawyers, a common language, something to rally around. It is the soul of a soulless world. We must hold onto this noble idea in a world that is losing its illusions and its dreams.

In this time of human's right bashing, we must firmly assert that human rights aren't colonialist values, only a part of the western way of life, and that to defend human rights it is to defend humanity, peoples, and not to try to prevail a civilization over another.

This's part of the CCBE's credo.

The CCBE gathers bars and law societies of 45 countries in the field of the Council of Europe. More than one million of lawyers from Iceland to Armenia. It is the official representative of lawyers to the European Union

and the Council of Europe. For instance, I had, last year, in my quality of head of the CCBE's Human Rights committee, to deal in the Human rights dialog between European Union and China.

We strongly think that a political regime can be measured by the importance it places on justice and the Bar.

In places where lawyers are harassed, threatened, arbitrarily arrested, convicted for defending their clients, murdered, tyranny, corruption, insecurity and injustice rule.

In places where lawyers can freely undertake their role, even to defend great offenders or political opponents, justice and legal security prevail, allowing everyone to develop their activities with confidence and faith in the future. In these places, well-being remains. Those who say that there could be a link between non democratic regimes and fair development are lying.

That's the reason why the CCBE places such a great emphasis on respect for human rights and the rule of law, and is particularly concerned with the situation of human rights defenders around the world.

Among our main actions, we can list :

- The CCBE's annual human rights award, created in 2007, to celebrate the lawyers who at the risk of their own life or freedom, accept to undertake their defence mission.

The list of winners who have since been granted the award shows not only the magnitude of the challenges that still need to be addressed so that our children may live in a fairer and more prosperous world, but also the courage of these lawyers who work daily to ensure access to justice for all, even for those who "trouble" governments.

These winners are Belgian, Chinese, Spanish, Russian, Mexican, Tunisian, Turkish, Brazilian, Belarussian, Azerbaijani, Georgian. They could also be Colombian, Venezuelan, Honduran, Sudanese, Burundian, Gambian, Egyptian, Syrian, Polish, Iranian, Ukrainian, or from so many other countries. The next one will be chosen this Thursday in Brussels.

- CCBE also follows daily the actuality of human rights defenders. More than one hundred human rights letters, as we call them, are sent every year to all the countries where lawyers are harassed, murdered, arrested, just because they defend their clients. Last week, one of this letter was sent to Islamic Republic of Iran, after the arrest of Nasrin Sotoudeh who defend the women that defend women's rights (after other interventions, during the previous weeks, for Zeinab

Taheri, Mohammed Najafi or Abdolfattah Soltani). In the last months we also sent letters to defend Turkish (they are too numerous to be named), Azerbaidjani (Irada Javadova, Emin Aslan, Yalcin Imanov, Khalid Baghirov and, of course, Intigam Aliyev, CCBE HR award 2015), Russian (Valentin Karelin), Belarussian, Saudi Arabia (Loujain al-Hathloul), Qatari (Najeeb Al-Nuaimi), Kirghiz (Kaalaigul Toktakunova) or Kazakh (Botagoz Jardemalie) lawyers for instance.

And when I speak about them , I can't resist to evoke the memory of Iryna Nozdrowska, from Ukraine, or Martins Bunkus, from Latvia, killed in the last months, as dozens of other lawyers, especially in Pakistan, India, Philippines, Africa or South and Central America.

- CCBE is also part of the organization of the Day of endangered lawyer, each 24th January, this year focussed on Egypt and next year on Turkey.
- And let me add that CCBE is proud to be the origin of Protect defenders, the European Union Human Rights Defenders mechanism.
- And to act, at the moment, for the adoption, by the Council of Europe, of an European Convention on lawyers.

All the names I have quoted are lawyer's names.

They are human rights defenders.

They work alongside men and women from around the world, giving them the strength to stand upright.

They are the honour of our profession.

Let's continue the struggle.