

Ludovic Trarieux Bar of the Year

Dear Madames Deken,

Mr. Le President,

Members of the Jury,

Honorable guests, Colleagues, Friends

I am greatly honoured to be here to accept the distinction of the Ludovic Trarieux Special Mention for Bar of the Year, on behalf the legal community that I call home: the Warsaw Bar Association.

This distinction is a great privilege for our community. The patron of the Prize, Ludovic Trarieux, as a statesman, as an advocate, as the founder of the League of Human Rights, symbolized everything that our legal communities hold dear: the struggle to uphold rights and freedoms, justice for the individual even in the face of adversity.

These values constitute our ethical compass as advocates and in fact the *raison d'être* for our profession. In times of injustice, our perseverance in upholding human dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms is the very test of our professional ethics and backbone.

The entire legal community in Poland has faced such injustice over the past years. A populist government has systematically violated the Rule of Law, undermined the independence of the Judiciary, targeted in particular independent judges and prosecutors with reprisals, severely weakening the safety net that is to provide protection for the rights and freedoms of all people in Poland and in Europe. I am proud to say that the advocates of the Warsaw Bar have been relentless in their opposition to the devastation of the Justice System, most notably defending judges and prosecutors, protesters and human rights activists against government repressions. Make no mistake: even today, judges face disciplinary proceedings merely for applying EU law in order to protect judicial independence. Even today, these judges are defended by members of our Bar.

However, the injustice we face over the past years does not end there.

We have seen pushbacks at the Belarusian border. Exhausted, starving and freezing families being denied the bare minimum required by the Geneva Conventions, pushed back across the border even though they demand international protection as refugees. This is a clear violation of the *non-refoulement* principle. I am very proud to say that no legal community responded as numerously as the Warsaw Bar in representing these extremely vulnerable people, demanding due process under international law, scrutinizing and calling out violations of the law by the border guard and the military and litigating before the European Court of Human Rights. All on a pro bono basis.

Most recently, Poland has seen a flood of people escaping a heinous war, waged by the Russian state against Ukraine. Early last year a deluge of people escaping war arrived in Poland. I am very proud that the members of our Bar Association, as all of Polish society, opened their hearts and homes. So many lawyers of our Bar drove to the border to pick up families with no place to stay and drove them back to their homes in Warsaw. The advocates and trainees of our Bar organized material support for those seeking shelter from the war. Most importantly however, our community did what they do best: organized a broad system of legal support for Ukrainians in Poland and provided legal help to those who needed it most, those who had fled from their homes with the shirts on their backs and a handful of belongings.

I am so very proud of the ten thousand members of our Bar, for their defence of democracy, independence of the judiciary, Rule of Law, basic principles of humanitarian law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. This special mention is critical moral support for lawyers, whose struggle for our core values has lasted so long and at times seemed so frustrating. On behalf of our Bar members, I would like to thank the members of the Jury for appreciating the dedication of the Warsaw Bar to the principles which Ludovic Trarieux himself held so dear.

This mention for our Bar is all the more significant, that it has been awarded alongside this year's Ludovic Trarieux Human Rights Prize, which was awarded to a lawyer whose courage and perseverance in the struggle for human dignity in the face of extreme personal danger, torture, lashing and imprisonment by the repressive Iranian authoritarian state is unparalleled and should constitute a beacon for all lawyers, jurists and human rights defenders across the world. Mr. Amrisalar Davoudi, the members of the Warsaw Bar, the entire legal community in Poland, salute You. On their behalf, please accept our deepest expression of admiration and respect. Our challenges pale in comparison to the terrible repressions You face.