

SPEECH FOR LONDON 10 Nov 2017

Thank you to all of you representing the leadership of the international legal profession, and for joining us in this celebration of 25 years of the FBE.

One theme has particular importance for the human rights of our clients, and for the health of the jurisdictions and societies in which we work. That is why today we will examine in what way we lawyers can support climate change justice.

We face many challenges and as lawyers we have a responsibility to recognise the challenges and to work together to overcome them. This is a responsibility which we bear towards ourselves, our colleagues, our clients and the societies in which we live, societies where we are still building democracy in the 21st Century.

We can meet these challenges. As European lawyers and members of the international legal community we share very strong values.

We promote the supremacy of law, the independence of justice and the right to a fair trial. We stand for the defence of human rights in Europe and in the world. This we do when these principles are under threat in many jurisdictions.

As lawyers, we have to be vigilant in the protection of human rights. We are in a historical period which sees the rise of nationalist parties and the rhetoric of rejection of refugees and immigration, and the rejection of the principle of equality before the law for people deemed to be different because of their race, religion and gender among various characteristics which make us different. We lawyers have to be beacons of reason in difficult times.

The independence of justice is core to a just society. The FBE member bars have been very concerned about the situation of lawyers and judges in Poland. On the 3rd June 2017, the General Assembly of the FBE, expressed its grave concerns for the situation of judges and lawyers in Poland. I have since written twice to the President of Poland Mr Andrzej Duda to ask for the veto of the proposed legislative changes. The FBE will continue to support the independent judiciary and the Polish bars through this period of uncertainty. We all need to protect the independence of the judiciary in all of our jurisdictions, and we must count upon our European colleagues to support each and every judiciary and bar when we are called upon to do so.

We provide support for lawyers or bars who are persecuted for complying with their professional duties. Lawyers from countries within the European Union and within the Council of Europe member states have addressed congresses of the FBE with reports of interference by the state in their professional practice, by the withdrawal of licences to practice as a lawyer because they have defended clients who are politically unpopular. Lawyers are falsely accused of corruption, and their offices raided for documents including client files. As we know in Turkey, lawyers have been persecuted for their defence of clients opposed to the government, and there are still hundreds of lawyers in prison in Turkey.

We promote the harmonisation of the profession in Europe, in professional practice and professional ethics and we uphold the highest standards of legal competence. During these

two days speakers will be sharing important information and raising issues with you for discussion such as company law, data protection, labour law, and finance processing across borders, which contribute to the excellence of professional practice.

These are the core values that we share as European lawyers, and in particular as members of the FBE.

The international legal community works together to face the challenges of the 21st Century. We live in a time of greater awareness of the abuse of human rights in many parts of the world thanks to the wide and instant accessibility of news. We cannot hide from the challenges. We face terrorism, now familiar in our own states. We face intolerance and prejudice, especially hate crime and attacks on people regarded as “other”.

Deepest of all in affecting the core of our values is the break-up of the membership of the EU, affecting me as an English solicitor because of BREXIT. Our family of lawyers, of bar associations, law societies and associations of legal advisers stands together to meet these challenges.

In conclusion, I turn to the theme of one of the main challenges we face to the human rights of all people, the rights of all our members and all our clients, which we share in the legal profession of Europe.

In September 1946, in Zurich, Winston Churchill spoke these memorable words on a proposal to meet the tragedy of the time, the genocide and horror of the 2nd World War. The proposal, as we remember, was to create a union of European nations to provide a secure and prosperous future without war. Churchill stated: “It is to re-create the European Family, or as much of it as we can, and provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom”.

We now know that those political movements who espouse nationalist policies, moving away from a united Europe, are gaining support. This is a serious challenge to our unity, which we as lawyers must be aware of, and we must find ways to bring the calm voice of reason to the service of our democratic societies. I am optimistic that in spite of the serious challenges we face, as lawyers we have strength together. **There is much more that unites us than can possible divide us.**

Our dedication is to a just society, spread across the whole of Europe. I can say, that I am optimistic, that I feel the warmth of your welcome, and that I have a vision of our united Europe, a dream of the peace and justice that many have built in order to overcome war.

It is important to repeat this and some of you will know what I am going to say next:

I can say, and I remember John Lennon and Yoko Ono here, *I may be a dreamer but I'm not the only one.*

We share our dreams together. Thank you colleagues and friends

Professor Sara Chandler QC (Hon) President of the European Bars Federation.

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