

Day of the Endangered Lawyer 2026: United States of America

Press conference | 22 January 2026, 16.00 CET (Via Teams)

Closing remarks by Roman Završek, President of the CCBE

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed colleagues,

It is a great honour to close this conference and to address you today on behalf of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe, the CCBE, on this important occasion: the Day of the Endangered Lawyer.

Today is both a moment of reflection and a moment of responsibility.

This day reminds us of a reality that many of our colleagues live every day: that in far too many parts of the world, being a lawyer is not merely a profession, but an act of courage. Lawyers are threatened, harassed, arbitrarily detained, disbarred, forced into exile, or even killed - not because they have broken the law, but because they have sought to uphold it.

They are targeted for defending political opponents, journalists, human rights defenders, minorities, or simply for insisting on fair trial guarantees and the independence of the judiciary. When lawyers are attacked, the rule of law itself is under attack - and with it, the very foundations of democratic society.

Over the years, the CCBE has shown sustained and visible engagement on the Day of the Endangered Lawyer, using this occasion to highlight the risks faced by legal professionals and to reaffirm, clearly and publicly, the principle of their independence. This engagement reflects our conviction **that the protection of lawyers is inseparable from the protection of justice itself.**

This year, the selection of the United States of America as the focus country is particularly significant. It serves as a powerful reminder that the safety and independence of lawyers can never be taken for granted - not even in long-established democracies with strong legal traditions. The challenges faced by members of the legal profession in the United States illustrate that pressures on lawyers can emerge in any jurisdiction, especially in times of political polarisation, social tension, or attacks on democratic institutions.

By making this choice, a clear and timely message is sent: the protection of lawyers **is not a concern limited to distant or fragile systems**, but a universal responsibility. It underscores the need for constant vigilance, cross-border solidarity, and an unwavering commitment to defending the independence of the legal profession **everywhere**. Only through such collective commitment we can ensure that lawyers are able to carry out their duties without fear, and that access to justice remains a living reality for all.

In this context, I also wish to mention our strengthened collaboration with the American Bar Association. In particular, in its statement of 4 April 2025, the CCBE expressed its solidarity with, and support for, the ABA in its efforts to uphold and protect the fundamental principles of judicial independence, the rule of law, **and the right to legal representation free from interference or intimidation**. This cooperation demonstrates the importance of unity among Bars across jurisdictions when fundamental values are at stake.

Beyond this important day, the CCBE has long considered the protection of endangered lawyers a core mission. This is not an abstract or symbolic commitment. It is a daily, concrete effort rooted in solidarity among Bars and in the belief that the independence of the legal profession is a cornerstone of democracy.

The CCBE engages systematically with European and international institutions. We highlight cases of endangered lawyers before the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, United Nations Special Rapporteurs, and other relevant bodies. This approach also underpins the CCBE's broader commitment to the rule of law, including its active contribution to the European Commission's annual Rule of Law Report, which consistently highlights threats to the independence of the legal profession.

We insist that violations against lawyers must be recognised not as isolated incidents, but as structural threats to justice systems and democratic societies. Silence or inaction in the face of such violations only allows them to spread.

As Bar leaders and representative bodies, we have a special responsibility. Our voices carry weight. Our institutions can mobilise attention, resources, and political will. Solidarity must not be symbolic; **it must be sustained, coordinated, and visible**.

The CCBE stands ready to continue working with each of you to ensure that **no colleague is left isolated simply because they chose to uphold the law**.

Friends and colleagues,

I'd like to take a moment to highlight an important milestone: the creation of a groundbreaking legal instrument dedicated to safeguarding the legal profession - the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer.

The Convention will set minimum standards to safeguard the legal profession, ensuring independence is protected. It will uphold core values like lawyer-client confidentiality and support the self-regulation of the profession, elements that are crucial to our integrity. Moreover, a monitoring mechanism will be established to hold states accountable, ensuring that these protections are implemented and maintained.

But this is not just a European achievement - it's a global one. The Convention will also be open for ratification by non-Council of Europe member states, extending its protections beyond Europe's borders. This is a significant occasion.

Friends, colleagues,

As I bring my remarks to a close, I leave you with this thought: the independence of lawyers is not a privilege granted by the state; it is a safeguard granted to society. **When lawyers are silenced, justice is weakened.** When lawyers are protected, democracy is strengthened.

May this important day renew our collective commitment - not only in words, but in action.

May our solidarity be steadfast and our response decisive.

And may our actions ensure that lawyers everywhere can practise their profession without fear.

Thank you.
