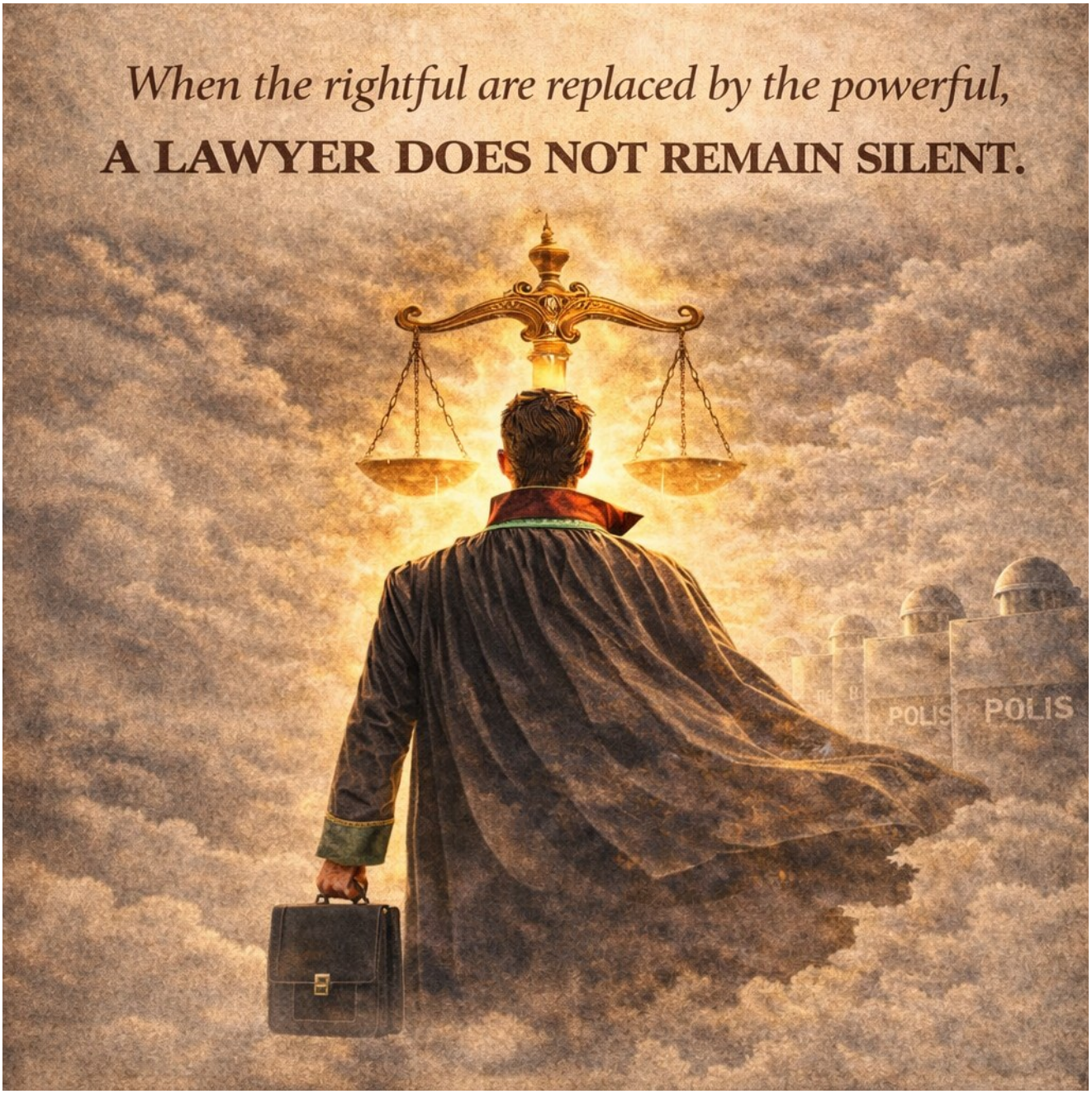
OPINION · Legal Profession and Lawyers' Rights

Being a Lawyer in Difficult Times

24 January 2026 · Amsterdam Law Center · 4 min read



January 24 – Day of Endangered Lawyers is not merely a professional observance.

It is a day on which we are reminded of the will to defend the rule of law, the commitment to the ideal of justice, and the responsibility to protect human dignity.

Today, in many countries around the world, the principle of the rule of law is weakening, the separation of powers is being eroded, and human rights are overshadowed by political calculations.

More concerning than the rise of a new order where the powerful replace the rightful is the increasing normalization of a system where those who defend rights are criminalized and those who remain silent are deemed acceptable.

In such a period, being a lawyer is not simply practicing a profession.

It is a conscious choice.

Why is the Rule of Law Important?

The rule of law means protecting those who are right, not those who are strong.

It means that the state, institutions, and individuals are bound by law; that arbitrariness is prevented; and that fundamental rights and freedoms are secured.

“The right has precedence, and no sentiment can outweigh it.”

When the law weakens, the first to suffer are usually minorities, dissidents, and migrants.

Because law exists precisely so that individuals are not left to the mercy of the majority.

Human rights are protected not because they are popular, but because they are universal.

For vulnerable groups in particular, law is not a luxury—it is a guarantee of existence.

The Value of the Defense

The right to defense is the foundation of a fair trial.

But in periods when authoritarian tendencies grow stronger, the defense becomes a target.

All over the world, authoritarian administrations continue to place lawyers at the top of their lists.

A lawyer's duty is not to love their client; it is to defend the client's rights.

When this distinction is forgotten, the legal system becomes emotional, and justice is damaged.

Defending what is right does not mean being popular.

Often, it means being criticized—or even ostracized.

But the practice of law is **not** a profession that shifts according to applause.

Unfortunately, today these values are rapidly deteriorating, and the "rotten apples" of this noble profession continue to decay in line with the system's flow.

Dictatorships and the "Acceptable" Citizen

History has shown us that dictatorships first instrumentalize the law, then criminalize opposition, and finally turn silence into a virtue.

As the definition of the "acceptable citizen" narrows, those who think differently—minorities and migrants—become easier targets.

At this point, the role of the lawyer becomes critical.

Because law must serve justice—not the state, and not the mentality that captures the state.

And those who can best provide this service are lawyers who do **not** serve governments or power.

When lawyers are silenced, the law weakens.

And when the law weakens, the entire society loses.

Recent events are clear proof of this.

A Day of Reflection: Lawyers' Day

January 24 should not be a day solely for discussing professional hardships.

It should also be a day for asking crucial questions:

- Are we doing enough to defend the rule of law?

- Are we courageous when defending human rights?
- Do we see our profession merely as a source of income, or as a social responsibility?

Every lawyer must answer these questions with their own conscience.

And let us remember:

It is not the “men of the system,” those who sell their profession and honor for cheap gain, who give the right answers.

It is the brave defenders of true rights and justice who do.

Keeping Hope Alive

Despite all difficulties, hopelessness is not an option.

The history of law shows that periods of oppression are never permanent.

But change does not occur on its own—it happens through the efforts of lawyers, academics, civil society, and conscious citizens.

As a migrant lawyer, I believe this wholeheartedly:

Justice gains meaning when it is defended based on principle—not identity.

Being a lawyer means standing not with the powerful, but with the law.

Final Word

On January 24, the Day of Endangered Lawyers, we must once again remind the world of the rule of law, human rights, and the independence of the defense profession.

There may be periods when those who defend what is right are criminalized.

But history judges not those who stand with the law, **but those who violate it.**

The struggle for justice may be long.

But this struggle is indispensable for the protection of human dignity.

And for this reason, the practice of law is not just a profession;

IT IS A STANCE.

H. Hüseyin TANRIVERDİ

Downloaded from amsterdamlawcenter.com on 23 November 2026. Current version: https://amsterdamlawcenter.com/being-a-lawyer-in-difficult-times/