

Endangered lawyers in Iran and Turkey

For the third time, the DAV organised a panel discussion together with Amnesty International on 24 January, the Day of the Endangered Lawyer, to raise awareness of difficult working conditions for lawyers abroad. This year the focus was on Iran and Turkey. Guest speakers in the “House of Democracy and Human Rights” in Berlin were Iranian human rights lawyer Dr. Leila Alikarami (Centre for Iranian Studies der SOAS University of London) and Turkey Director of Human Rights Watch Emma Sinclair-Webb.

Dr. Leila Alikarami reminded us of how important it is to remember all of the imprisoned colleagues, and part of that awareness is created with events like the Day of the Endangered Lawyer: “The fear of being forgotten is the worst. Worse than being imprisoned itself.” She talked about the human and womens’ rights activist Nasrin Sotoudeh, who was sentenced to 33 years in prison and 148 whippings. “She is incredibly courageous” said Alikarami. In a trial they both attended Sotoudeh had yelled at the Iranian Secret Service agents hired just to intimidate the defence lawyers in court.

Regarding the situation of the legal profession in Turkey, Human Rights Watch has published a detailed report in 2019. Co-author Emma Sinclair-Webb continues to lobby for persecuted colleagues in Istanbul. Among others, she reminded of the human rights lawyer and President of the Bar Association Diyarbakır, Tahir Elçi, who was shot in 2015. In a courageous public speech immediately before, he had campaigned to prevent armed conflicts in the Kurdish areas from being carried into city centres in order to protect civilians. The details surrounding his death have not been determined yet, said Sinclair-Webb – all the more reason to honour his commitment to protect victims of human rights violations.

In the ensuing discussion it became clear how important the training of lawyers in the area of human rights is and also the sensitization of the judiciary towards the subject.

Moderating the discussion was Stefan von Raumer, chair of the DAV human rights committee, who talked about the seminars he had held for hundreds of young Turkish lawyers on the European Convention for Human Rights. This will also raise awareness of defence rights in the longer term, and the hope that colleagues will no longer be persecuted or threatened for exercising their profession.