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## 2024 IBA Award for Outstanding Contribution by a Legal Practitioner to Human Rights

By Sam Sasan Shoamanesh

IBA Executive Director, dear Mark,

Esteemed members of the IBA Human Rights Committee, SPPI and LexisNexis colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset to express my *sincere* gratitude to the *IBA Human Rights Committee* for this prestigious honour, and the hospitality that has been extended to me in the past week.

I am truly humbled, and accept this honour as recognition not merely of my personal achievements, but rather of the importance of the *genuine* pursuit and *promise* of international criminal justice for a more *just world*.

This *timely* award acknowledges the impact of that work as an essential pillar for an international global order based on the rule of law – a notion, we can all agree is *so vividly* in need of cultivation in our times.

With your indulgence, I'd like to also accept this award on behalf of the broader human rights movement that is deeply rooted in the selfless contribution of so many unsung heroes; a movement that remains ever crucial to the betterment of the human condition.

I equally wish to acknowledge the support of many principled and dedicated colleagues of mine at the International Criminal Court, past and present, who, in their respective capacities, have contributed to this necessary work-in-progress, often under the most difficult of circumstances.

Dear colleagues,

The notions of peace and justice were ensconced in my consciousness early on by virtue of my experiences as a child in war-stricken post-revolutionary Iran.

The imprinting impact of war on the ordinary life of civilians is not easily forgotten.

These real life experiences have resulted in the deep conviction I have for respect for human rights, international law, and multilateralism as peaceful means to resolve conflicts.

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As Chef de Cabinet to the former ICC Prosecutor and as an officer of the Court in various capacities for the past two decades, I have tried to make international criminal justice work in practice, and do my part to hold perpetrators of the worst international crimes to account, and to bring a measure of justice to the victims.

As my record demonstrates, I have done this work *without fear or favour*, and under immense pressures including direct overt and covert personal threats to my person and family from some of the most powerful forces in the international arena.

Here is a truth: seldom have major advances in human progress travelled the path of least resistance. International criminal justice challenges impunity for perpetrators, irrespective of rank, status or official capacity. True international criminal justice is blind to power, and holds all perpetrators to the same legal standards – not double-standards.

My dedication to this cause has remained unwavering.

Today, when conflicts around the world are theatres of unbridled violence that destroy thousands of innocent lives, the law is in dire need, but it must prove to be an effective remedial response.

We must be sincere and consistent in our support for international criminal justice – no matter the situation, who, or how powerful the perpetrator.

No *beaux mots*, empty platitudes or political machinations dressed as selective human rights advocacy; rather unshakable integrity in the pursuit of law over violence, and a firm conviction in the universal truth that every human life matters and deserves protection under the law.

In that necessary path, experience has shown that it will often be a lonely journey but solitude in the pursuit of a better destiny for humanity is preferred over the company of *the many* who've chosen self-gain at the cost of the greater good.

May I conclude by adding that there is also no greater perversion of the human rights cause than lawfare and weaponizing it in the interests of political expediency, divorced from the best interests and plight of victims.

Our collective civilisation deserves better.

And our common future demands more decency, courage and integrity in the affairs of war, peace and justice.

I'm grateful for your attention, and indebted to the IBA leadership for its vote of confidence, and decades-long contributions to the cause of international criminal justice. \*\*\*

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