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SCANDINAVIAN TRUST
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Section on Public and Professional Interest Awards Presentation

IBA Annual Conference 2026

Bella Center, Copenhagen, Denmark

Thursday 8 October 2026

Charmaine Yap

Winner

IBA Outstanding Young Lawyer Award



Speech

Thank you for the award.

I am grateful for the honour but I must apologise because I have no achievement to offer for celebration. I have fought for the common humanity of migrant workers and refugees, and for a just approach in tackling climate change.

As I stand here, genocide is being committed against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the Rohingya in Myanmar. Communities are reeling from a catastrophic glacier collapse in the Nepal-Tibet border resulting from human-caused global warming.

Closer to home, daily violence occurs when we transport workers at the back of lorries that are not safe for human transport. When a migrant worker has to pay a kickback to secure or keep a job, we treat it as an employment matter, when we would call the same payment corruption anywhere else.

Beyond outstanding individuals, what our times call for are movements against the relentless, habitual unfairness of the world.

Movements start with individuals deciding that what exists is not what ought to exist.

This will take imagination but I believe lawyers are imaginative people. The practice of law calls for imagination that institutions can be improved, that power can be restrained. It calls for imagination that people can be treated more fairly tomorrow than they are today.

I have met lawyers who refuse to believe that injustice is permanent, that disparity is inevitable, and that compassion is naïve. So instead of celebrating my achievement, I celebrate the fact that there are lawyers who respect strength and not power, and who continue to insist that dignity matters.

May we as a profession never lose our capacity to be troubled and never lose our capacity to imagine. Thank you.