

***Address of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
at the Assembly of Judges of the Republic of Albania
Prof. Dr. Sokol Sadushi***

Honourable Judges of the Republic of Albania,

There are moments in the history of justice when words lose their weight, for the pain they must carry is greater than any phrase can bear. Today is one of those moments.

The murder of our colleague, Judge Astrit Kalaja, is not merely a grave criminal event. It is a blow struck at the very foundation of what justice represents, a wound carved deep into our collective conscience as human beings and as judges. It is an act that has shocked not only the judiciary but the State itself, for it occurred in the very place where the law should reign supreme: the courtroom — the place where justice takes form and where the citizen seeks protection. And it was precisely there, where the rule of law was meant to prevail, that the unthinkable occurred.

This was a foretold tragedy. For years, judges have been become targets of insults, threats, and denigration. Instead of protecting judicial independence, its authority has been undermined. Instead of cultivating respect for justice, contempt has been encouraged. Instead of building confidence in the rule of law, public opinion has been poisoned by a language of hatred and ignorance. This is merely a climate of disrespect — rather a sustained campaign of attack and denigration. Echoes from the political and state spheres, from irresponsible media outlets, and from other uninformed individuals, have become a daily chorus of commentators of judicial decisions declining accountability, ethics, and often without the slightest legal knowledge. They pass judgment as though they were judges themselves, proclaiming guilt or innocence at will, interpreting the Constitution according to the expediency of the moment, and broadcasting verdicts on television sets that mimic courtrooms. This is not an exercise of freedom of speech — it is the public distortion of justice. And when the State remains silent, when the institutions bound to protect judicial independence say nothing, that silence becomes a form of moral complicity.

In this cacophony of voices, high-ranking politicians either from the government and the opposition feel at ease to insult, stigmatize, or mock the judge who delivers a decision, often without having even read its reasoning, without awaiting appeal, and without respecting the judicial hierarchy. Instead of honoring the legal process, they rush to deliver “*justice*” through microphones and cameras, judging the magistrate as if he were a political actor. The tragic event that gathers us today is the most extreme consequence of this poisoned atmosphere. An event that should have been prevented, for it was forewarned in every insult, in every irresponsible declaration, in every public assault against a judge who was simply performing his duty.

Yet before pointing fingers at others, we must begin with ourselves. We must honestly acknowledge that the Albanian judiciary is still not at the level that society rightfully expects from it. Delays in adjudication, unnecessary procedural stagnation, and failures to respect statutory deadlines for delivering reasoned judgments are open wounds that erode public trust. There are cases where proceedings drag on for years without justification, turning the citizen’s wait for

justice into a punishment of its own. There are decisions left unreasoned out of timeframes, and others that differ from one court to another, creating uncertainty and a perception of inconsistency. A judiciary that is unpredictable in its jurisprudence loses the authority of law and the respect of the public. When citizens cannot foresee the justice they will receive trust collapses. Likewise, our communication with the public is often distant, and incomprehensible to the ordinary citizen. There is room for improvement and reflection. Only a judiciary that recognizes its own weaknesses and works to strengthen itself from within has the moral right to demand accountability from others. Only in this way will justice regain the trust it has lost and the moral authority it deserves.

However, self-criticism must not blind us to the harsh reality in which we been set to work. We well understand the difference between legitimate criticism — which is a cornerstone of a democratic society — and personal insult or accusation that seeks to delegitimize the judge. A judge is not above criticism, but no one has the right to turn him into a target of public contempt.

The judge does not reply, he does not defend himself or respond to insult — for restraint is the duty of his office, and silence is part of its dignity. But while the judge remains silent, politics speaks. We cannot allow this imbalance to become the norm, nor can we remain silent forever before continued defamation of the judicial system. . Our response must be institutional, unified, and principled. . There can be no *ad hoc* statements driven by pressure or emotion. The judiciary needs a single institutional voice; one that speaks with prudence, and strength whenever judges and the authority of justice are threatened. For when injustice is met with silence, trust dies, and when trust dies, justice collapses.

The executive and legislative must bear their share of responsibility. There can be no modern justice without State investment and efficient legislative changes. One cannot demand results from a system that operates with insufficient personnel, limited funds, and infrastructure from another century. Justice cannot function on the basis of propaganda. It requires concrete guarantees: budgetary, institutional, and moral. In this dark moment, silence is not an option. We must raise our voice, not for ourselves, but for justice itself. For a State that does not protect its judges cannot protect its citizens. A State that allows a judge to be threatened allows injustice to reign.

We do not ask for privileges. We ask for security, respect, and dignity in the performance of our duty. We ask that no judge feel abandoned, despised, or threatened, for a justice that fears is a justice paralyzed. This is the moment to act. Words are no longer enough. We must take visible and measurable steps.

Today, in this hall, justice does not mourn; it reflects, it emerges. We speak on behalf of all the judges of the Republic of Albania, and we are not here to lament, but to testify that justice has a beating heart and a voice that speaks with integrity. We shall not yield to fear, nor remain silent before injustice. We shall stand with dignity, courage, and faith.

Let this Assembly be the moral turning point of the Albanian judiciary. Let this be the moment when silence becomes resolve, fear becomes strength, and pain becomes purpose, for a justice that is safer, fairer, and more humane.

In honor of our fallen colleague, and on behalf of every judge of the Republic, we make this solemn vow today: *never to bow, never to surrender, and never to forget that justice is the force that sustains the State, dignity, and hope of this nation.*

In their name, as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, I state clearly and unequivocally:

No act of violence shall bend justice.

No threat shall deter the judge from performing his duty with integrity.

No political or public pressure shall compromise the independence of judgment.

This is our moral and professional commitment. This is our mission before the citizens and before history.

Tirana, 9th October 2025