



The Bar Council

## Kirsty Brimelow KC, Chair of the Bar

### Inaugural address

Gray's Inn, Monday 12 January 2026

Happy New Year and welcome to Master Treasurer, distinguished guests, family, friends and colleagues.

#### A warm welcome to Gray's Inn.

The first recorded performance of the Comedy of Errors was in Gray's Inn in 1594. Other plays were staged in the Inns, including Twelfth Night and Measure for Measure.

In Measure for Measure, Isabella pleads for her brother Claudio's life. She invokes the concept of mercy in law. Angelo, who was then in temporary charge of Vienna, rejects her pleas. He stands for strict enforcement of the law.

He says: *"It is the law, not I, condemn your brother"*

In support of Angelo, a legal interpretation is that he was seeking to save the law from arbitrary application, but the defects in Angelo's legal theory are deep. Indeed, mixing my Shakespeare plays for a moment and referencing the Merchant of Venice, Angelo is the anti- Portia.

The argument against Angelo's inflexible enforcement, is that it ignores the legal principles of equity and justice. It is empty of the mercy of mitigation required for justice.

And so, enter the equitable Judge and Aristotle jurisprudence, where equity and mercy underpin the rule of law.

If the ghost of Shakespeare watches over this hall, I hope he is encouraged by the Portias, Isabellas -and Prosperos -who work for clients in courts and tribunals globally, strengthening principles of legality, supported by their Bar Council.

## **A little more about the Bar Council**

The first Chair of the Bar Council was Herbert Cozens-Hardy QC, MP from 1891 to 1899.

The years that people held office are recorded as spanning from 14 years to 2 years with 1-year tenures occurring during and immediately after the Second World War – they were Sir Charles Doughty KC (1946-1947) and G.O. Glade KC (1947-1948) – before 1-year tenure became the norm from 1973.

Of course, women were not able to take these positions. It was only in 1919 with the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act that sex was removed as a disqualification to entering the legal profession.

### **And so, enter the women:**

The first woman Chair was in 1998, Baroness Heather Hallett KC, as she now is. There then was a gap until Dame Maura McGowan KC in 2013 and then Chantal-Aimée Doerries KC in 2016, Amanda Pinto KC in 2020 and Barbara Mills KC in 2025.

Barbara Mills KC was the first woman of colour as Chair and she put all energy into the role, particularly in relation to the Family Bar and wellbeing.

I am the sixth woman and the 72<sup>nd</sup> Chair of the Bar Council since records began in 1891.

I am the first former Chair of the Bar Human Rights Committee and fifth former Chair of the Criminal Bar Association. I am the first international human rights barrister to reach this position.

Social mobility data is sketchy but I will be one of a handful from a state education background and I am sure that I am the first Chair from Chorley, Lancashire.

This year, I lead a team of women barristers, Heidi Stonecliffe KC, Vice Chair, Lucinda Orr, Treasurer, and Amelia Clegg, Chair of the Young Barristers' Committee. We are an historic all female team. It also is the first time that all officers, apart from myself, are from the employed Bar. This truly is a One Bar leadership, and I welcome my colleagues' expertise and alternative perspectives.

There also is further change at the Bar Council with the retirement of CEO Malcolm Cree CBE. Malcolm, drawing from all his Navy experience, will leave the Bar Council ordered, calm – most of the time – with excellent people working as a team.

He has had an effective 8 years in post and we wish him a happy retirement. He will be missed.

I look forward to being put through my paces by our newly appointed CEO, former Royal Marine Major General Jim Morris CB DSO, who will be in position in March.

### **Who am I?**

I was brought up near Chorley. Both my parents started work at 15 years' old. My dad worked on the factory floor as an apprentice in engineering. My mum worked as a sewist. She actually is very talented. My dad probably has far excelled my qualifications through those he got studying at night school.

Education was valued in our home as the scrubbed steps into a profession. I read law at Birmingham University and made friends for life. Some are here this evening.

In my second year, I entered the Law Faculty Mooting Competition. The final was judged by Sir Stephen Brown LJ, former President of the Family Division and the winner was awarded by Lord Goff at a formal dinner. I remember an outsider shadow bouncing alongside me as I clutched the lectern. When I won, I was presented with a cup which could have been engraved "self-belief". That was the moment that I thought I could be a barrister.

I always have felt fortunate and have tried to give back. At university, each year, a group of us fundraised and took deprived children from inner city Birmingham, on holiday. I think of them sometimes and wonder if they might have been able to reach the possibilities that we saw in them.

Lancashire Local Authority provided my grant through university and through the Bar Course. Gray's Inn awarded me a scholarship and the securing of a pupillage and grant at 2 Crown Office Row (now Lyttleton Chambers) meant that I was on my way to becoming a barrister.

I was called to the Bar in 1991 and, against all advice, deferred my pupillage for a year and travelled the world, working in bars and hostels.

In 1993, on completion of pupillage, I was offered tenancy at a small common law set of chambers full of junior barristers. It folded after 18 months and I scrabbled to gain a footing in tenancy. After happy, busy times both squatting in two chambers (practising from a chambers, without being a tenant), and then moving to tenancy at Francis Taylor Building, I went to 187 Fleet Street.

Increasingly, I was working with barristers at Doughty Street Chambers. In 2009, Geoffrey Robertson KC suggested that I join Doughty Street. He introduced me to a chap who I thought was pretty impressive, called Keir Starmer KC, and I followed his invitation to join.

In 2011, I was appointed silk. The messages of congratulations from Judges, barristers and solicitors sit alongside the mooting cup in the pockets of my mind.

Subsequently, I have been appointed a Recorder and also was successful in appointment to a section 9(4) Deputy High Court Judge position in the King's Bench Division.

I have a long active history of trying to develop my profession beyond the courtroom. In the 1990s I was a Young Spokesperson for the Bar, encouraged by the much-missed Courtenay Griffiths KC, and, for a decade I would appear on daytime TV chat shows, debating and explaining the legal issues of the day. This also is how I met John Stapleton, who became one of my closest friends. I am deeply sad that he didn't live to be here.

I was elected to the Criminal Bar Association Executive for seven years and, in later years, was elected as Vice-Chair and Chair of the Criminal Bar between 2021 and 2023.

During this time, having been elected a Bencher of Gray's Inn, I also was elected to the Management Committee of Gray's Inn. In 2023 I was elected Vice Chair of the Bar Council and in 2024 I was elected Chair Elect.

I always feel the tug of my privilege on my sleeve. I was Chair of the Bar Human Rights Committee for six years, with 15 years on the Executive. This involved applications to supranational courts, complaints to the United Nations treaty monitoring bodies, advocacy and diplomacy through meetings and letter writing, and conflict resolution.

Highlights include acting in the peace process in Colombia, the drafting and passing through the Human Rights Council of a Resolution on the Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attack, the successful proposal of civil legislation to tackle FGM, namely FGM Protection Orders, successful legal interventions leading to the release of unlawfully detained prisoners and the reinstatement of Judges from Bahrain to Honduras, trainings in child rights for UNICEF in Nigeria, tackling sexual violence in trainings in India and Tanzania and fact finding in refugee camps, even as they went up in flames.

My practice alongside the pro bono work ranges from terrorism, murder and protest cases in courts in England and Wales to training of Judges internationally in counter-terrorism and financial crime, to complaints of international human rights violations at the United Nations, to litigation before the Inter-American Commission and Court and European Court of Human Rights.

I've been jubilant and crushed by my appearances in civil and criminal courts of appeal and the Supreme Court. I've battled through the press and demonstrations, representing protestors and celebrities and I have addressed thousands of juries and magistrates on behalf of clients – and for 10 years also for the prosecution -who have been charged with offences from murder to shoplifting. I've had razor blades waved in front of my face, been caught in prison lockdowns and had to make a swift exit from an unwell client in the grip of psychosis. I've held the hands of families of those unlawfully killed and sat in detention centres opposite scared children. I became an unlikely expert on fixed penalty notices during Covid and then a voice against the Single Justice Procedure which continues to operate with injustice.

Fairness and access to justice, including people's involvement through jury trials, have been the accompanying drum beat and salsa rhythm.

### **And so, where will I focus over the next year?**

#### **Turning to national priorities**

##### **First priority: the crisis in the criminal courts and the legally aided Bar**

**Firstly, juries** - I am leading the Bar Council's stance against the government proposals to reduce jury trials. The opposition is principled and pragmatic.

The constitutional principle is deep with its importance being cemented in 1670 when Edward Bushel and his fellow jurors, a disinterested group of property owners, would rather have gone to prison than convict the Quakers Penn and Mead of causing tumultuous assembly by preaching in Gracechurch Street.

There is much to do to recover our criminal justice system. The latest government proposals restricting jury trials will not reduce the backlog of cases, built up over years of financial slash and burn of the criminal justice system but may further erode trust which hangs by the thread of citizen participation in the criminal courts.

The pragmatic points are that the reduction of juries would have no impact on the existing backlog as it would take effect towards the end of this Parliament. Impact even then is highly uncertain. Meanwhile energy and focus are drained from

implementing the urgent reforms now that would decrease the backlog. These include intense case management; successful reduction of the backlog can be seen in courts where there has been pro-active triaging of cases led by CPS and police and opening the courts that continue to sit empty by removing the cap on sitting days. If we can implement these reforms in the courts, and have every court room sitting, we can reduce the backlog.

The calls for prisoner escort and custody service reform is the whine that became a roar. The combined value of the two contracts, for north and south, is nearly £1.4 billion. The annual cost is around £138 million. And yet hours are lost in courts each day due to prisoners not being brought to court on time and when at court, not taken up into the dock due to lack of staff. I know because I am one of the barristers buzzing the cells with the forlorn hope that my client might have arrived or sat in an empty courtroom chatting with the unsung clerk and usher -as we wait.

It is commonsense to combine and implement all of Sir Brian Leveson's other recommendations to reduce the backlog before further removing a fundamental part of our criminal justice system. The Bar Council is hand in hand with Circuit Leaders and the Criminal Bar Association to protect our jury system. The government, if listening, can move past this issue and return to getting on with the emergency action needed in our courts. We remain ready and willing to assist.

## **Secondly, legal aid**

Properly resourcing the publicly funded Bar remains at the heart of the legally aided work that we do. Legal aid should be placed alongside the NHS and education. It is essential to ensure equality before the law.

I will focus on legal aid across all jurisdictions.

In criminal cases, the backlog in the Crown Court is nearly 80,000. Trial dates are being fixed for as far away as 2029 and 2030. The delays show a system in crisis. It is the result of political decisions to impose savage cuts and consistent underinvestment in the criminal justice system.

Between 2009 and 2023 public funding for justice declined by 22.4% in real per person terms – 30% behind where it should have been if it had kept pace with inflation, population growth and the economy. The June 2025 Spending Review brought some welcome news with a commitment to additional spending, but it is clear justice is left behind where it should be. It remains the Cinderella of public services.

In criminal legal aid, in 2022, criminal law barristers were forced to take industrial action for the criminal justice system. In September 2022, I brokered the opening of negotiations with former Lord Chancellor, Brandon Lewis on what became an historic legal aid increase of around 17%, to barristers, when calculated in an impact statement in September 2023.

This was followed by an increase in prosecution fees and further money into the youth courts.

However, this should have been a start and now has been overtaken by the cost of living and inflation.

Funding does aid retention of barristers. Numbers of barristers who receive at least 80% of their income specifically from criminal legal aid, fell 11% from 2017/2018 to 2020/2021 but have since returned to 2017/2018 levels, following the legal aid investment in 2022.

However, the number of KCs receiving at least 80% of their income from legal aid, or those who predominantly practise in crime, has fallen by a quarter.

And the despair is back as we visibly no longer have enough barristers in our courts.

The government has recently announced that there will be up to £34 million invested in barristers and higher court advocates. This is welcomed but it is in stark contrast to the £550 million for the support of victims. The Bar supports victims and does so every day. A challenge to this balance of financing is that supporting a complainant to court will be ineffective – a waste of resources - if there is no prosecutor to enable them to give evidence or defence barrister to ensure that the trial goes ahead.

I am back on the board of the Criminal Legal Aid Advisory Board, that I helped set up in 2022 and it was positive that Sarah Sackman, the courts minister, attended the last meeting.

It was the last CLAAB chaired by HH Deborah Taylor. I send thanks to her as she completes her term. I look forward to working with the new Chair.

There is a declining number of barristers and solicitors undertaking civil legal aid work. It has been 30 years since there was any meaningful increase to civil legal aid rates. This is unsustainable.

The Bar Council produced a report on the Family Law Bar in December 2025 setting out that attrition of its barristers from legally aided work is due to increased complexity alongside a severe reduction in legal aid.

The overall result is that people do not have access to justice, including when they are seeking to flee violence in the home, struggling with collapsing housing or trying to hold the state to account on how their loved one died in a hospital or police station. Barristers representing families should at least be paid the same as the barristers representing the state.

I will invite the government to address the submissions of the Bar Council in the Review of Legal Aid in February 2024, as well as the specific report on the Family Bar.

Legal aid is back in sharp focus in 2026.

Pro bono work through Advocate and FRU and others, remains supported by the Bar Council. However, legal aid must be properly funded, because pro bono can only ever meet a tiny fraction of the need.

**Second priority, children in the justice system** - The age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales is 10 years old. It is the lowest in Europe. I have set up a working group to analyse the increasing of that age. We are rightly concerned about crime, victims and public safety. But the question is not "*how do we punish*" but "*how do we prevent a lifetime in the criminal justice system?*" A proportion of children in custody are care experienced. Neurodiversity and learning disability are significantly over-represented. The measure of a justice system is how it treats the most vulnerable.

**Third priority: combating violence against women and girls** has been a focus of my career and remains so as Chair of the Bar. The Government also has a manifesto commitment to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. One area that is overlooked is where women and girls are abused and sometimes killed because the perpetrator, usually a family member, believes them to be a witch. It is 25 years since the Victoria Climbié Independent Statutory inquiry into the murder of Victoria Climbié. Victoria was murdered by her great aunt and her great aunt's boyfriend through belief that she had "demons inside her".

There remains a lack of proper recording of these cases in the Crown Courts, so that appropriate protection can be determined through data analysis.

There also is no consideration in sentencing of the belief that drives the harm. I will look at whether the Sentencing Council should consider its inclusion as an aggravating factor in sentences. This would serve to mark the serious physical and emotional abuse inflicted on the person by a witchcraft belief and also lead to better caselaw on the extent of the issue.

Hitting the ground at pace, at the invitation of the National FGM Centre, I will be chairing a session, in the coming weeks, on abuse of people through witchcraft and spirit belief. The roundtable will include Parliamentarians, police, Ministers and other high-level representatives.

Stalking is an increasing threat to women and girls both physically and online.

I represented the family of Shana Grice, a 19-year-old who was stalked by her ex-boyfriend. Her first report to the police was on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 2016 – “*I don’t really know how to start this conversation but I think I’m being stalked*” - and her last report to Sussex police was on the 12<sup>th</sup> July 2016 when she telephoned twice, the second time asking for the police to respond. She was marked as low risk. Two weeks later he murdered her. A further 12 women came forward to authorities after Ms. Grice’s murder to report stalking and harassment by him.

There is a review of the stalking laws due to be published this year. We offer our expertise to assist with its recommendations.

**Fourth priority** - Amongst the legal aid demands, I will not overlook **commercial and arbitration** work. It is significant and our barristers are an essential and brilliant part of the UK’s legal services, which are one of the most significant contributors to the economy, generating £42 billion pounds annually. The UK legal services market is the largest in Europe and second only to the U.S. in value globally. It’s expected to grow at 5.1% annually until 2029.

I am delighted to be part of the government’s newly established English Law Promotion Panel and will work to promote the work of our barristers both domestically and internationally.

There is an important intersection between this work and investment into legal aid and the broader justice system. The chronic failures in the criminal justice system damage the UK’s wider reputation for the rule of law on which commercial justice stands. There is no firewall between criminal justice failure and commercial justice confidence. The struggles of our publicly funded justice system are noticed, internationally.

#### **Fifth priority - AI and tech**

A.I. and digitalisation is a world away from when I started at the Bar, receiving instructions by fax and briefs delivered tied in a pink, white or green ribbon.

Having spoken about this topic to various colleagues, including Judges, last year, I will be progressing work already being undertaken in this field.

One concern is people's everyday access to courts and tribunals. The Justice Select Committee recently described the county court as dysfunctional and failing to deliver justice.

Also, too often money is spent on systems and layout of buildings that do not fit with the working practice of barristers in court. I invite the Ministry of Justice and HMCTS and judiciary to include the Bar Council and its barristers in any proposed reforms.

I also will continue my focus on reforming the **Single Justice Procedure** and invite the Ministry of Justice to act. It is issuing fines to the most vulnerable people in circumstances where they should not be prosecuted. It's nearly a year since the Magistrates Association itself recommended reform. We stand to assist with the implementation. Speed and saving do not always equate to justice. There is no doubt that the Single Justice Procedure offends fundamental principles of fairness.

### **Internationally**

#### **Sixth priority – War and Law and the Environment**

2026 is a year in which the world is deeply divided, with significant and growing geopolitical tensions, economic challenges and environmental concerns both at home and abroad, with ongoing and rising conflicts and a shifting global order.

I will bring the Bar Council's Climate Crisis working group into clearer view, including promoting the intersection between climate competence training and the development of commercial work.

We all have an interest in protecting the planet for future generations and I will help the Bar Council play its part. The international crime of ecocide also will be in focus. Every day, we watch the news and see military strikes inflicting widespread and long-term damage on the environment. It would be an important by-product of the international crime of ecocide if it depoliticised referrals of warring states for investigation by the ICC and so increased effective prosecutions.

Another area I am keen to promote is the expansion of barristers working in conflict resolution and rebuilding rule of law and justice systems in countries emerging from conflict.

And so, a little about Colombia where, in 2009, I joined a fact-finding of extra-judicial killings, facilitated by the NGO PBI, and it shapeshifted into over a decade's human rights work and conflict resolution.

Let me tell you about San José de Apartadó peace community. They are a group of Cacao farmers who resisted displacement in 1997 and set up their own community with rules which included not getting involved in the FARC/State conflict.

On 21 February 2005, paramilitaries and the Colombian army joined to massacre the community's leader and seven others, including three children. The community cut dialogue with the Colombian State and became emblematic of the 52-year-old conflict.

I met the community in 2012 and they agreed that I could open talks with the Colombian government over a Constitutional Court Order which had ordered reparations by the Colombian government. I was supported by the British embassy.

I had a meeting with former President Santos on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2013 at the Presidential palace in Bogotá, together with the former Colombian Ambassador to the U.K, Mauricio Rodriguez Munera.

I requested a public apology for former President Uribe's stigmatisation of the community, immediately after the massacre, as FARC. President Santos apologised on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013. The words remain with me:

*"We do not agree with phrases or attitudes which stigmatise those who strive for peace and reject violence. On the contrary, we consider that every defender of peace and human rights must be praised and protected."*

*"For this we ask for forgiveness. I ask for forgiveness. And I do so with the knowledge that forgiveness is a condition for peace, and that peace is the only guarantor that there will be no more victims."*

During this time, I met many people who had fled Venezuela. I have their stories.

Information gathering, analysis of evidence and resolving conflicts of others is core to barristers' skillsets.

## **Europe**

### **Seventh priority - protection of lawyers**

I will press the Government for the UK's ratification of the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer. Only two days ago, a barrister wrote to the Midland Circuit Leader about his chambers receiving anonymous calls, one accompanied by verbal abuse, after he had represented an

Afghan refugee convicted of rape. Conflating barristers with their clients stabs at the heart of the rule of law and the Bar Council is firm in its support of our barristers.

This year, I am leading the Bar Council's examination of the European Convention on Human Rights and the application of Article 3 and Article 8. Also, from recent conferences in Germany and France, it is clear that freedom of speech and protection of rights to protest is an area that the Bar Council should also keep in focus.

### **And so to barristers ourselves**

There is ongoing work by the Bar Council in relation to the **Bar Standards Board**. The delays in handling complaints is a failure of regulation. The BSB needs to do less and do it well, returning to its core purpose of risk-based regulation of authorised persons, and stopping non-core work. It is not a sustainable model of regulation for there to be continued increased cost to barristers alongside continued poor end -to -end enforcement by the BSB.

The BSB has had and continues to have a torrid time, but action is being taken. We have a good working relationship with the new BSB Chair Professor Chris Bones and we share the same aim. Whilst considering the context of an increase in complaints, it is his clear goal is that the BSB reduces the unit cost of processing each report and investigation, through efficiency so that the large increases in practising fees that we have suffered for the last four years will not continue.

The issue of deferred call to the Bar remains under discussion by the Bar Council, the Inns of Court, the Council of the Inns of Court and the BSB. A way ahead should emerge in the spring.

### **Eighth priority - addressing the earnings gaps at the self-employed Bar**

The Bar Council has been monitoring income since 2020. There remains a substantial gender earnings gap and we know that certain lucrative types of work still go to men.

In November 2025, the Bar Council published the latest earnings figures (by sex) for the profession.

Based on 2024 earnings data: Women were earning less than men across all experience levels at the self-employed Bar. Junior women were earning 76% of what junior men were earning. Women silks were earning on average 72% of their male colleagues' median gross earnings. Earnings gaps persist across every post-qualification experience band and in every area of practice and is still increasing.

The widest gaps were in commercial and Chancery practice, where women at 11-15 years post-qualification were earning 63% of their male colleagues' median fee income.

Under my leadership, the Bar Council will continue to encourage chambers to audit earnings to establish patterns by protected characteristics using our earnings toolkit as well as promote meaningful conversations on earnings in practice review.

We already have guidance in the form of the practice review guide developed in partnership with the IBC. We will step up offers of training, guidance and bespoke advice to chambers. Women and those from minority groups at the Bar also need support to recognise their worth when fee negotiation takes place at point of briefing.

In 2026, we will work with solicitors to encourage fair briefing practices. I already have had one meeting with the President of the Law Society, Mark Evans, and the Bar Council and Law Society will collaborate.

I will lead the initiation of a campaign to improve billing practices. Junior barristers and women often don't bill to reflect the work that they have done, feeling pressured or lacking confidence to bill the full hours that they have worked.

**Ninth priority - addressing Bullying and Harassment.** The Bar Council commissioned the Harman review in June 2024 and it was published in September 2025. Its 36 recommendations have been accepted by the Bar Council and are being implemented. One significant recommendation is the appointment of a Commissioner for Conduct. She has been appointed and will be announced shortly.

All barristers are entitled to work in a safe environment and there is no place for bullying and harassment in this profession.

This is a wonderful profession and I am determined our junior colleagues and aspiring barristers are not deterred from the pathway to and in the Bar by the unacceptable behaviour of a minority at the Bar and on the Bench.

I welcome the support that the Bar Council has received from the Lady Chief Justice and from the Senior Presidents in tackling bullying or poor behaviour from the Bench.

I will stamp my own foot on bullying or harassment, whilst wearing heels.

## **Tenth priority - social mobility**

Research suggests that a barrister's socio-economic background continues to have a notable and persistent negative impact on their income. Cultural matching, fit and polish – too often mistaken for merit - should not be determinative at the point of entry to the profession, nor to progress within the profession. Sadly, too often they are.

Previously, I have taken part in moots with students for Big Voice London, had the most engaging questions from an evening with care-leavers and of, course, have taught in Gray's Inn's training programmes. A former client of mine, convicted of serious assault when she was a teenager, became a mentee. I assisted her to be called to the Bar and, many years ago now, she spent a month shadowing me in court at the Old Bailey. She is a good example of how the Bar can open its doors wide.

I will continue to build on the work of my predecessors, the Bar Council and many organisations and individuals across the Bar - to identify talent and to provide access to the profession to those with less social capital or contacts - through work experience (like Bar Placement Week), mentoring and other programmes.

On leaving school, children with poor verbal communication skills are less likely to find employment and more likely to suffer from mental health difficulties. The Government's focus on oracy is a real opportunity for the Bar to make a difference.

Advocacy is our profession's key skill. Over the next 12 months I will promote the Speak for Success resources we have created for school children to help them develop core skills in listening, storytelling, persuading and arguing respectfully - skills that we need to navigate life. In fact, I will go back to school and, hopefully, inspire a few potential barristers along the way.

## **Eleventh priority - Access to the Bar for those with disabilities**

Disability is too often given less priority than other protected characteristics. My nephew, Oliver, started to lose his sight aged 15 and by 16 years old the genetic condition LHON left him unable to see. He somehow overcame the barriers. He wouldn't let sport be taken away from him and he now plays Blind Football for England. We – my family- are very proud of him.

There are many brilliant barristers who also have disabilities, including those that are hidden. I will continue to work alongside them and support them in their chambers and also with HMCTS to improve assistance and facilities for disabled practitioners.

Our ambition remains - a Bar of all – for all. We have made progress, but there is much more to do if we want to create an inclusive Bar where everyone feels welcome and able to flourish.

**Twelfth priority - wellbeing.** Our lives can be limited in many different ways if we are stressed and heading to burn out.

In addition to assessing last year's pilot Reflective Practice models, we will pilot trauma informed training for both barristers and chambers' employees.

I became interested in this training around a decade ago, when trying to shake from my head photographs of the tortured and murdered and witness evidence of the extra-judicial killings in Iran's 1988 Massacre.

I also spent many hours with Brigida in San José de Apartadó, talking to her and watching her paint. She painted her trauma. One painting is a tree with stones underneath. Each stone has the name of a member of San José de Apartadó peace community killed during Colombia's conflict. I still remember the conversation with Brigida where she pointed at the name on one stone and said simply: "mi hija" – my daughter.

Of course, a large part of wellbeing is tied to our day-to-day interactions, how we treat others and the importance of being sensitive to inclusion and cognisant of how another may feel. The Bar Council's work in wellbeing is deep and developed. There also are many organisations launched by barristers that greatly benefit our profession and my door always is open.

## **Conclusion**

As I have ended on the twelfth priority, it is appropriate that I finish with Twelfth Night.

Using Shakespeare's routes to the top of the tree, I wasn't born great, and I will leave it to you to decide if I have achieved greatness -or might yet- as I would categorise my leadership, as through service of clients.

But standing here as Chair of the Bar, I do feel the greatness thrust upon me. I will carry it through 2026. I will work in an inclusive way. I will keep my hand outstretched and the ladder down for others and I will represent the Bar with courage and kindness.

Thank you.