

Jury Report

KHMW Jan Brouwer Thesis Award 2025 - Law

Kristen Lazarus LLM, VU Amsterdam

The Politics of Humanitarian Aid in Sudan: The Final Nail in the Outdated International Humanitarian Coffin

The jury of the KHMW Jan Brouwer Thesis Award for Law 2025 had a difficult task. No less than 26 Master theses were nominated, covering a wide variety of legal sub-disciplines. From the classical areas of private law, criminal law and administrative law, to more specific domains such as labour law and the regulation of artificial intelligence. The sheer variety of topics reflects the extent to which law interacts with developments in society, as well as the extent to which our Master students are capable of capturing the challenges and dilemmas of our times. On the whole, we were impressed by the quality of the nominated theses – clearly, there is hope for the future of legal scholarship!

All this did not make the task of the jury any easier. It would have been entirely justified to award not one or two prizes, or perhaps even three (or four). But the regulations required us to select only one winner, and being lawyers we had no choice but to follow the law.

And so we decided, unanimously, to award to KHMW Jan Brouwer Thesis Award for Law 2025 to Kristen Lazarus, for her thesis *“The Politics of Humanitarian Aid in Sudan: The Final Nail in the Outdated International Humanitarian Coffin”*. Kristen obtained her Master degree in “Law and Politics of International Security” at the VU Amsterdam; her supervisor was Dr. Lianne Boer.

Lazarus takes her readers to a horrible conflict that, despite the extent of the suffering, rarely manages to reach the newspaper headlines in the West: the on-going civil war in Sudan. Against that extremely grim background, Lazarus addresses one of the big dilemmas surrounding the delivery of humanitarian aid: while international relief organizations and aid workers strive for neutrality, parties to the conflict seek to politicize the provision of aid. Food, for instance, is deliberately blocked. It is a phenomenon which, as we are all too well aware, does not just occur in Sudan. International aid has the greatest of difficulties, for instance, to reach the starving population in Gaza. Why does this happen, how can we understand the logic behind the situation, and how should we respond? In seeking to answer these questions, Lazarus combines doctrinal legal research with an extensive set of interviews with aid workers. This adds an extremely useful dimension to her research - one that is extensively justified in terms of methodology. She writes with confidence, and she writes well.

But Lazarus did not just write a skillful thesis. She has a message. She takes a clear stance against the traditional insistence on neutrality – since the days of Henri Dunant one of the cornerstones of the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Lazarus understands where the principle of neutrality comes from, but she is not convinced of its merits: ‘this narrative is profoundly hypocritical at best, and completely mis-founded at worst’. Lazarus does not mince her words. Illustrating her argument with the observations of her interlocutors, she advocates giving much more priority to working with local NGOs, relying on their understanding of local conditions and acknowledging their contribution.

It's a thesis that challenges received wisdoms; it challenged the members of the jury - and it deserves to be read by policy makers of international relief organizations and by the people on the ground. Hopefully the KHMW Jan Bouwer Thesis Award will contribute to that.

Prof. dr. N.A.N.M. (Nico) van Eijk, voormalig hoogleraar informatierecht Universiteit van Amsterdam

Prof. dr. E. (Ellen) Hey, hoogleraar internationaal publiekrecht Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam

Prof. dr. R.A. (Rick) Lawson, hoogleraar Europese bescherming mensenrechten en oud-decaan Faculteit Rechtsgeleerdheid Universiteit Leiden

Prof. dr. A.E.M. (Ingrid) Leijten, hoogleraar Nederlands en Europees constitutioneel recht Tilburg University

The meeting of the jury, chaired by KHMW social member drs. G. (Garance) Reus-Deelder, took place on December 16th, 2024 via Zoom. Also present at the meeting was prof. W.B. (Wim) Drees, academic secretary for the social sciences and humanities of the KHMW.