



# Laudatio for Folkert Jensma

*Laudatio by Iris van Domselaar on the occasion of the awarding of an honorary doctorate to Folkert Jensma, 11 January 2024, University of Amsterdam. This laudation was delivered during the Dies Natalis.*

The importance of mothers. Folkert Jensma's mother, in the 1950s, as one of the then-few female lawyers, contributed to access to justice for the ordinary citizen. She likely planted the seed for Jensma's journalistic body of work, with the rule of law and access to justice as a leitmotif.

Now, over 70 years later: the Dutch legal order creaks and groans. According to former politician and senior civil servant Tjeenk Willink, this is partly due to a failing government, failing legal institutions, and failing legal science. But also due to failing legal journalism. Too much focus on incidents and specific questions, too little attention to the broader issue of the role of law in society.

For Jensma, this criticism does not hold. In times of fragmentation, specialization, and the instrumentalization of legal practice and legal science, Jensma has stood in the Netherlands for years as a legal generalist. As a legal editor, Jensma demonstrates a rare and, speaking for myself, almost envy-inducing combination of an eye for 'law in action,' the law as it unfolds in everyday legal practice, and an eye for the bigger picture. Concise when possible, extensive when necessary, always in 'plain language.' Always sharp.

Jensma reported on hundreds of legal cases and wrote reports on what goes on behind the scenes at an overloaded court in Central Netherlands, the immigration judge in Den Bosch, and the juvenile court in Rotterdam.

Always aided by a notebook and an almost invisible and neutral appearance. Jensma also wrote many thorough analyses: on the digitization within the judiciary that never takes off. On the risks of corruption within the criminal defense. Or on the faltering separation of powers, for example, when politicians leave thorny but essential politically charged decisions to the judiciary. Or when a judicial judgment is dismissed as 'just an opinion.' Jensma's pieces often echo an unmistakable indignation about the barriers that 'ordinary citizens' face in seeking justice. Especially when these barriers could be easily addressed with common sense and innovation.

Throughout all of this, Jensma does not shy away from robust criticism of socioeconomically privileged legal professionals. Always with fundamental legal system values such as equality before the law, separation of powers, access to justice, fundamental rights, and above all, the rule of law as a yardstick. An attempt at makeshift analytics - with the help of and thanks to an NRC colleague - shows that since his tenure as legal editor in 2007, Jensma has used the term 'rule of law' in 632 articles.

It is worth considering that precisely on this Dies in January 2024, where we honor Jensma as the 'legal conscience' of the Dutch legal order, the decline of the rule of law looms so prominently. Anyone devoted to the democratic rule of law has been warned, as stated in Jensma's cri de coeur in his Rule of Law column after the recent election results. Perhaps this warning can also be read as a call: that the rule of law should not only be advocated but, in the spirit of Jensma's mother, must also be lived. Not least by legal professionals. Dear Folkert - if I may, I believe I speak on behalf of the entire legal science when I thank you for your unique and socially valuable journalistic body of work in which the legal practice is central from the perspective of the rule of law.