PRESS RELEASE

The fight against impunity and economic, social and cultural rights:

15th EU-NGO Human Rights Forum

The 15th EU-NGO Human Rights Forum took place in Brussels on 5 and 6 December, bringing together hundreds of civil society organisations from across the globe, representatives from international and regional human rights mechanisms and from the EU institutions and Member States. The Forum is a joint venture between the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Commission and the Human Rights & Democracy Network. The Forum looked at a diverse range of issues, with the dual theme of "Fight against Impunity" and "Economic, Social & Cultural Rights".

"The theme of this year's NGO Forum – accountability – reflects the EU's strong commitment to ensure that where human rights violations occur, victims have access to justice and redress." said the EUSR for Human Rights Stavros Lambrinidis, opening the Forum.

The event saw also contributions from UN Special Rapporteurs Mr Pablo de Greiff and Mr Olivier de Schutter, Sakharov Prize recipient Salih Mahmoud Osman, International Commission of Jurists Regional Director Ramón Cadena Rámila, alongside many representatives from civil society, Human Rights Defenders, NGOs and the EU Institutions.

The “Fight against Impunity” panel discussed the various strategies aimed at breaking the cycle of impunity for gross human rights violations and the most serious crimes of international concern, and heard from Human Rights Defenders from around the world about their experiences on the ground. Ensuring accountability for human rights abuses and violations requires constant vigilance, and the EU has taken this opportunity to hear directly from those on the front lines.
The "Economic, Social & Cultural Rights" panel discussed how the use of accountability mechanisms can advance the respect, protection and realisation of economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) in a globalised world. It examined the gaps between national protection and needs, the accountability of duty bearers and other actors such as companies and the impact of cross-boundary or transnational activities, which can exacerbate vulnerabilities and make it more difficult to hold those responsible to account, and paid particular attention to the role of Human Rights Defenders in the ESCR context.

Engagement with civil society is essential for the ongoing work the EU is undertaking to help realise human rights, indivisible and universal for all peoples. Events like the EU-NGO Forum are just one of the ways in which the EU engages with civil society.

In her address to the closing session of the Forum, European External Action Service Managing Director for Global and Multilateral issues Mara Marinaki said: "At a time when space for civil society is being encroached upon, both nationally and in international fora, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that the voices of NGOs, Human Rights Defenders, and all actors active on promoting and protecting Human Rights are heard and acted on".