Dear Friends,

Warm welcome again in our European house, I am proud that we once again and together mark the International Day for Human Rights in Sudan.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 66 years ago. At our Delegation of the European Union we have been celebrating this important occasion every year for the past seventeen years and it is already my third time to host this event.

Our aim is to send a clear message that the protection of human rights is an important prerequisite for the strengthening of our relations with other countries to which Sudan is not an exception. The EU is fully committed to upholding human rights.

Two years ago the European Union adopted the Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy, together with its Action Plan, and we have appointed EU Special Representative for Human Rights.

Since then, with the support of EU Member States, we have been advocating human rights in over 40 human rights dialogues with third countries and we have been tirelessly promoting human right values with regional and multilateral organisations.

In particular, we want to reassure about our continuous support for the human rights related projects we implement here in Sudan through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

I would like also to honour the individuals and institutions that strengthen the values of human rights and freedoms in Sudan and beyond. Tonight's event is meant to bring together human rights activists, civil society and in fact all people who care about human rights to meet and engage in discussions about the path for activism in human rights in Sudan.
Freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of thought, freedom of the press, religious tolerance and freedom from fear and torture - are our shared concerns and they require firm vision and hard work.

We continue to believe in greater courage, stronger will, better ways and more ambitious expectations. And we eagerly encourage all the brave people and their supporters who tirelessly plant the seeds of human rights for a better Sudan and a better world. This can mean to firmly advocate women's rights. It can also mean to peacefully demonstrate against religious discrimination. The
destruction of religious buildings is a clear violation of freedom of religion or belief. Arresting peaceful congregants is furthermore a violation of their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly which are all guaranteed under Sudan’s constitution.

One year ago, we remembered the passing away of Nelson Mandela, one of the most significant personalities in the recent history of mankind. At that time, I was honoured to hand over an award to the lawyer Dr. Amin Mekki Medani, a man with high moral credibility for his tireless work with the civil society and defending human rights in Sudan and internationally. His arrest and detention earlier this week clearly go against the spirit of national dialogue, are a violation of the constitution, freedom of expression as well as relevant Sudanese laws. He should be released immediately, along with other political detainees.

The EU will continue to take a proactive approach with key partners and supports the role of civil society organisations throughout the world.

Success of our European project is based on commonly shared values including human rights and active civil society which are the cornerstone of our internal stability and prosperity. I want to confirm tonight that the European Union will always support you and we will never forget your efforts.

The protection, defence and democratic transformation of freedoms and human rights are the keys to stability, peace, development and full-fledged integration of Sudan into the region and the world.

Tomas Ulicny
Ambassador