

**Speech by Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst,
Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon.**

"2011 Human Rights Film Festival"

as part of the "Multimedia Virtual Space for Human Rights",
a project funded by the European Union and implemented by COSV.

Major Ziad Kaed-Bey, representing Minister Ziyad Baroud,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today with our Lebanese and European partners to launch the 2011 human rights Film Festival.

Having just arrived in the country, I can see the efforts undertaken by many actors, including a striving civil society, to protect human rights. Many concerns indeed call for urgent action, including promoting equality between women and men, improving the living conditions of refugees, improving prison conditions, protecting migrants, fighting all kinds of discrimination, and abolishing the death penalty.

Any country that aspires for stability and long lasting peace is to place the protection of the rights of its citizens as an overriding principle, a key pivot of its development and a source of government's legitimacy.

Respect for human rights, democratic values and the rule of law has for long been the cornerstone of the policies of the European Union within the EU and in our relations with our partners.

Under the European Neighbourhood Policy, the EU supports the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms through continuous political dialogue and financial assistance. The EU is financially supporting the Lebanese institutions to reinforce the protection of human rights and strengthen the democratisation process; but we also support directly the efforts of numerous civil society initiatives.

These initiatives deliver tangible results: for instance, many victims of abuse are now benefitting from legal and psychosocial support; migrant workers are more aware of their rights and how to claim them; multimedia tools have been developed and are currently used to engage on human dignity.

The 2011 human rights Film Festival is one of these initiatives by NGOs funded by the European Union. Why did we choose to support it? Because the promotion of human rights in the 21st century should not be limited to conferences and workshops.

Nowadays, it goes beyond any doubt that audio-visual productions are an efficient medium for raising awareness and shedding light on crucial issues worldwide such as human rights violations and abuses. In the era of communications we know that a photo, a film, a documentary can be more effective at raising consciousness than the best and thickest of the reports.

Ingmar Bergman, the Swedish director, once said: “No art passes our conscience in the way film does, and goes directly to our feelings, deep down into the dark rooms of our souls”. The films and documentaries that will be screened in this festival will allow us to deeply enter into the realities of the people whose human rights are denied, threatened or infringed, the often dark reality of vulnerable groups: immigrants, refugees, prisoners, etc.

I am hopeful that, after each screening, our commitment to do all we can to protect human rights will grow stronger.

I would like to thank the various organisations (*Comitato di Coordinamento Delle Organizzazioni per il Servizio Volontario, KAFA, Permanent Peace Movement and the Centre Libanais des Droits de l'Homme*) that have organised this festival and to commend civil society organisations, which play a crucial and often undervalued role in the protection of fundamental rights... Be assured that the EU will continue to support the efforts of those that strive for the protection and recognition of human rights.

Let's now give the floor to the screen.

Thank you for your attention.