

Declaration by the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on behalf of the European Union on Human Rights Day, 10 December 2013

"This year marks the 20th anniversary of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action confirmed the universality of all human rights and led to historic advances in their promotion and protection. It continues to be a source of inspiration for the EU, which has human rights among its founding principles. Today also marks the creation of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 20 years ago. We congratulate High Commissioner Navi Pillay for her personal commitment and for the tremendous work done by her office to safeguard human rights throughout the world.

One year ago, the EU adopted its Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, and appointed our first Special Representative for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis. Since then, we have focused on ensuring that human rights and democracy are mainstreamed throughout the EU's external action. We have adopted new EU Guidelines on freedom of religion or belief and on the enjoyment of human rights by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons. We have continued our long-standing campaign to ban capital punishment throughout the world.

The EU remains determined to promote the respect for and protection of all human rights of all persons around the world. We are concerned by the increasing level of intimidation, violence and censorship that the media and human rights defenders face in many countries. Our thoughts go out today to all those who are subject to persecution because they defend human rights. The EU will continue to offer unwavering support for human rights and democracy, and those who defend them".