

Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on Human Rights Day, 10 December 2020

On 10 December, we celebrate Human Rights Day. This day deserves our attention as it marks the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Today it is more important than ever to recall that human rights are universal and indivisible, and that our efforts to defend them can never stop.

The coronavirus pandemic has magnified and exacerbated some of the world's greatest challenges, including in relation to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. In many parts of the world, we have seen worrying trends: censorship and restrictions to freedom of expression discrimination, deepening inequalities, an increase in violence against women and girls as well as arbitrary detentions that should have no place in the response to coronavirus. But one thing is clear: the European Union remains committed to respect, protect and fulfil human rights for all; this founding value will continue to guide all our actions. No one should be left behind, no human right ignored.

The coronavirus pandemic has also created an opening for stronger collective action. In today's changing geopolitical landscape, the European Union remains the strongest supporter of multilateralism with human rights at its core.

Today is an opportunity to mark what the European Union has done to advance human rights worldwide. This year saw some notable successes. In the middle of a global pandemic, the EU adopted the new EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, which sets out an ambitious roadmap for external action for the next five years. This Action Plan is an opportunity to reinvigorate our human rights and democracy work. The establishment of an EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, giving us the power to impose sanctions, with asset freezes and travel bans, on those involved in serious human rights violations and abuses is another tangible step that will further strengthen collective action on human rights. Throughout this year, the EU has been a leading voice in the multilateral institutions that work to uphold human rights. Building cross-regional coalitions in support of UN action has been a top priority. Our work in support of UN action on Belarus is a key example. Across the spectrum of human rights, the European Union has sought to bring renewed focus and build alliances.

On the ground, EU Delegations and Member States Embassies supported civil society organisations and human rights defenders, sometimes taking them out of danger, observing trials in many parts of the world from Russia to Colombia and Hong Kong, working on projects that advance the rights of women and girls, persons in vulnerable situations, media freedom and support civil society. The EU and its Member States will promote women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a priority.

However much remains to be done. Looking to 2021 and beyond, the European Union commits to working alongside its partners to show leadership on human rights issues and to work to strengthen the protection of human rights in a post-COVID-19 world.

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