

## Moving Towards an Ambitious EU Human Rights Policy

### Co-ordinating Members

- Amnesty International
- Christian Solidarity Worldwide
- International Rehabilitation Council for Torture victims

### Full Members

- Association européenne des Droits de l'Homme
- Association for the Prevention of Torture
- CBM
- Club of Madrid
- Conference of European Churches
- Coalition for the International Criminal Court
- DEMAS
- Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network
- European Partnerships for Democracy
- European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
- FIACAT
- Front Line Defenders
- Human Rights Watch
- Human Rights Without Frontiers
- International Centre for Transitional Justice
- International Dalit Solidarity Network
- International Federation for Human Rights
- International Harm Reduction Association
- International Lesbian and Gay Association - Europe
- International Partnership for Human Rights
- International Rescue Committee Belgium
- Justitia & Pax Netherlands
- La Strada International
- Light for the World
- Minority Rights Group International
- Open Society Institute-Brussels
- Partners for Democratic Change International
- Peace Brigade International
- Penal Reform International
- PLAN International
- Protection International
- Quaker Council for European Affairs
- Reporters sans frontières
- Save the Children
- Search for Common Ground
- Terre des Hommes international federation
- World Coalition against Death Penalty
- World Organisation Against Torture
- World Vision

On 16 June 2010, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, Catherine Ashton, announced before the European Parliament her intention to launch a consultation to inform a new EU human rights strategy. This new strategy must be ambitious and should make the strongest EU statement so far on human rights in terms of purpose, EU policy and EU commitment. We believe that the following recommendations are the absolute minimum requirements for a coherent and effective EU human rights policy.

1. The strategy should state clearly that human rights are not merely principles nor "European" values, but international legal standards and obligations undertaken by states within the framework of international law. We expect the EU to make strong references to obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law, to cooperation with the UN, the Council of Europe and other regional human rights monitoring mechanisms as well as international justice mechanisms.

2. The strategy should make clear that the EU is committed to respecting human rights both at home and abroad, and seek to diminish double standards by consistently addressing human rights violations and abuses whenever they occur. In particular, the strategy must explicitly recognize the need for the EU to strengthen its response to human rights violations that occur within the EU and those caused by EU companies abroad.

3. Respect for human rights should be moved to the centre of EU foreign policy. The strategy needs to pursue an integrated approach to EU human rights policy which ensures the full involvement and commitment of all EU institutions. There should be effective mainstreaming of human rights into all EU policies and mechanisms, including migration, development, energy and trade.

4. The role of EU member states in shaping and implementing EU human rights policy should be spelled out as EU human rights policy will only be meaningful if backed by all 27 member states. We expect EU member states to commit to this new strategy at the highest political level and act on this commitment, including by adopting Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) conclusions which make clear references to international law. Member states urgently need to take on more initiative and responsibility, particularly through proactive engagement on the ground.

*The Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) is an informal grouping of NGOs operating at EU level in the broader areas of human rights, democracy and conflict prevention. Participation in the network is open to non-governmental organizations which engage at EU level in the promotion of human rights, democracy and conflict prevention in and outside the EU.*

*The vision of the HRDN is that human rights and democracy are placed at the heart of the EU's internal and external policy agenda. This vision should manifest itself in a EU that effectively protects human rights at home and is a force for positive change in the world. In pursuit of this vision, the network aims to influence EU and member state human rights policies and the programming of their funding instruments to promote democracy, human rights and sustainable peace.*

5. The strategy should guarantee and clarify how obligatory human rights training for all levels of EU staff (including Heads of EU Delegations and EEAS Directors) will take place. The strategy should also make a commitment to ensuring that performance reviews on human rights are an integral part of the annual evaluations for all EU diplomats and relevant officials.

6. The strategy should ensure transparency and accountability on how the commitments undertaken are implemented by all institutions. In this respect, a genuine partnership with civil society, which includes regular consultation in non-EU countries and in Brussels, must be ensured. The new strategy should ensure that the European Parliament and civil society organizations are stakeholders in overseeing implementation of the EU's human rights policy.

7. To guarantee effective implementation of this new strategy we call on EU member states and the High Representative to ensure the appointment of EU Special Representatives on human rights. We support the European Parliament's call for the appointment of high level EU Special Representatives on human rights, international justice and international humanitarian law, women's rights, children's rights, and human rights defenders. Such Special Representatives on human rights should be expert level appointees and would act as the high-level face and voice of EU human rights policy internationally, increase the coherence of the EU's human rights policy, and fill the gap between member states and the EEAS by acting as focal points for internal guidance and expertise.

8. The new strategy should improve the effectiveness of Council decision-making structures in addressing human rights. This should include frequent discussions on human rights within the Political and Security Committee (PSC) and all geographical working groups, as well as the establishment of a Brussels-based working group on human rights (COHOM) that would include human rights experts from all 27 EU Permanent Representations. Unless the Permanent Representations in Brussels are regularly involved in discussing EU human rights policy, the commitments made in this new human rights strategy will be empty pledges. Similarly, the strategy should look at strengthening the role of the Working Group on Fundamental Rights and Citizenship (FREMP) in addressing human rights violations within the EU.

9. We expect all 27 EU member states, the EU High Representative, the European External Action Service (EEAS), EU third country delegations, the Council President and the European Commission to be bound by this new strategy, and for the strategy to clearly set out the roles and individual responsibilities of all actors in shaping and implementing EU human rights policy.