



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



## **Council Conclusions on the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

*2914th GENERAL AFFAIRS Council meeting  
Brussels, 8 December 2008*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Council reaffirms the primary importance which it attaches to that Declaration. Its universality, and the need to promote it, have been reaffirmed at the highest level, in particular at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna, at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000 and at the World Summit in 2005.
2. The Universal Declaration is the cornerstone in the edifice built after the atrocities of World War II for the protection and promotion of human rights at the national, regional and global level, and is the foundation for advancing and ensuring human dignity worldwide. The European Union welcomes the fact that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is now recognised by an increasing number of States as a major contribution to the development of customary international law.
3. The European Union, which is founded on the principles of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and of conscience, democracy and the rule of law, fully shares the values in which the Declaration is rooted. Its action both internally and externally is based on respect for the human rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Treaty on European Union, and reflected in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The universality and indivisibility of human rights, the responsibility to defend those rights throughout the world, and the promotion of pluralistic democracy and effective guarantees for the rule of law are, for the European Union, essential principles. In this context, the European Union would note that the Agency for Fundamental

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Rights was created to provide the Institutions and the Member States with assistance and expertise in matters pertaining to fundamental rights.

4. The European Union recalls that everyone is therefore entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration. It reaffirms that the primary task of international law in the sphere of human rights is to protect persons in the exercise of their freedoms and their rights. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms, without distinction of any kind, such as birth, race, sex, language, religion or conviction, political or other opinion, origin, belonging to a minority or other status. There can be no valid exemption from the principles enshrined in the Declaration through special provisions based on tradition or on national, cultural or religious considerations.
5. The European Union recognises and welcomes the achievements since the adoption of the Universal Declaration. However, it deplors the continuing flagrant violations of human rights in many regions of the world, including on the basis of sexual orientation. It reaffirms that the international community and all States, acting individually or collectively, have the legitimate and permanent responsibility to promote and safeguard human rights throughout the world, particularly in the context of the responsibility to protect, a key concept endorsed by all Heads of State at the World Summit in 2005 and which it is important for the international community to promote in order to protect civilian populations against the crime of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. The Union for its part will continue to denounce such violations and will endeavour to bring them to an end, wherever they occur. It reaffirms its unshakeable commitment and determination to make the full exercise of all human rights a reality for all.
6. The European Union pays tribute to the courage of human rights defenders, those often anonymous women and men who fight indefatigably to defend these universal values, sometimes at the cost of their own safety, and it will continue to accord them its full support.
7. The European Union exhorts all States which have not yet done so to accede to the main human rights treaties concluded in the United Nations framework, especially the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The European Union also invites all States which have not yet done so to plan to sign and ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

As we mark the sixtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, combating the impunity of those responsible for human rights violations must be a priority. The European Union calls on all States which have not yet done so to accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Reaffirming the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights, the European Union notes with interest the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights by the United Nations General Assembly.

8. The European Union welcomes the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 2007 of its historic resolution calling for a moratorium on the application of the death penalty. It reaffirms its strongly held commitment to the universal abolition of the death penalty and urges those States which still practise capital punishment to consider abolishing it for good.

9. Women's rights merit special attention, as they are still all too often flouted in the world. All States are called on to step up their actions regarding the place and role of women in areas such as equality between men and women, the right to have a family, work, and combating violence against women, inter alia by drawing up an inventory of good practice. In this context, the European Union welcomes the adoption, on the one hand, of EU guidelines on violence against women and girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them and, on the other hand, of a comprehensive EU approach to protection and the role of women in conflict and post-conflict situations as well as guiding principles which aim to improve respect for women's rights in the context of operations under the European Security and Defence Policy.
10. Regarding the rights of the child, the Union will continue to promote a global and consistent approach in all its policies relating to human rights, security and development and humanitarian action.
11. The European Union reiterates its full support for international human rights mechanisms at the global and regional levels, particularly those within the United Nations (the Human Rights Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the fifteenth anniversary of which is currently being celebrated, the General Assembly and special procedures) which play a major role in the promotion and protection of human rights, and for action in this area by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe."

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