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The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights—60 Years of Global Commitment

Adopted in December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly lists the fundamental human rights and freedoms to which all men and women, everywhere in the world, are entitled. Immediately hailed as a triumph, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights united very diverse—sometimes even conflicting—political regimes, religious systems, and cultural traditions.

Six decades later, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains the foundation of international human rights law, and the inspiration for numerous treaties and declarations, including the Council of Europe's European Convention on Human Rights and the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights. Although human rights violations are still documented throughout the world, all countries have accepted the declaration. Some have incorporated it into their national constitutions and laws, and it guides the work of the United Nations.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights enumerates 30 specific rights, including the right to life, liberty and security; the right to be free from slavery; the right to a fair and public trial; the right to own property; the right to peaceful assembly; the right to work; and the right to an education.

Respect for human rights is a founding principle of the European Union, and an integral objective of EU external policy and assistance. The principles of the Universal Declaration are embedded in the EU's founding treaties and were reinforced by the adoption of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in 2000. Respect for human rights is a prerequisite for countries seeking to join the Union and a precondition for countries wishing to forge preferential trade and cooperation agreements with the EU.

The European Union actively supports the UN's human rights agenda through development partnerships and humanitarian



assistance. When the EU and UN collaborate on crisis management programs, both military and civilian operations protect human rights during and after conflict. The EU also works with the UN—as well as autonomously—to build the capacities of governments in developing and transitional countries to meet their human rights obligations, to educate citizens about their rights, and to empower people and communities.

In 2007, the European Commission worked within the UN framework to help secure universal rights for persons with disabilities, develop principles on respect for cultural diversity, reach consensus on promoting decent work opportunities, and make progress toward a strengthened UN gender architecture. The EU also cooperated with the specialized agencies, funds and programs of the United Nations on development and humanitarian efforts in 102 countries across the globe.

Human Rights Defenders Take the Floor

To commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in October 2008 the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the United Nations convened a high-level conference in Brussels to reaffirm and illustrate the scope of the Universal Declaration through the work of human rights defenders across the globe.

Human rights defenders, courageous individuals who by peaceful means advocate, mobilize, and often put their life at risk to defend the most fundamental freedoms of their fellow citizens, are key agents of change in their own society and the best allies of

the international community's efforts to support democracy and human rights.

During the conference, more than 50 human rights defenders and human rights organizations testified to the reality of the struggle for human rights and reviewed the support mechanisms that have been developed by the UN, the EU, and the Council of Europe.

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted in 1998, recognizes the importance and legitimacy of the work of rights activists, and their need for better protection. In 2004, the EU also issued guidelines that encourage EU countries to do more to support activists at risk.

On the Web

Universal Declaration of Human Rights:
<http://www.un.org/events/humanrights/udhr60/>

The EU and Human Rights:
<http://europa.eu/pol/rights>

Europe's Commitment to Universal Values

The European Union holds that democracy and human rights are universal values that should be vigorously promoted around the world. The effective promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms is essential to sustainable development, peace, and stability, and can serve as a valuable bulwark against terrorism.

The European Security Strategy (ESS), adopted by the EU in 2003, explicitly states, "The quality of international society depends on the governments that are its foundation. The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states. Spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order."

The EU takes a two-pronged approach to promoting fundamental human rights. First, human rights concerns are integrated into all EU policies, programs and projects. The EU Guidelines on Human Rights—a series of policy documents adopted by the Council of the European Union—highlight issues of particular importance to EU Member States, including the death penalty; torture; dialogues with third countries; human rights defenders; and children and armed conflict. Guidelines are a practical instrument of EU human rights policy, and provide EU actors and their partners with the guidance they need to take sustained action in key areas of concern.

Second, the EU finances specific projects to promote and protect human rights through its European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), a program through which the EU supports the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide.

Through 2010, EIDHR programs will focus on the following objectives:

- Enhancing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms where they are most at risk;
- Strengthening the role of civil society in promoting human rights and democratic reform, in supporting the peaceful conciliation of group interests and in consolidating political participation and representation;
- Supporting actions on human rights and democracy issues in areas including human rights dialogues, human rights defenders, the death penalty, torture, and children and armed conflict;
- Supporting and strengthening the international and regional framework for the protection of human rights, justice, the rule of law and the promotion of democracy;
- Building confidence in and enhancing the reliability and transparency of democratic electoral processes, particularly through EU Election Observation Missions (EOMs).

Assistance under EIDHR complements other tools which are used to implement EU policies for democracy and human rights. These range from political dialogue and diplomatic initiatives to various instruments for financial and technical cooperation, including the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI).

For example, EIDHR currently provides support to the rehabilitation of torture victims in 41 countries worldwide, including 20 torture rehabilitation centers and networks in 16 EU Member States. Recent Election Observation Missions have been deployed to Mexico (2006), Bolivia, Yemen, Zambia, East Timor, Bangladesh, and Indonesia, among others.

EIDHR's work also complements more crisis-driven interventions, such as those supported by the EU's Instrument for Stability.

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“The cooperation between the United Nations and the European Commission strives to remove obstacles that hamper the fulfillment of all human rights. It strives to help countries build the necessary capacities, structures and knowledge to enable people to exercise their inalienable rights.”

—Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations

“Respect for human rights is one of the most fundamental and universal values of our world. All of us, in our official capacity and in our private lives, have a responsibility to promote and protect the rights of our fellow members of the human family, be that at home or elsewhere in the world.”

—Benita Ferrero-Waldner, EU External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy Commissioner



EU Insight is published by the Delegation of the European Commission to the United States.

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ISSN: 1830-5059

Catalogue No: IQ-AB-08-11-EN-C

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Issue No. 26, December 2008

Chinese Dissident Wins 2008 Sakharov Prize

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, named in honor of the Soviet physicist and political dissident Andrei Sakharov, has been awarded by the European Parliament every year since 1988 to individuals or organizations who have made an important contribution to the fight for human rights or democracy. Previous honorees include Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Reporters Without Borders.

In 2008, the prize was awarded to Chinese political activist Hu Jia, a

prominent human rights activist and dissident in the People's Republic of China. He has embraced a wide range of causes, including environmental issues, HIV/AIDS advocacy, and a call for an official inquiry into the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. He has also acted as a coordinator of the "barefoot lawyers' movement."

The European Commission also awards the Natali Prize for excellence in reporting on human rights and democracy in the developing world.

For more information: www.eurunion.org/euinsight