

Press Release

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The Council of Europe spells out human rights priorities on the International Human Rights Day

Strasbourg, 10.12.2007- The Council of Europe spells out its priorities in the protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe on the International Human Rights Day:

Ján Kubiš, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia and Chairman-in-Office of the Committee of Ministers: "On this solemn day, aiming to promote human rights protection all over the globe, I would like to focus our attention to the protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, as we must spare no efforts to ensure that these rights are firmly secured".

Referring to a number of serious problems that remain for groups such as Roma and Travelers, Mr Kubiš underlined: "They live as a minorities in almost all Council of Europe member states and continue to face discrimination, prejudice and hostile attitudes in many states. The Council of Europe member states have a duty to address this challenge and the Slovak Chairmanship will pay particular attention to measures that could improve their situation".

René van der Linden, President of the Parliamentary Assembly: "The Council of Europe, the continent's human rights watchdog, is indispensable. And its aims are, clearly, nowhere near being fully realised. The Assembly's recent report on CIA renditions and secret detentions in Europe showed that the Council of Europe does not apply double standards, and that it is willing and able to criticise violations committed in any of our member states.

I have recently signed on behalf of the Assembly an agreement with the European Parliament which should enable us to co-operate better in the future, by providing for more frequent mutual contacts and exchanges of information 'upstream'. I'm confident that this mechanism will be used in the ongoing work by the Assembly's Legal Affairs Committee on UN Security Council and EU anti-terrorism 'blacklists', to be examined by our Assembly in January 2008, which raises serious questions as to whether minimum standards are being met in terms of human rights and the rule of law."

Terry Davis, Secretary General: "If we want to defeat terrorists, we must remain faithful to our ideas and our values. People around the world must know that we are right, and that terrorists are wrong - that we are just, and that they are criminals. Those who argue that secret detention, torture and the denial of the right to a fair trial have stopped a number of terrorist attacks, should have the moral and intellectual honesty to consider also how many future terrorists these abuses of human rights have helped to recruit".

Halvdan Skard, president of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities: "Local and regional authorities are increasingly becoming the first line of defence of human rights within their communities. The Congress, a representative body of more than 200,000 communities in Europe, has a clear mission of bringing the local and regional dimension to human rights protection.

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Local and regional authorities are best placed to respond to situations involving, for example, human trafficking, drug abuse, domestic violence and other human rights violations. Empowering communities, enhancing citizens' participation and involving them in the decision-making was one of the ways of protecting their rights."