



COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSAIRE AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME



CommDH/Speech(2009)8

Commemorative Ceremony for the 60th anniversary

Speech by

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Strasbourg, Palais de la musique et des congrès

1 October 2009

I belong to the generation born during World War II - and grown up in the ashes of this disaster. We learned that Peace was not automatic; it had to be built. Peace required unity in Europe. Peace required respect for each individual. "Never again" was our determination - and hope.

Fortunately, we had politicians who had vision and courage to start building the new Europe. Council of Europe was the first manifestation of this dream. From the very beginning Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law became its mission.

It adopted the first international, legally binding convention on human rights – followed by other treaties. It established procedures to ensure that the agreements were respected in reality. The creation of the human rights court was a milestone. The charter on social rights another crucial step forward.

The agreed norms were tested in crisis situations. The defence of democracy in Greece demonstrated that the Council was something more than a meeting place. When the iron curtain was lifted 20 years ago it was obvious that the new democracies should join the Council.

When celebrating the 60th anniversary we should reflect not only on what our Organisation has achieved, but also on what remains to be done. In fact, serious and structural shortcomings still impede a full realisation of human rights.

There are still Europeans who are forgotten or marginalised; who have lost their homes; who do not have the contacts or the means to seek legal advice; who face language barriers when they want help.

People who are repressed or underground and fear exposure; who are isolated in their disability; who have lost everything and are too fragile to start again; who are victims of different forms of intolerance or discrimination, violence and trafficking.

People whose living conditions are inhuman; who risk their lives to seek and tell the truth; who flee war and poverty and knock on our doors asking for a better life.

The challenge is still in front of us: how can we ensure genuine rights for everyone on our continent?

Continuing to build a truly just society is certainly not simple. It requires political will, popular support and resources. It requires legislation influenced by human rights principles; a competent, non-corrupt judiciary; a disciplined police force; a system for independent monitoring; a political culture which is open for criticism and ready to take action for reform. And it requires the courage to dream.

Enabling all people to enjoy equal access to rights must be a priority for all. We therefore ought to continue to join forces to attain the full respect for the equal rights and dignity of all human beings, for a Europe where no one is left without protection of their rights.

Over the past sixty years, the Council of Europe has achieved a great deal in building a continent where disputes are solved by dialogue and injustices corrected by agreed standards and procedures protecting the rights of the individual. This has also sowed hope among many.

We must now empower the next generations with the same hopes, means and abilities to defend the true European values.