



**EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS
COUR EUROPÉENNE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME**

**International Four Freedoms Award 2010
Middelburg, 29 May 2010**

*Speech by Mr Jean-Paul Costa,
President, European Court of Human Rights*

Your Majesty,
Your Royal Highness,
Mr Prime Minister,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,

It is only right that I begin my remarks with words of gratitude for the Roosevelt Foundation. In conferring the International Four Freedoms Award on the European Court of Human Rights, the Roosevelt Foundation has bestowed a high honour on the Court. In its name I thank you most sincerely. It is a privilege indeed to be associated with the memory and legacy of the great Franklin Delano Roosevelt, as well as of Eleanor Roosevelt, a key actor in the elaboration of one of the fundamental texts of the modern age - the Universal Declaration of Human rights.

The legacy of President Roosevelt to humanity is an enduring and invaluable one – a courageous and steadfast commitment to the true freedom of the human person, living in a peaceful society that is fair, decent and inclusive. You know how the situation of the world is now, with its challenge and its threats.

In keeping with its open, outward-looking tradition, The Netherlands was at the forefront of this. The landmark Hague Congress of 1948 federated those who wished for a new and progressive European polity. The Congress translated their vision into audacious proposals. These included a court that to act as a powerful guardian of the values upon which human civilisation rests. The first achievement of this movement was the Council of Europe, which came into being in 1949. And within this new body, the first major achievement was the European Convention on Human Rights, adopted 60 years ago. And so modern Europe's trust in the rule of law, and its faith in the judicial process became reality.

As any human institution, the European Court of Human Rights has grown and developed. Each decade brought some measure of reform to Convention, extending it and improving it. This process continues – it is part of the life of a living institution. But we have to keep in mind our permanent aim: protect men and women, guarantee human rights.

The European context is a dynamic one. Our societies evolve, advance and diversify, and in so doing face new possibilities and challenges, new risks and uncertainties. Being directly open to individuals and civil society, the European Court has been confronted with many of the human rights questions of the present day, in the 21st century. What is the meaning of human dignity in the 21st century? How shall States balance national security and public safety against individual liberty? What recognition and what protection is due to the vulnerable, to the marginalised? These questions are with us, and the answers given define the character of the societies in which we live.

The award today recognises all that has been achieved since the creation of the Court. It is a tribute to the very many women and men, from many walks of life and all corners of Europe who have contributed to its accomplishments. I will make special mention of President René Cassin, a great figure in the history of human rights, and firm ally of Eleanor Roosevelt. And, in the presence of Her Majesty and so many leading figures of Dutch society, it is appropriate to pay tribute to the consistently distinguished representation of The Netherlands on the Court, including a President of the Court, Gerard Wiarda, and this country's unwavering support for the Strasbourg system.

I believe, and am confirmed in my belief by the Four Freedoms Award, that the European Convention on Human Rights will remain a strong pillar of European construction. And the accession of the European Union to the Convention, which is provided for by the Lisbon Treaty, will be an important mark of maturity for the process of European legal integration.

Your Majesty,
Your Royal Highness,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I proudly accept, on behalf of our Court, the Four Freedoms award.

Let me once again express my gratitude on receiving it, let me congratulate the other distinguished laureates, and thank you for your attention today.

I am so happy !