



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

H.K.K Kronprinsen

Tale til Den europeiske menneskerettighetsdomstolen – 60 år

Strasbourg, 18. mars 2019

Mister President of the European Court of Human Rights,
Mister Secretary General,
Distinguished Judges,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen

I am pleased to be back in Strasbourg, and honoured to be here to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe and the 60th anniversary of the European Court of Human Rights.

This is an opportunity to reflect on the history of the Court and on the important purpose it serves, namely to ensure respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law for everyone in Europe. It also gives us an opportunity to reflect on the relevance of this institution and the challenges it faces.

The Court and the Council of Europe were first and foremost conceived as a peace project.

We owe a debt of gratitude to those who came before us – who created the European Convention system. They had a vision for the future of Europe. A vision of cooperation and respect for individual rights. They understood the importance of respect for human rights for attaining and maintaining peace.

To ensure that the horrors of World War II would never be repeated, they saw that a new approach was called for – an approach where the majority would not be able to deprive the minority of their basic human rights.

In 1948, the fundamental human rights were defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Council of Europe acted swiftly, and adopted the European Convention on Human Rights in 1950. By establishing the European human rights system, including a court of human rights, Europe took a bold step and created a unique system for protecting human rights in our part of the world.

With the fall of the Berlin wall, the end of the Cold War, and the subsequent dramatic changes that unfolded in Europe at the end of the 1980s and through the 1990s, the Council of Europe and this Court gained a new relevance. They became key institutions for building a more integrated Europe.

Walls came down, new members joined, and a unity of common values was built up.

Today this Court has the task of safeguarding the fundamental rights of 830 million European citizens. The Court protects our common European values, as reflected in the individual rights. Today however, these values are being challenged. The Council of Europe and the Court are under pressure in parts of Europe.

Let me therefore emphasise the crucial importance of this Court's work to safeguard fundamental rights.

The Court is unique in that its decisions are legally binding for all 47 member states. States are obliged to implement the Court's decisions. This requires political will. Each state must mobilise that will and abide by its international obligations.

States that have the political will but lack the means to meet their obligations can receive assistance from the Council of Europe.

I consider this cooperation to be extremely important. I also welcome the expansion and professionalization of this work under the current Secretary General. And I gather that there is great need for it.

In my view, the Court's impact on the situation of individuals in member states is often underestimated. The list of achievements and landmark judgments from the Court is long and impressive.

Rights we now take for granted have, in fact, been defined by the Court.

I am proud that a former Norwegian judge, Mr Rolv Ryssdal is the longest serving President of this Court. I was reminded yet again of the impressive legacy of Mr Ryssdal, when I stopped at his bust in the lobby of this building today.

In 1950, the establishment of a supranational court to protect human rights and the introduction of a right of individual petition were revolutionary steps. Norway was the second state to ratify the European Convention on Human Rights on January 15, 1952. However, it took another 12 years of reflection before Norway recognised the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court, in 1964.

Since then Norway has been a firm supporter of the Court and the Convention system.

This year, which marks the Court's 60th anniversary, is also the 20th anniversary of the Norwegian Human Rights Act.

Under this act, the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, are implemented directly in Norwegian law with precedence over any other legislation that conflicts with them.

In 2014, the Storting – the Norwegian parliament – adopted amendments to the Constitution giving human rights an even stronger position in Norwegian law. Furthermore, the Norwegian Supreme Court has stated that it will interpret these provisions in the light of the jurisprudence of the Court of Human Rights.

Consequently, it is fair to say that Norwegian law develops in tandem with the Court's jurisprudence.

Mr President,

The Court has undergone major reforms in a changing Europe during your tenure. With the inclusion of many new member states during the late 1990s and early 2000s, the number of cases has increased. This in turn has led to a large backlog.

Mr President, you have achieved a lot during your term.

You have been involved in many important judgments. You have succeeded in substantially reducing the backlog. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you and your colleagues and supporters on an impressive achievement. On my visit today, I have seen a Court that is modern and efficient.

The work of the Court, like that of other Council of Europe institutions, is funded mainly through states' obligatory contributions. Today, unfortunately, we see that the challenges are growing faster than the budgets available for finding solutions.

Norway has been a longstanding supporter of the Court. I am therefore glad that the Norwegian Government has decided to make a further contribution of 600 000 Euros to the Special Account for 2019. We hope that this will alleviate the burden on the court and make it possible to further reduce the backlog of cases.

President, judges and distinguished guests,

Allow me to address an issue that is close to my heart.

I am a United Nations Development Programme Goodwill Ambassador and I travel around the world to promote the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. My ambition is to persuade world leaders to put the SDGs firmly at the top of the agenda. However, one thing is quite clear to me – there will be no genuine development without national stability and peace.

The SDGs set clear targets and they give us a solid framework for making strategic decisions on how to shape the future.

Agenda 2030 is a compelling platform for transformation. Transformation from poverty to prosperity;

from inequality to equity;
from marginalisation to opportunities for all;
from suppression to freedom.

It has the potential to change everyday life for all.

The 2030 Agenda brings the world together. The commitment to leave no one behind goes to the core of our humanity – our willingness and ability to ensure equal rights and dignity for all.

According to the Council of Europe's own assessment, 85 % of its operational activity is relevant for the attainment of the SDGs. This Court is playing a part in this context, perhaps most obviously in relation to SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and SDG 5 on gender equality.

President,

Human rights, democracy and the rule of law must never be taken for granted. They must be actively defended, every day. This is particularly important at a time when fundamental democratic principles are being challenged and where the legitimacy of the European Court of Human Rights is being questioned by some states.

These challenges pose real and immediate threats to human rights, democracy and rule of law in Europe.

There are no sustainable alternatives to democracy. Violations of rights and despotism will inevitably lead to instability, insurrection, violence and suffering.

I would like to take this opportunity to voice my concern about growing disrespect for international law and increasing nationalism. As a strong supporter of inclusive cooperation, I disagree with those who claim that international relations are a zero-sum game. We face common challenges and we should find ways of working better together in order to address them.

Sometimes the very short-term interests of one state may best be served by acting alone. However, the longer-term interests of states will best be secured through mutually binding cooperation.

It is our task to highlight the benefits of international cooperation and international law.

And it is our task to make the general public aware of the positive impact this Court has on their everyday lives. In this way, I hope that we can increase understanding of the role of the Court and the Council of Europe and win strong public support for these crucial institutions.

There have been criticisms that the Court limits national sovereignty, and encroaches on areas that should be left to national authorities to decide.

I take a different view.

Namely that the Court offers legal solutions to some very difficult questions. It gives valuable guidance to states and can help them reconcile different interests among their populations.

In this way, the Court helps to enhance stability.
We should welcome the part it plays, not reject it.

It is our common responsibility to preserve this unique system for future generations of Europeans, for our common future. To this end, Norway remains a consistent partner.

I remain optimistic.
I see that many young people are prepared to stand up for their rights and for the effective protection of these rights.

I visited the Youth Centre here in Strasbourg earlier today. As often before, I was impressed by young people's vision and inner drive. They want to change lives, and not just their own lives, for the better.

With these words, I congratulate the Court on its 60th anniversary.

I wish that people could age in the same way as this Court -- by becoming ever more productive, more effective, more influential and more important. I congratulate you on all that you have achieved over these 60 years.

And I look forward to returning, hopefully before, but at least in 40 years' time, to celebrate the Court's 100th anniversary.