



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

**Fourth Summit of the Heads of State and Government  
of the Council of Europe**

*Reykjavik, 16-17 May 2023*

**Síofra O'Leary**  
**President of the European Court of Human Rights**

Chair,

Your Excellencies,

On behalf of the European Court of Human Rights, I would like to thank you and your delegations for the tremendous work undertaken on the Road to Reykjavik.

This Summit was born of a realisation by Council of Europe States of their need to stand firm against aggression, stand firm in defence of our common European values and stand firm in their resolve to ensure that the mechanisms bequeathed to us by our forefathers and foremothers function effectively in both regards.

Today you reaffirm your commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights and to the Court as the ultimate guarantors of human rights across our continent; for some of you the beating heart, for others the backbone.

The Convention system provides for shared responsibility. It goes without saying that the primary responsibility for ensuring compliance with international legal obligations, to which your States have sovereignly committed is borne by your domestic democratic and judicial systems.

You also recommit to the binding nature of our judgments and decisions, to their timely execution and to ensuring the effective functioning of the Court through the provision of sufficient and sustainable resources.

At no time in the history of the Council of Europe have your resolve and these commitments been more important.

Firstly, in the exercise of its residual competence in relation to the Russian Federation, the Court is ensuring that a former Contracting Party cannot evade retroactively its international legal obligations under the Convention. Individual and interstate conflicts cases are being dealt with as a matter of priority in the only international court currently seised and working at the merits stage.

Secondly, for over 60 years the European Court – your Court - has dealt with well over 1 million applications and handed down almost 26,000 judgments. Those judgments have saved lives, transformed thousands of others and contributed to the bettering of our societies.

Indeed, it is through the judgments and decisions of the European Court of Human Rights that the values underpinning the Council of Europe, and the democratic principles to which you subscribe today, find concrete expression.

There is no doubt that the Convention has proved an essential bulwark in times of conflict.

But its value lies too in its equal application at all times to all States – old democracies and new – in defence of common European values.

Rule of law backsliding, attacks on judicial independence, gender violence and inequality, the erosion of effective political democracy, pluralism and tolerance are not ills befalling other States. They are the ills which the Convention is being used to tackle across all Council of Europe States – your States- whether before domestic courts or in Strasbourg.

Respect for human rights is a legal obligation. But their defence and the defence of those charged with ensuring the law is respected are also acts of politics and diplomacy; acts which require political ambition and courage.

It falls to the European Court, as a court of law, to act with legal rigour and efficiency. It falls to you to ensure that we can bequeath the unique and precious Convention edifice intact to future generations.

Finally, my thanks to Iceland and her enchanting people.