



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

## **Fourth International Human Rights Forum between the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights, the ECHR and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights**

Opening online speech by Mattias Guyomar

*Strasbourg / Arusha, 3 March 2026*

*Dear President Tchikaya,*

*Dear President Mudrovitsch,*

*Dear Ms Wakio Kakai,*

*Fellow Judges,*

*Distinguished guests,*

*Dear friends,*

It is my great pleasure, on behalf of all judges of the European Court of Human Rights, to greet you at today's Forum, kindly hosted by the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.

I regret not being with you in-person today, but I am pleased that Vice President Bårdsen, Judge Seibert-Fohr, and Deputy Registrar Campos are able to join you for this important meeting. I am most grateful to them for representing the Court.

Last year, we marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights. This year, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. On behalf of all the judges of the Court I warmly congratulate our sister court and extend our most sincere wishes for the years ahead.

I also wish to congratulate *Honourable Justice Blaise Tchikaya*, for your recent election as President of the African Court – *cher Président Tchikaya, mes plus sincères félicitations*.

Celebrations are important because they provide us with the hope and motivation we need for our work. However, they are being increasingly overshadowed by attacks on multilateralism and international law.

In many places around the world, a growing narrative challenges the rule of law and pits judges against democracy. Independence of the judiciary, an essential guarantee of the rule of law, is being attacked. Courts and judges are put under immense political pressure. Now, more than ever, we need judicial unity and judicial solidarity.

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We need to build what former President of the Inter-American Court, Judge Hernandez Lopez, called “*collective resilience*”: resilience to face today’s challenges and “preserve the universal principles that unite us.”<sup>1</sup>

Judicial unity translates into a duty of protection and mutual assistance. In times of crisis, reactive solidarity is essential. We owe support to fellow judges and courts who are being targeted. Like the judges of the International Criminal Court, subjected to international sanctions because of decisions taken in the course of their judicial duties.

Judicial unity also means judicial dialogue. Dialogue based on mutual respect, trust, and the shared values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law while respecting legal diversity. The Second Declaration of San José, adopted at our most recent meeting in 2023, reaffirmed our shared commitment to such dialogue.<sup>2</sup> Over the past years, we have managed to strengthen our trilateral cooperation through our biennial forums. Both your regional human rights courts are observers in our Superior Courts’ Network.

Harmony within our judicial family also extends to personal contacts and visits. This was the case, most recently, with our Inter-Registry virtual roundtable in August 2025 which included not only our three courts, but also the ECOWAS Court of Justice and the East African Court of Justice. We also hosted the ECOWAS Court for a study visit in November. In January, we welcomed former President of the Inter-American Court, Judge *Pérez Manrique*, in Strasbourg for the opening of our Court’s judicial year. My colleague *Judge Mingorance Cairat*, elected in respect of Andorra, represented our Court at the Inter-American Court that same month. Another colleague, *Judge María Elósegui*, elected in respect of Spain, will take part in a seminar and hearing of the Inter-American Court in Brazil in March. Two weeks ago, President of the Constitutional Court of Cabo Verde, José Pina Delgado, paid a visit to our Court.

Together, our courts – with our different history, languages, and legal traditions – embody the richness and diversity of the international judiciary. Our dialogue reminds us that law is a living process, written together across generations and jurisdictions. Our judicial work converges as we maintain regular dialogue.

Here, I wish to mention, as an example, our Joint Law Reports, the latest of which was published last year<sup>3</sup>. They are a useful marker of where our respective case-law meets, but also where our perspectives differ.

To further illustrate our dialogue of case-law, I would like to briefly mention two judgments by the Grand Chamber of our Court.

The first is *S.M. v. Croatia* (GC, 2020) which concerned a woman’s complaint of human trafficking and forced prostitution.<sup>4</sup> As there is no definition of human trafficking in Article 4 of the Convention, which prohibits slavery and forced labour, the Grand Chamber found this definition by drawing on the Inter-American approach and the African Charter system.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Message](#) of the President of the IACtHR, Judge Nancy Hernández López, during the Inauguration of the 2025 Inter-American Judicial Year.

<sup>2</sup> Declaration of San Jose II, 26 May 2023, para.2.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/joint-report-2022-2023-afchpr-echr-iachr-eng>

<sup>4</sup> ECtHR, *S.M. v. Croatia* [GC], no. 60561/14, 25 June 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Notably, for the IACHR: *Trabajadores de la hacienda Brasil verde v. Brasil*, 20 October 2016 and *López Soto y otros v. Venezuela*, 26 September 2018; and for the ACHPR: General Comment No. 4 on the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights: The Right to Redress for Victims of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Punishment or Treatment (Article 5).

The second ruling is the Court's historic climate judgment, *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen and Others v. Switzerland* (GC, 2024), which touches upon the interests of future generations. In its judgment, the Grand Chamber referred to the case-law of the Inter-American Court<sup>6</sup> and the African Commission.<sup>7</sup>

The Court's *Klima* judgment was followed by three Advisory Opinions: from the Inter-American Court, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Seas, and the International Court of Justice.<sup>8</sup> Each of them confirmed that States must reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These are important illustrations of judicial convergence on matters that concern us all.

## CONCLUSION

*Dear friends,*

Exchanges like the one today bring us closer together. All our three courts act, at the regional level, as guardians of the rule of law. By ensuring the effective protection of the fundamental rights, our courts support democracy.

We also use law to support the sovereignty of our member States, as demonstrated by our Court's historic ruling in the inter-State case *Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia*, delivered in July last year.

But law is also an instrument in the service of peace. As judges, we dedicate our lives to the pursuit of justice and the peaceful resolution of disputes. We defend what President Mudrovitsch, in his opening speech in San José this year, called "*the protective mantle of human rights*", outside which "*the promise of peaceful coexistence is futile*".<sup>9</sup>

Through Law and Justice, we defend Peace. For the benefit of all.

In this shared effort, as sister regional human rights courts, we have a lot to learn from each other. Today's Forum is an excellent occasion to share knowledge and deepen our bonds.

I wish you all fulfilling exchanges and I look forward to hosting you in Strasbourg in July next year for our next, Fifth Forum. It will be held back-to-back with an international event, also organised by the Court, to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1967 World Conference on Peace through Law. Both meetings will aim to emphasise the role of human rights as the foundation of justice and peace in the world.

*Thank you - Asanteni sana - Muchas gracias - Muito obrigado – Shukran - Merci beaucoup*

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<sup>6</sup> Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *State Obligations in relation to the environment in the context of the protection and guarantee of the rights to life and to personal integrity: Interpretation and scope of Articles 4(1) and 5(1) in relation to Articles 1(1) and 2*, [Advisory Opinion OC-23/17](#) on the environment and human rights, 15 November 2017; *Case of the indigenous communities of the Lhaka Honhat Association (Our Land) v. Argentina*, 6 February 2020. In those cases, the Inter-American Court examined the rights to a healthy environment, adequate food, water, and cultural identity.

<sup>7</sup> *The Social and Economic Rights Action Center, et al. v. Nigeria*, [Comm. No. 155/96 \(2001\)](#), in which the Commission held that environmental rights should be construed as collective rights.

<sup>8</sup> *Request for an Advisory Opinion submitted by the Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law - Advisory Opinion*, International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, 21 May 2024, No. 31; *Climate Emergency and Human Rights. Advisory Opinion AO-32/25*, requested by the Republic of Chile and the Republic of Colombia, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 29 May 2025; *Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change*, International Court of Justice, [Advisory Opinion](#), 23 July 2025

<sup>9</sup> Discurso, Toma de Posesión de la Presidencia de la Corte Interamericana de derechos humanos, Apertura del año judicial interamericano, 2026.