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**58th SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
(GENEVA, 18 MARCH - 26 APRIL 2002)**

**GENERAL DEBATE**

**GENEVA, 19 MARCH 2002**

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Mr Chairman,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is a great honour for me, as the High Representative for the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy, to speak to the Commission today.

First of all Mr Chairman, let me congratulate you on your appointment and wish you every success. Let me also express, Madam High Commissioner, my warmest appreciation for your continuous advocacy of human rights and for the achievements and quality of work of this Commission.

I fully support the intervention made this morning by Minister Piqué on behalf of the European Union. I will not duplicate that intervention, but will speak more generally about the place of human rights in foreign policy.

A Union of responsibility and values

2. Mr Chairman, the European Union is determined fully to assume its international responsibilities. These are responsibilities that we have on account of our size, our wealth, our history and our geography. In due course we can expect the EU to include nearly thirty countries, with a combined population of over 500 million. Our Union is set to play a prominent international role in the century to come.

3. Human rights will remain at the heart of that role because human rights are at the core of European integration. We are much more than a free trade area or an alliance of convenience.

Ours is a Union of values. These values are essential conditions for membership, and a compass that helps guide our external relations. We are committed to the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for universal and indivisible human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

4. Our attachment to human rights is not an abstract one: it was forged in the bitter experiences of the last century. Europeans need only look back on their own history to understand why the Universal Declaration on Human Rights referred to : "... disregard and contempt for human rights" that "have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind (...)". That sense of outrage has been used positively in the past half century to construct a Europe that has learned from, but not forgotten, its history.

5. We are proud of our achievements over the last 50 years, but not complacent. We are reminded every day that human rights are not "for export only". Acts of racism, xenophobia and intolerance have not disappeared in our own societies and our continued vigilance is required. Believing in human rights means being ready to accept criticisms and working every day to strengthen respect for the freedoms that we all hold dear.

The intrinsic value of rights

6. Human rights are of fundamental, intrinsic value. Nothing excuses or justifies their denial or compromise anywhere. And yet, already this new century has already seen its share of ethnic abuses, religious and gender discrimination, and denial of democratic rights. This Commission is and must remain an uncompromising watchdog against

abuses of this kind. Human rights are threatened from many directions, but it seems to me that three recurring threats demand particular attention: conflict, poverty and isolation. These three factors, often inter-related, are both the parents and the offspring of human rights violations.

7. Conflict, poverty and isolation all erode basic rights. At the same time, there can be no enduring peace, no sustainable development without democracy and due respect for fundamental freedoms. The EU places great emphasis on conflict prevention and crisis management, on poverty alleviation, and on a policy of engagement and dialogue. Through concrete action in each of these three areas the EU is helping to consolidate human rights.

#### Defending rights by ending conflict

8. Mr Chairman, across the world conflict and the threat of conflict put human rights in danger, and the denial of human rights in turn increases the risk of conflict. That is why the European Union is working hard to improve its capacities for crisis management and conflict prevention and why the defence and promotion of human rights are important elements in these efforts. In keeping with the primary role of the UN in conflict prevention, the EU has stated that its actions will be undertaken in accordance with the principles and purposes of the UN Charter.

9. I make no apology for the amount of time, energy and resources that the EU - and personally - have devoted to efforts to manage crises and avoid or end conflicts whether it be in the Balkans, the Middle East, or in Africa. These efforts are the concrete expression of our determination to protect and promote human rights. Tackling the root causes of conflict means defending the legitimate rights of all those involved in conflict, regardless of their religion or ethnicity. That is why the European Union placed such emphasis on citizens' rights when facilitating peace in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and in supporting the actions of the international community in Bosnia and in Kosovo.

10. Along with many others, the EU is working tirelessly to bring peace to the Middle East. But we want more than peace. We want more than just an end to violence. We want to see democracy, security and freedom. A peace without democracy, security and freedom will never be a lasting peace. But democracy, security and freedom for all in the region require that peace is established, that violence ends. No one's freedom is served by the slaughter of innocent teenagers and children on the streets of Tel Aviv, or Ramallah. No one's security is served by the demolition of houses and the occupation of refugee camps. Everyone's democracy is debased by daily contempt of and disregard for human rights and humanitarian conventions. So I welcome, in all respects, Resolution 1397 of the UN Security Council adopted last week. But let me make one special plea : that the Resolution's call to respect universally accepted norms of international humanitarian law is heeded by all, immediately and unconditionally.

11. Legitimate interventions to defend human rights, undertaken in the framework of the UN, must be followed by enduring commitment. Rights defended must be nurtured. Earlier this month I had the opportunity to present to the UN Security Council in New York the details of the EU Police Mission in Bosnia that will provide the follow-on from the current UN police mission.

Similarly, the Member States of the EU are playing the lead role in the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Both actions are proof of European efforts to strengthen the rule of law and thus to better guarantee peace, stability and human rights. Democracy, development and freedom.

12. If crises and conflict are the most visible and acute threats to human rights, then poverty is surely the most widespread. How can one enjoy what we agree are fundamental rights if one finds oneself in the half of the world's population that has to survive on less than three euro per day? What chance is there to exercise rights when all one's efforts must be devoted to a grim daily struggle for survival? What value do we place on the rights of the 36,000 children who die through disease and hunger every day in the third world? If we are serious about the universality of human rights, and I believe that we are, then we must face up to these questions.

13. The point is not that development is an alternative to rights, or that the promotion of rights is a luxury of richer countries. The point is that we must make a sustained global effort to lift the poorest out of their misery into a position where their rights begin to be meaningful.

"Democracy, development and respect for fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing", as the 1993 Vienna Declaration on Human Rights states. But let us be realistic, outside help is vital if this virtuous cycle is to be begun.

14. The European Union contributes to human rights through its actions to promote development. The EU and its Member States account for more than half of all official development assistance. We have offered duty-free access to goods from the poorest countries. We have reaffirmed our commitment to the development goals and targets set out in the UN Millennium Declaration.

We are determined to make a major contribution to the success of the UN Development Financing Conference that opened yesterday in Monterrey, and also to the Johannesburg World Summit later this year.

15. The conviction that democracy, development and freedom are tied together is widely shared. I recently met several African leaders to discuss the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and was impressed by their strong personal commitment and by their candour in recognising the challenges ahead. All of that conviction, all of that commitment and all of that candour are called upon now if the full potential of this important initiative is to be realised. In recent days we have witnessed once again the truly inspiring enthusiasm for democracy among ordinary Africans. The calm, dignified enthusiasm of thousands queuing to vote should inspire us all to ensure that each and every one of their voices is heard, that each and every one of their votes is counted.

#### Progress through dialogue

16. Mr Chairman, in trying to promote human rights our starting point should be cooperation and dialogue. With our many international partners and in international fora the European Union shows an instinct for engagement and a commitment to dialogue, as we did for example in the Durban Conference where, despite the difficulties, we contributed to a positive outcome. Contact yields influence. Dialogue allows observation of progress. Our commitment to dialogue will not however prevent the EU from firmly stating its positions, as we do in this Commission. And while we much prefer to make progress through consensus, if need be, we will not hesitate to put resolutions to a vote and act to protect human rights.

17. Cooperation and engagement go beyond state to state contacts. The EU places great value on the dialogue it has at many levels with the human rights NGOs. NGOs cannot substitute the state, but they can and do act as our eyes and ears and often our conscience

too. They are an essential part of civil society, and a flourishing civil society is a key feature of a healthy democracy.

A global approach to global problems

18. Mr Chairman, Madam High Commissioner, we live in a global age, an age characterised by the degree of our inter-dependence, and our consciousness of this fact. This inter-dependence has many facets: economic, environmental, political. As Kofi Annan noted in his recent Nobel Lecture: "Today, no walls can separate humanitarian or human rights crises in one part of the world from national security crises in another." A global age demands that we make full use of those global institutions available to promote respect for international humanitarian law, not least this one and also the International Criminal Court. Commitment to genuine multilateralism is the surest way of convincing even the weakest and poorest that their voice will be heard, that their rights will be protected.

19. Through global institutions we can tackle global problems, not least that of international terrorism. The terrorist attacks against the people and the institutions of the United States were indeed an attack against all of us. Terrorism is a real challenge for the world and for Europe.

All countries must combine their efforts to make impunity for terrorists impossible. Actions taken against those responsible for the barbaric acts of September 11th are not targeted against any people or religion: and we must make sure that they never will. They aim instead at the reinforcement of international security and the rule of law as well as at the security of the countries affected by the scourge of terrorism. Collectively we are strong enough to prevail against terrorism, and to do so in full respect of human rights and the rule of law.

20. Let me conclude by saying that more than ever before the countries of the European Union are pursuing a common foreign policy through a Union founded on respect for fundamental human rights. More than ever before, the EU places human rights at the core of its international relations. And more than ever before, we are developing the operational capabilities to defend those human rights when they are under threat. This Commission represents the key UN instrument by which the European Union seeks to advance the values upon which it itself is founded. That is why we place such importance on the Commission's work, and why we are determined to contribute to its success.

Thank you.

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