

**Speech by HRH The Crown Princess of Denmark  
at the Parliamentary Assembly session**

Strasbourg, 23 January 2018

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen – Good morning,

It is not that often I have the opportunity to address such a distinguished audience of high-level policy and decision makers, people of dialogue, protectors of human rights, democracy and the rule of law – an audience that represents the diversity of the European Region but, shares a common vision.

Actually, it's my first time in Strasbourg and definitely a first for me speaking at The Council of Europe. Either way it is an honor to address the members of the Parliamentary Assembly here at your first session of the New Year, 2018.

Growing up in Australia and moving to Denmark as an adult, I've never really had to dwell on the need or importance of my human rights being respected and protected. You could say that I have taken them for granted because they always were granted. I imagine that this must be the case for the majority of people that grow up in democratic, free countries with a strong rule of law. Particularly, amongst the younger generations that have not known the atrocities of war.

To some extent this is due to the role of The Council of Europe. The need for such an organization emerged out of the rubble and cruelties of the Second World War. And it is a unique organization that recognized the need for more than just peaceful relations between states – citizens were also to be protected against human rights abuses by their own Governments.

The founding members of this organization, including Denmark, saw the need to establish a forum in Europe to protect fundamental universal values – human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The fulfillment of this need has led to Human Rights being at the core of Europe's values, progress and development and to following generations growing up with their human rights being safeguarded and monitored. However, we must never take them for granted nor expect that they will always be granted.

Today, the Council of Europe is the leading regional human rights organization in the world. The Council guides the promotion and protection of human rights in Europe and sets high standards for the rest of the world to follow.

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death. They apply regardless of where you are from, what you believe or how you choose to live your life.

These basic rights are based on values like dignity, fairness, equality, respect and independence. But human rights are not just abstract concepts – they are defined and protected by law.

And even though there has been a unanimous adoption of The UN General Assembly's, 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights their remains enormous challenges globally in securing broader recognition and implementation of the various Human Rights Frameworks. Two people or two countries can have the same general idea of human rights even though they disagree about which rights should be protected by law.

Unfortunately, the existence of legislation, policy, law, strong will and conviction is not always enough to prevent human rights violations. There can often be a wide gap between willful intentions and words on paper to the reality of those, whose human rights are threatened. We must also consider cultural and social norms and the role they play in observing human rights in our societies.

We can all be in agreement that there exists a strong Human Rights Framework and that as a Region we have achieved a great deal and I'm sure that we can also agree that as a leading region we have an obligation through even greater unity between member states to be even better and to develop best practices and tools to be internationally agenda setting.

Although Human Rights are inherent they are also fragile and their protection and expansion and integration into policy development should be seen as one of our finest achievements, and a legacy to be truly proud of.

Here at the heart of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly gathers to discuss and debate issues affecting the people of Europe and to shape and support the economic and social progress of the Region.

Denmark has a long tradition of supporting and addressing human rights and a long-standing record of important contributions to the promotion of human rights, good governance and the rule of law.

As one of the founding members of the Council of Europe, Denmark has a strong historical bond with the organization and is a strong champion of the values of the Council of Europe.

Later today, in his address to you, the Foreign Minister of Denmark will present the priorities of the Danish Chairmanship. (A chairmanship you obviously all are looking forward to.....)

I would like to use my remaining time to focus on an issue that I'm convinced is integral to ensuring positive social and economic growth and development, of not only our societies but, the societies of the world. And that is Equality - Equal treatment and equal opportunities for all, no matter who are, where you live or what you have.

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and fundamental to a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Denmark has been tireless in its commitment to improving the lives of women and girls all around the world and is - I think it is fair to say - a leader with a strong global voice on these issues.

As a nation, we have seen firsthand that gender equality is a prerequisite for economic growth, welfare, social cohesion and freedom and opportunities of the individual. And although much has been achieved, we also recognize that we still have a way go.

The gender equality challenges that we face in Denmark are of course, different to the challenges faced in other countries. And globally there exists large gaps between countries and regions in terms of what has been achieved. In some countries, gender equality is about securing basic human rights and in others it is about specific issues such as; women being underrepresented in public arenas and decision- making positions or the prevalence of violence against women.

In order to bridge these gaps we must work together across Europe, share our knowledge and experiences, identify best practices and learn from and inspire each other.

The Council of Europe deserves acknowledgment for its ambition and its dedication in this respect.

The Council of Europe plays a crucial role in putting gender equality higher on the global agenda. It provides tools and directions on how to better promote gender equality in our societies and therefore has a natural link to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 5 – for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Realization of Goal 5 will make a crucial contribution to progress across all goals and targets because, sustainable development cannot be obtained if half of humanity is denied its' full human rights and opportunities.

The Council of Europe's commitment to addressing human rights violations that affect women disproportionately is clearly demonstrated through the strategies, conventions and monitoring mechanisms, that provide the region with common goals and a language for finding innovative and apt solutions.

Violence against women is one of the strongest manifestations of gender inequality and is one of the areas in which the Council of Europe has raised the bar. The Istanbul Convention is the gold standard for international human rights protection in this area. It sets standards for prevention, support services, data collection and the law - standards that shape policies across Europe and beyond – and positively affect the lives and opportunities of women and girls.

Full gender balance in decision-making processes and politics has not yet been achieved in any member state. However, the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on balanced participation of women and men in political and public life *is* an important step towards achieving just that.

The Council of Europe is also at the forefront in the fight against sexism and hate speech which is a form of violence against women that feeds into gender-based discrimination. Prior to the 'MeToo' movement going global last year the Council of Europe had already initiated a draft Committee of Minister Recommendations to combat sexism - an important step in addressing an issue that has devastating effects, especially on young women, and presents a serious obstacle to the achievement of real gender equality.

Greater gender equality in a country is linked to a higher level of education and better health, higher per capita income, stronger international competitiveness and more inclusive and rapid economic growth.

In other words, striving for greater gender equality is not only the right thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do.

XXXXXX

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights regardless of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. But that assertion, for far too many around the world, does not hold true. Even though we write 2018, too many LGBTI people continue to be victims of hatred, violence, discrimination, bullying and ill-treatment – and this we cannot and must not accept.

This is another focus of the Council of Europe and here they provide its' members with useful directions which includes good practices on value based campaigning to promote the legal recognition of same-sex partnerships.

Sexual rights are some of the most controversial yet, some of the most intimate and fundamental of human rights, and therefore at the core of human dignity and human development. They encapsulate rights to make informed decisions about the most basic aspects of one's life – one's body, sexuality, health and relationships.

XXXXXX

Our endeavor to promote and protect human rights is a complicated task with many different aspects. Most vulnerable groups in need of protection are known in our societies but, as is often the case vulnerable people can remain hidden as they may be affected by social issues that are overseen or shrouded in taboo.

Promoting human rights also concerns working to end prejudice and stigmatization of vulnerable people and groups. Promoting and protecting human rights of persons with disabilities is essential to the Council of Europe's work and action to protect and promote the human rights of all citizens; less prejudice and more knowledge of their rights will enhance equal opportunities, improve the quality of life and independence of people with disabilities,

guarantee their freedom of choice, full citizenship and active participation in the life of the community – in short, the equal opportunity as an individual to fulfill their full potential.

To promote human rights is not only to defend them. We have an obligation to remind and teach each other about the principles and values that the framework for our human rights is built upon. This knowledge must not be lost or diluted, we have an obligation to pass it on to our children.

The European Convention on Human Rights, drafted by parliamentarians, lays down the fundamental rights of the citizens in all the Member States that are party to the convention. However, human rights, and democracy as well, is not secured with legal rights alone, its principles and values need to be understood, lived, felt and guarded by future generations.

Knowledge is key and education is essential. The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow and we need to teach them about the principles of human rights, we need to pass on the fundamental values of our societies, and we need to show them that equal opportunities and equality is integral to building prosperous, inclusive and sustainable societies - societies where everyone has the chance to reach their full potential.

An educated and confident child who is a valued and a respected member of his or her community is a powerful agent to take an active part in a democratic society and to be a guardian and promoter of human rights.

XXXXX

In a few minutes, a group of very talented girls from Denmark will share with us, their gift of singing. Whenever I hear this choir sing, I'm reminded of the power of voices when they come together as one. Allow yourself to take a moment and just enjoy.

XXXXX

One of the darkest chapters in the history of Europe unified this region and lead to a common vision for the future. Only together and in sharing this common vision – a common voice - can we build a culture where everyone is accepted and tolerated for who they are and where everyone can participate equally, fully, and freely in all aspects of society.

By listening to each other. Learning from one another. By standing united in recognition of all the good that has been achieved and all the good we want to achieve.

And by guarding today the principles and values that we live by, can we secure tomorrow a world that is more equal, fair and one that holds a sustainable future for us all.

Thank you.