

Joint declaration of the SALAR and the Congress of the Council of Europe, in co-operation with the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe

We, local and regional decision makers in Europe and representatives of the Congress of the Council of Europe, meeting in Stockholm on 6 October 2008 for the seminar on “Systematic Work for Human Rights - a challenge to local/regional politics”, organised in the perspective of the International Conference on Human Rights on 6-7 November 2008,

Recognizing the special role that local and regional authorities have in the effective implementation of human rights;

Considering that this year marks the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirmed the universal value of human rights to which the member states of the Council of Europe are deeply committed;

Recalling that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, together with the European Convention of Human Rights and the European Social Charter, have been the basis for the creation of human rights protection systems of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and other organisations;

Bearing in mind the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union;

Considering that this year marks also the 20th Anniversary of the entry into force of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which laid down the principles of local democracy as a constituent element of any democratic system;

Noting the efforts made by the Congress to implement and to strengthen local and regional democracy across Europe, and the Congress action in reinforcing the respect for human rights at local level;

Bearing in mind the Conclusions of the Forum for the Future of Democracy in Stockholm/Sigtuna 2007;

Acknowledging the work of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure a systematic approach to human rights at all levels;

Welcoming the active interest for the topic and further work expressed in particular by the Committee for Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR), the Committee of the Regions, the European Institute of Ombudsmen, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), and the International Permanent Secretariat Human Rights and Local Governments (IPSHR);

Recalling the Warsaw Declaration adopted by the Third Summit of Heads of States and Governments of the Council of Europe in May 2005, in which member states committed themselves to pursuing their work to implement human rights standards;

1. Reaffirm that effective democracy and good governance at all levels are essential for creating sustainable societies where people can enjoy a good quality of life and effective participation;
2. Emphasise that democracy and human rights are interdependent and that the improvement of local and regional democracy, as the cornerstone of democracy itself, must be considered both as a tool and a core objective of European countries in implementing human rights in a better way in our societies;
3. Believe that an unconditional compliance with fundamental rights is a prerequisite for good governance;
4. Call for concerted action between all tiers of government, including local and regional, to eradicate all forms of intolerance and discrimination, and to build cohesive societies in Europe based on respect for human rights;
5. Consider that local and regional authorities must play a more substantial part in the implementation of human rights within the scope of local self-government as laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government;
6. Emphasise the need for both a judicial and extra-judicial monitoring of human rights implementation;
7. Recognise the importance of an enhanced co-operation in this area between the Congress and the other Council of Europe human rights bodies, in particular the Commissioner for Human Rights;
8. Recognize that the full implementation of some human rights by local and regional authorities calls for financial resources which are not available everywhere, and that such needs must be taken into account at the national and international level;
9. Request full support from the representatives of governments, international organisations and civil society, who will be meeting at the International Conference on Human Rights organised in Stockholm (6-7 November 2008), and ask them to take the following proposals into serious consideration in their forthcoming action plan, and to consult local and regional authorities:
 - a) to make local and regional authorities aware of their responsibilities regarding human rights' implementation and also aware of the possibilities which a rights-based governance offers;

- b) to actively involve civil society in human rights planning and implementation at all levels;
- c) to encourage local and regional authorities to promote the respect for human rights through awareness-raising campaigns (for the rights of vulnerable people-including children's rights- and gender equality for instance), and through local/ regional action plans;
- d) to ensure that local and regional authorities guarantee equal access to public services for all, citizens and non citizens, without discrimination towards any individuals, and the preservation of their social rights;
- e) to make sure that local and regional authorities act in full compliance with fundamental rights, in particular in the area of data protection;
- f) to promote and support the establishment and development of good methods of implementation, such as independent ombudsmen or human rights co-ordinators, at local and regional level;
- g) to ensure that, in the implementation of the European Strategy on Innovation and Good Governance at local level, adopted by the Council of Europe, the inherent human rights dimension is effectively taken into account;
- h) to create appropriate structures or procedures to facilitate effective monitoring and remedy of cases where fundamental rights are not fully respected in the delivery of local public services;
- i) to foster respect for human rights through systematic training of local authorities elected representatives and staff, as well as of independent monitoring bodies, to make them aware of their responsibilities regarding compliance with human rights.

10. Suggest that the Congress prepare a monitoring report on the follow-up to these proposals.