



**2021 Council of Europe Programme for Human Rights Education
for Legal Professionals (HELP) Network E- Conference “Human
Rights Responses to Global Challenges”**

**Remarks by Bjørn Berge,
Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe**

Strasbourg, 1 July 2021

Ambassadors,

President of the European Court of Human Rights,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since the beginning of last year, HELP's user numbers have more than doubled.

50 versions of the courses were launched in 2019; 200 since January 2020.

The Council of Europe was already our continent's top provider of online legal training.

But this growth is unprecedented.

The circumstances in which it has happened are not good.

It has been COVID-related lockdowns and restrictions that have largely driven up demand for these online training tools.

And none of us would have wished for these conditions.

But it is a good thing that the expansion of this resource has been possible.

At our Ministerial Session in Hamburg last month, our 47 member states endorsed the importance of implementing the European Convention on Human Rights, and standards and values that mark out our Organisation.

HELP courses play an increasingly important role in achieving that.

They provide high quality education, giving legal professionals the knowledge and skills that they need to uphold human rights in their work.

And they are creative, flexible and adapted to the needs of users throughout the continent and who fulfil a range of functions within the legal profession.

Recently I went through one of the courses myself. It was on Human Rights and Sports. I must say I was impressed, and these types of courses are particularly useful – given our focus on human rights in sports and also in light of the sports issues we face today related to specific human rights challenges.

I also note that over the past year and more, we have seen a peak in demand for the Bioethics and Pharmaceutical Crimes courses.

Given the public health crisis, this is no surprise.

But again it is testament to the value of HELP, as well as the particular relevance of the Council of Europe's Conventions on Biology and Medicine and Medicrime.

National justice institutions have also prioritised courses on violence against women, privacy rights, human trafficking, child-friendly justice and anti-discrimination. This is important.

The asylum and migration courses – jointly developed with UNHCR – was also in demand.

This range of subjects truly reflects specific challenges that were certainly with us before the pandemic, but that have been magnified by COVID-19, and also the ongoing challenges facing human rights, democracy and rule of law in Europe today.

I have no doubt that the high quality for which HELP is well-known will also be carried over in the new courses that will be presented during the next two days.

These include Cybercrime, Anti-corruption and the Environment on which the Council of Europe is increasingly active and considering new legal instruments or standards.

Our colleagues will also present a new training module on the European Social Charter and an updated version of the course on Labour Rights.

These subjects are always of importance.

But as our societies lift the measures put in place to deal with coronavirus, the full economic impact will become even more apparent;

Governments will take financial decisions;

And it is important in this context that the fight against poverty – and for inclusion – is continued with strength and determination.

So, it is right to also refresh our learning on these issues and ensure that people's rights are more widely understood.

On these and on all the other subjects covered, let us hope this online training feeds through to increase knowledge and better understanding, and ultimately better judgments.

But while legal practitioners were always the target audience, the courses are now under increasing demand from students.

This is really good.

Because it sows the seeds of a human rights culture that will be better placed to flourish in the years ahead.

It is also important to be looking at ways of strengthening its links to other related initiatives – notably, the Open Council of European Academic Networks.

Just as, together with the European Court of Human Rights, we are looking to open-up access to its knowledge-sharing system, which will be a major new initiative in the years to come.

The basic idea is that national judges and other legal professionals would have access to case-law drawn from interpretation of the European Convention on Human Rights.

And this system will be rolled out across Europe, translated into member states' languages.

This too is a highly welcome way of transmitting knowledge about European standards to those who are charged with upholding them.

Innovations of this sort require new thinking, but also a willingness to act.

So, I want to finish by thanking all those who help out and act to ensure that HELP develops and remains highly relevant.

I should have mentioned you all by name and institution, but the Help Network is wide and the list of those involved is too lengthy to read out in full.

Still, I want to pay a particular tribute to the support provided by the European Judicial Training Network and all justice training institutions involved;

The Council of Bars and Law Societies in Europe;

And the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.

In fact, the EU continues to be HELP's primary institutional partner.

And it is important to note that its courses cover both the Council of Europe and EU legal systems, and the case law of European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice too.

So, we all benefit from this close alignment, strong partnership and the sustained financial support.

What we have here is a dynamic system that is growing fast and being helpful.

For European standards to be met and European justice to be done, we need initiatives like this.

So, I wish you all the best. I wish you a successful conference, and may we together advance the boundaries of human rights knowledge yet further across the European continent.

Thank you for your attention.