



**Conference “Human Rights and Democracy in Action -
Looking Ahead”**

**The impact of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for
Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education
Strasbourg, 29 November 2012**

Welcome address by Mr Thorbjørn Jagland

Dear Minister,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,

First of all I would like to thank the Minister of Education and the government of Andorra, for the decision to make education the priority of your chairmanship. This is the first time a chairmanship has done so.

My thanks and greetings also go to the co-hosts: to Jan Trzeczyński, the Director General of Education and Culture of the European Commission; and to Ana Perona, the Director of the European Wergeland Centre.

I should also like to welcome all the other participants from ministries, research institutes, education professionals, NGOs and other international organisations.

We live in a society where nothing can be taken for granted. Europe is facing one of its most challenging periods in decades, an economic crisis that in many countries has raised youth employment to the level of 50%, leading to social unrest and an unpredictable future for many. The crisis is already hitting education budgets and the financial support of youth work. This is a worrying trend. Cuts in education today will have long-term consequences, not just on children and young people's future, but also on the fabric of our democracies.

Against this background, this conference is very timely. While democratic institutions are crucial, they will only work if they build on a democratic culture and a culture of human rights; and in building this culture, for each generation, we need our education systems to play a key role.

Children are not born knowing what “democracy” is. They are not born knowing that they have rights and responsibilities, much less how to exercise them. In all our member states, every child has to acquire this knowledge, has to learn these skills.

This is why I consider the Council of Europe Charter on Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education so important for raising awareness of the core values of the Council of Europe, and for fostering the active engagement of citizens. The Charter is the reference point in Europe for promoting democracy and human rights.

The Charter associates education to the protection and the promotion of human rights and democracy. It is generous in its principles, because it reaffirms the right to human rights education for all; but it is also realistic in its expectations towards the various stakeholders.

The challenge now is to make the Charter an effective instrument for change. We count on your support and co-operation in this respect.

This conference should help us to move towards the implementation of the Charter. The responses of the member states to the implementation survey, and the additional opinions provided by civil-society organisations, are very encouraging: they show that the Charter is already making a difference.

I am sure that you bring with you many examples of successful practice. You are indeed our most important allies, and I would like to thank you for your continued commitment to education for democracy and human rights. I hope that during the conference you will find inspiration from each other's initiatives and achievements.

I look forward to learning about the outcomes of this conference and, especially, the follow-up which you plan. Let me assure you that this will remain a high priority for the Council of Europe.

Thank you.