



Convention 108+ : better protecting us in the digital era

**Speech by Thorbjørn Jagland,
Secretary General of the Council of Europe**

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Ladies and gentlemen,

The Council of Europe's Convention 108 is the only legally-binding multilateral instrument on the protection of privacy and personal data.

Opened for signature in 1981, it has influenced privacy laws around the world and will soon have 55 parties and 25 observers.

And its impact is felt today across subject areas including Artificial Intelligence, the media, and internet governance,

and big data, health-related data, and data processing by law enforcement.

Last year, we built on this achievement with Convention 108+, with a Protocol to the original that ensures our measures are up-to-date and fit for purpose in the digital age.

We are pleased that the Mr Cannataci, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy, and who is with us here today, has recommended that all UN member states accede to it.

We are pleased that the European Commission has stated that the EU wishes to do so, acknowledging that Convention 108+ is an important tool for their recognition of adequate data protection.

And we are particularly pleased to be able to have this exchange of views with you today:

To discuss the impact that Convention 108+ is already making in Europe and beyond;

Why the 30 Parties that have already signed are set to grow in number;

And how – together – we can identify and help to remove obstacles for those countries that want to be a part of this important progress.

So why should a given country choose this moment to accede?

Because the right to data protection, long safeguarded by Convention 108, has not kept pace with the expansion of digital technology;

Because the amending Protocol has brought the 108 standards up to the higher levels now required;

And because this provides unparalleled protection for individuals in a world of globalised data flows.

Those that maintain this international standard of data protection are seen as virtuous countries.

They are recognised as safe players on the “data market”, receive data more easily from other countries, and are better placed to develop aspects of their economy that require the use of such information.

Another key reason for joining is that the Convention opens up a network for mutual assistance and co-operation.

Being part of the Convention 108+ “club” is not just about harmonising high standards of data protection per se – important though this is.

It is also about ensuring that states parties can work together on compliance and other challenges in a fast-

changing, digitised world – and that their authorities are prepared to do so.

Ladies and gentlemen, accession is not necessarily easy, but the rewards are plain to see.

Joining now will give new states parties the opportunity to shape the future of data protection and maintain the free flow of data around the world.

This is about protecting the autonomy and dignity of individuals and shaping a digital environment in which innovation thrives and economies grow.

I hope that today will be an opportunity to deepen our mutual understanding and lay the ground for further co-operation.

I wish you all a very successful Conference.