



Newsletter



Human rights in a change of era: protecting dignity, memory, and the rule of law

In recent weeks, I have been actively engaging with member states, civil society and other partners to address the most pressing human rights challenges across Europe. From the situation in Ukraine to the state of our democratic institutions, my message is clear: honouring human dignity is our goal and human rights is the roadmap.

Protecting the integrity of the European Convention on Human Rights

Speaking at Roma Tre University, I warned against a "rule of law recession" and the increasing tendency of "a la carte" compliance with human rights treaties. I outlined how states have to protect the integrity of the Convention by grounding policy on evidence and by upholding non-refoulement and judicial independence. I specifically addressed the recent initiatives of some member states to weaken the protection of certain groups, notably migrants. This risks creating a hierarchy of rights holders, with some people having "lesser" rights than others, and it is a dangerous path to tread. Currently, the focus is mostly on migrants. Where will it stop? We have to uphold the principle of equality and the universality of rights.

Read my speech [Universal rights, national duties: protecting the integrity of the ECHR](#)

Ukraine: bringing immediate relief for Ukrainian civilians

In light of the intensifying Russian attacks on energy infrastructure, I raised the alarm about the widespread human suffering caused by the destruction and called for accountability and continued solidarity with the people of Ukraine. A ceasefire and human-centred peace processes are urgently needed to protect lives and dignity. Peace talks should bring immediate relief for Ukrainian civilians.

[Read my statement](#)

Return policies: efficiency through dignity

In my latest *Shout Out*, I challenge the narrative that human rights are an obstacle to effective border management, emphasising that lawful and fair return policies are more effective. We won't 'magically' increase return numbers by tearing up the rulebook. Only a lawful, fair, and dignified return policy can deliver results. European leaders must govern with respect for human rights. I warn against the risk of creating human rights black holes, calling instead for risks assessments prior to the

establishment of return hubs, investment in voluntary returns and alternative to detention and an end to the detention of migrant children.

Read my Shout Out on [why Europe's return policies need human rights](#)

Country Focus

During my visit to **Italy**, I focused on the need for renewed action to break the cycle of child poverty, as well as on need to strengthen the institutional architecture to protect the rights of all. This includes establishing an independent National Human Rights Institution (NHRI).

Read my [end-of-visit statement for Italy](#)

Reclaiming the space for AI regulation and civil society

In an exchange with the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, I outlined some of my priorities, including:

- **Artificial Intelligence:** ensuring "smart oversight" that puts technology at the service of human thriving.
- **Civil Society:** standing up for human rights defenders and civil society organisations who face increasing threats and regulatory burdens.

Read my intervention at [PACE Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights](#)

Reflections from Wilton Park: human rights in a change of era

I participated in the **20th Annual Wilton Park Human Rights Conference** in the UK. This year's gathering of academics, activists, and international representatives was far from business as usual. We are witnessing a change of era. A moment of cataclysmic change where everything—including human rights—is up for grabs. In my intervention, I outlined a strategy to ensure that human dignity remains the heart of our future societies.

Read my [intervention on carrying human rights forward into a new era](#)

Paths of memory and action: Holocaust Remembrance Day

In Rothau, France, I joined young people in remembering the genocide of six million Jews and 500 000 Roma and Sinti, and all victims of Nazi persecution. The Memory and Human Rights Garden, created by Regards d'enfants with some of these children and young people, ensures that the memory is kept alive. I emphasised that remembrance is not just a lesson from the past, but also the foundation on which we defend democracy, safeguard human rights and uphold the rule of law today. We

committed to forging a different path forward, guided by memory and responsibility – toward a future where equal rights and dignity are respected for all.

Read '[Holocaust Remembrance Day: paths of memory and action - preserving the past, protecting the future](#)'

I also visited the **former Natzweiler concentration camp** and the European Centre of Deported Resistance Members. I started my visit at the gas chamber and I finished it at the crematorium. Between these two dreadful places, I was told horror after horror story about the callous disregard for, and taking of the lives of men, women and children. However, Struthof is also, in a curious way, a negative reminder of something wonderful: a reminder, through its horror, of all that we have achieved since it was shut down. It is also a reminder of how very fragile all that we have achieved is. We could lose it all, even through negligence.

Join me as I reflect on my visit of the [Former Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp](#)

The power of hope

Just as Holocaust survivor, Eva Schloss — Anne Frank's half-sister — and other survivors of Nazi persecution found hope in building the post-war order, so must we now. We must believe we can salvage what has been achieved and carry it forward.

SAVE THE DATE: Standing with Roma and Travellers

Join us in Geneva or online on **February 26** for a high-level joint side event at the Human Rights Council. Alongside UN experts, State partners, and Roma human rights defenders from Europe and the Americas, we will tackle the challenges of antigypsyism and chart a path forward.

The event also marks the inauguration of the exhibition **“The Unheard 12 Million”**, hosted at the Palais des Nations from February 23 to March 3.

*Learn more and join us for [Voices, Rights, Action](#)
Download the [Concept Note](#) and [flyer](#) of the events
Read my book “The unheard 12 million” [English](#) | [French](#)*

61st session of the Human Rights Council



**DURBAN
DECLARATION
AND PROGRAMME
OF ACTION
25TH ANNIVERSARY**

Side-Event & Exhibition

On site access for UN badge holders only - working language English

VOICES, RIGHTS, ACTION: STANDING WITH ROMA AND TRAVELLERS

SIDE-EVENT (hybrid)

12:00 - 13:00 CET | 26 February 2026

BUILDING A | ROOM IX

Palais des Nations (GENEVA)

- Michael O'Flaherty, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
- Kerry Gallagher, Education Coordinator, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre
- Ashwini K.P., UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism
- Nicolas Levrat, UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues
- Aline Miklos, Head of Advocacy, Vladimir Herzog Institute
- Senada Sali, Legal Director, European Roma Rights Centre
- Dushko Uzunovski, Head of the Permanent Mission of North Macedonia to the UN in Geneva
- Noel White, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN in Geneva

SCAN ME



<https://bit.ly/RomaHRC61>

Moderator: Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Executive Director, European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture

EXHIBITION OPENING

13:15 CET | 26 February 2026

HALL CLOSE TO SALON DES DÉLÉGUÉS

Palais des Nations (GENEVA)

- Nada Al-Nashif, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Michael O'Flaherty, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
- Marcos Gómez Martínez, Permanent Representative of Spain to the UN in Geneva
- Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Executive Director, European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture

A light reception will follow.

The exhibition is open from 23 February to 3 March.

Event organised by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Permanent Missions of Ireland and North Macedonia to the UN in Geneva.



Buan-Mhisean na hÉireann | An Ghinéiv
Permanent Mission of Ireland | Geneva
Mission Permanente de l'Irlande | Genève



Republic of North Macedonia Permanent
Mission at United Nations in Geneva

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