



EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
COUR EUROPÉENNE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

#7140335

**Ceremony for the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty  
organised by the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe**

*18 October 2021*

**Robert Spano,  
President of the European Court of Human Rights**

Madam Secretary General,  
Ambassador Ruzs,  
President Verbeek,  
Deputy Mayor,  
Vice-President Eliane Chemla,  
President Ermischer,

It is indeed an honour to represent the European Court of Human Rights today at this ceremony.

I would like to thank the Conference of INGOs for marking these two important days which fall one after the other on 17 and 18 October.

I would also like to pay tribute to the victims of poverty and human trafficking who have shared their moving testimonies with us.

At first glance it seems that there is a stark divide between the European Convention on Human Rights, which sets forth what are essentially civil and political rights, and the European Social Charter which guarantees social and economic rights. However, we know that there is no water-right division separating these two spheres. The Court often finds itself ruling on the direct or indirect protection of economic and social rights.

The Court has had to deal with many such stories originating as they often do from the tragedies of our often fragile human existence.<sup>1</sup> Allow me to tell you one of those stories. A Roma woman asked the Court to take her case. She was poor, illiterate and had no work. She had been fined for begging and then imprisoned because she could not pay her fine.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Lacatus v Switzerland* application no. 14065/15, 19 January 2021.

She received no social benefits and was not supported by any other person. Begging was a means for her to secure an income and alleviate her poverty.

How did we respond? The Court made clear that human dignity, a notion that was central to the spirit of the Convention, was severely compromised if the person concerned did not have sufficient means of subsistence. Persons who begged adopted a particular way of life in a bid to deal with a humiliating and precarious situation. Hence, the particular circumstances of each case had to be taken into consideration, and especially the reality of the person's economic and social situation. The right to call on other people for assistance went to the very essence of the rights to private life protected by the Convention.

It is right that you have put the victims' voices at the centre of our reflections today.

We must not forget these human stories which underpin violations of human rights which end in applications to the Strasbourg Court: women trafficked as cabaret artists<sup>2</sup>; men trafficked as construction workers<sup>3</sup>; minors trafficked as gardeners in cannabis factories<sup>4</sup>.

Trafficking in human beings, by its very nature and aim of exploitation, is based on the exercise of power attaching to the supposed right of ownership. It treats human beings as commodities to be bought and sold and put into forced labour.

There can be no doubt that trafficking threatens the human dignity and fundamental freedoms of its victims.

Such cases, implicating the core of human dignity, form the cornerstone of the European Convention. It is one of the reasons that the Convention must be interpreted in light of present day conditions and provide for real and effective protection, not rights that are illusory.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Rantsev v. Cyprus and Russia*, no. 25965/04, ECHR 2010 (extracts)

<sup>3</sup> *Zoletic and Others v. Azerbaijan*, no. 20116/12, §7 October 2021

<sup>4</sup> *V.C.L. and A.N. v. the United Kingdom*, nos. 77587/12 and 74603/12, 16 February 2021.

Increasingly high standards are required in the area of the protection of human rights and fundamental liberties and therefore we expect more from our Member States in terms of protecting victims of human rights violations. This should give us hope for the future.

Thank you.