

International conference "Freedom or Fear" dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Speech by Dunja Mijatović

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

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By video message

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Human Rights Commissioner -- dear Dmytro,
Thank you for inviting me to speak to you on this momentous occasion – the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The title of today's event draws its inspiration from US President Roosevelt's visionary Four Freedoms, particularly the poignant concept of "Freedom from Fear".

In the midst of a war of aggression ravaging Europe and the world, Roosevelt outlined a vision of the future where people are free from fear.

A world where no nation would be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbour, or anyone else.

A few years later, his vision was embedded in the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and later also in the European Convention on Human Rights.

As we reflect today upon the Universal Declaration's profound impact, this vision takes on special significance in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine.

Alluding to the world wars, the Universal Declaration says that "disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind".

And it is equally true that years of Russia's increasingly evident disregard for human rights have culminated in the illegal aggression of a fellow member State of the Council of Europe.

This barbarous act has led to Russia's exclusion from the Council of Europe.

Today, we stand firmly together in solidarity with Ukrainians as they defend their human rights and freedoms against Russia's aggression.

Aggression that is the very anti-thesis of the future that the Universal Declaration seeks to achieve.

Ukraine and its citizens have felt the heavy weight of the struggle for their Freedom from Fear.

As I have observed in my memorandum on the human rights consequences of the war in Ukraine, published last year, Russia's aggression has resulted in serious and massive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

These violations have had disastrous effects on virtually all human rights of the Ukrainian people.

Delivering justice for the victims of the war in Ukraine will be a long process.

Doing so will require determination and impartiality, so that the interests of all victims can be served, and so that respect for human rights and international humanitarian law is strengthened.

It will also require international support.

I am proud to note that the Council of Europe has been at the forefront of supporting Ukraine on protecting human rights, ensuring accountability, and building up resilience.

I am confident that this important work will continue and increase in the coming years.

In the face of existential adversity, Ukrainian people have shown unwavering commitment to the values and aspirations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Their resilience stands as a testament to the indomitable spirit of freedom.

Let us use today's occasion to renew our commitment to the principles set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Its vision is as relevant today as it was when it was adopted 75 years ago.

"Freedom from fear" remains a powerful vision for the future of Ukraine and the world.

We may not be there yet, but I am confident it is only a matter of time that we will.

Thank you.