



EUROPEAN UNION

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Statement on EU annual report on human rights and democracy

Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, issued the following statement yesterday:

The human rights "package" builds on existing activity

"I am pleased to speak again on another human rights topic today before the European Parliament, which has shown a strong and sustained interest how the EU can harness its influence to better the lives of ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

This second topic today concerns the EU's Annual Report on Human Right and Democracy in the World in 2011. This report, which is available on the Council website, is set to be adopted in two weeks time. I am happy to present the outline of this report before this House, on time, as promised last year.

The Annual Report shows how the EU really can make a difference when and where it matters most. This report covers 2011 but let me give you some up-to-date figures to illustrate what I mean: since the beginning of this year, the EU has made 36 declarations or statements on behalf of human rights defenders or country situations of concern. That makes three statements each fortnight and doesn't include the countless number of demarches we conduct behind closed doors.

Since January, we also conducted 14 in-depth human rights discussions with countries around the globe, with another 22 still to come this year. From Jordan to Vietnam, from Ukraine to the United States, from Argentina to Pakistan, the EU sits down in the spirit of partnership to see how together, we can improve the situation of human rights.

P R E S S

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The Annual Report details all of this action for 2011. But it does more: In line with the wishes of Parliament, the report contains a section on Freedom of Religion or Belief, so essential to the development of free societies. 2011 saw worrying developments in this connection, with intolerance spilling over from discrimination into violent attacks.

Also, for the first time, it contains a section on International Humanitarian Law, which was the subject of various EU initiatives in 2011, culminating in the seven pledges made in November to the 31st International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

And as in previous years, the Annual Report catalogues our work across the whole range of thematic issues, bilateral and multilateral.

It encapsulates the tremendous challenges to human rights and democracy that 2011 threw at us, and how we responded.

Examples show how the EU stays consistently active.

In Bahrain, the EU has been working since the events of February 2011 to encourage all sides to engage in national reconciliation. I have personally expressed support for the Independent Commission of Inquiry and the implementation of its recommendations when I met the King and the Foreign Minister.

The EU has kept a close eye on the case of Mr Al Khawaja; I have asked my officials to meet him in prison, this took place just before he ended his hunger strike. The EU is also following the fate of Mr Nabeel Rajab, who has just been arrested again.

In Mongolia, the EU has been following the situation since the arrest of former President Enkhbayar on corruption charges, his hunger strike and subsequent release.

The EU is determined to support the democratic process in Mongolia ahead of the elections on 28 June.

In Pakistan, the EU intervened in the case of Mr Behram Khan, who has been on death row since 2003. Following the rejection of several appeals, he was due to be executed on 23 May, but after several EU appeals to the Pakistani authorities the execution was put off. During my visit last week to Pakistan, I raised the need to protect and promote the rights of women, to abolish the death penalty and to make good on the promise of legislative changes.

The "package" concerns human rights AND democracy.

Our Election Observation Missions remain an essential tool to support democracy and accompany political change, as in:

- *The historic elections in Tunisia;*
- *Creation of a new state in South Sudan;*
- *Important parliamentary elections in Algeria and the first ever EU election observation there.*
- *Peru, where the observation mission contributed to strengthening our bilateral relations.*

Thanks to MEPs for their participation in these missions, adding visibility and enhancing the political commitment of the EU.

On a related note, I am happy to confirm that we are making good progress in preparing a draft statute for the European Endowment for Democracy, including on the basis of the Lambsdorff report.

I hope you will consider the annual report a useful resource. The recent Howitt report expresses expectations that the report should evolve. I am open to exploring this idea – in cooperation with you – to make sure the report continues to be relevant."
