



15 February 2016

Public Statement

EU Global Strategy must keep human rights at its centre

As the European External Action Service (EEAS) drafts a new European Union (EU) Global Strategy on foreign and security policy (the Global Strategy)¹, Amnesty International calls on the EU and its member states to ensure that human rights remain at the centre of this new strategy and of their foreign policy now and in future.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that if the EU's obligations, commitments and ambitions on human rights do not occupy a central place in this strategy, it risks irrevocably undermining EU foreign policy on human rights to date. As a global actor, the EU has a key role to uphold the principles enshrined in international human rights law, in particular the principles of universality and indivisibility of human rights as enshrined in the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights. By explicitly and meaningfully integrating human rights into the new Global Strategy, the EU and its member states will seize the opportunity to drive an ambitious human rights foreign policy, building on their human rights commitments to date and working to transform policy into practice.

Defending international human rights law is in the EU's interests

The key to such an ambitious foreign policy will be to defend the universality of human rights and to acknowledge that international human rights law and norms - and the preservation of human dignity - do not fall into a false dichotomy of interests and values, but are ultimately in everyone's interest. Human rights are not 'notions' or simply 'values' but are legally codified obligations for states. The EU treaties place the consolidation and support of human rights and the principles of international law as foreign policy objectives and thereby firmly at the foundation of the EU's strategic interests. The new global strategy should therefore be built on these foundations.

By explicitly affirming its commitment to a rules-based international order framed by its human rights commitments, the EU will be strongly placed to protect and promote human rights at multilateral fora and in its bilateral relations. This is of particular relevance to the EU's work at the United Nations and to its role in peace talks, where the EU should implement its human rights foreign policy through keeping justice and accountability central to negotiations. Worldwide, resilience and stability in the long term are best obtained by ensuring that people's fundamental human rights are respected.

Security cooperation must not undermine human rights

In the aftermath of the Paris attacks, concerns about upholding human rights in EU security policy, counter-terror cooperation and intelligence-sharing with third countries are as acute as ever. The EU must ensure that any sharing of intelligence or other security cooperation with third countries cannot be used to persecute, harass or arrest political opponents, human rights defenders (HRDs) and activists. Equally, the EU must take a strong stance affirming the absolute prohibition of torture and ill treatment, as well as against the death penalty in all security cooperation. This must include clear safeguards against the use of torture-tainted information to avoid any risk of EU or member state acquiescence in torture.

An opportunity to cement political will in support of human rights

The Global Strategy represents a crucial opportunity to address today's lack of systematic mainstreaming of the EU's existing human rights policy and the urgent need for the highest level political backing for the full implementation of the EU Strategic Framework, Human Rights Guidelines and the Action Plan on human rights and democracy. EU human rights engagement needs to be robust and consistent within and between Saudi Arabia and Burundi, between China and Azerbaijan—whatever the security, foreign policy, trade, energy, aid or other stakes.

Amnesty International calls on the EU and its member states to fully use the opportunity of the Global Strategy to:

- Reaffirm EU and member state commitments on human rights as a primary objective of foreign policy in accordance with the EU treaty and with their commitments under international human rights law and the Strategic Framework of 2012
- Express through the High Representative on Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) and at the highest levels of the EU and its member states, full political backing to the promotion and protection of human rights in EU foreign and security policy
- Ensure that this commitment to universal, indivisible human rights is placed explicitly at the centre of the Global Strategy, underlining support to the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations and to the International Criminal Court
- Address new foreign and security policy challenges by promoting a rules based order emphasizing the primacy of international human rights law commitments, both in policy and practice, and in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy
- Fully consult EU, member state and third country civil society on human rights policy and practice to enable the experience and expertise of practitioners and human rights defenders to inform and sharpen EU foreign and security policy
- Ensure EU foreign policy adopts a strategic approach on human rights, emphasizing concrete actions and outcomes and demonstrating coherence between EU engagement on human rights across different countries and regions (“external-external” coherence) as well as between EU and member state practice at home and human rights engagement abroad (“internal-external” coherence)
- Strongly reaffirm existing human rights policies and practices in EU foreign policy—including the Strategic Framework and Action Plan and the Human Rights Guidelines—and develop a more ambitious approach fully integrating human rights into EU foreign and security policy to address new global challenges in strategic and impactful action

¹ “A Global Strategy for the European Union”, <http://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/global-strategy-foreign-and-security-policy-european-union>; cf. “The European Union in a changing Global Environment: A more connected, contested and complex world,” 30 June 2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/docs/strategic_review/eu-strategic-review_strategic_review_en.pdf