



Federica Mogherini
EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy

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Dear High Representative,

Securing universal human rights through the new EU Global Strategy

We are writing to follow up on the recent presentation of the European Union (EU) Global Strategy (EUGS)¹ “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy,” June 2016 to the European Council.

Amnesty International acknowledges many key human rights commitments and concerns that have been taken up into the EUGS. At the same time, from the vantage point of our daily engagement with the European institutions and member states, we have long observed and grappled with worrying trends challenging action on human rights in EU foreign policy. We strongly urge you and your colleagues across the European institutions and member states to truly place human rights at the centre of EU external action, and redouble your efforts to promote and protect human rights in policy and practice.

The EUGS rightly points to several factors that will be crucial as the EU and its member states put their human rights commitments into practice. These include: greater coherence between external and internal human rights practices and recognition of its importance for the EU’s global credibility; championing the indivisibility and universality of human rights; systematic mainstreaming of human rights throughout the institutions; deepened engagement with civil society and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs); and a renewed commitment to speak out against shrinking civil society space and violations of rights to freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Above all, realising EU human rights commitments rests on the full grounding of EU external action in the Lisbon Treaty and steadfast pursuit of joined-up external policies across member states and European institutions, as well as across internal and external policies.

At the same time, the EUGS reveals multiple tensions that must be resolved in practice. It still situates human rights within the false dichotomy of values and interests, listing it as one of many concerns instead of placing it at the very centre of EU external action, in line with the Lisbon Treaty, the EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy² and many other existing policies developed to date. While the EUGS commits the EU to mainstreaming human rights, both its proposed approach to regional orders across the globe and specific chapters on key sectors such as energy make no further reference as to how such mainstreaming might take place, belying what could be an overarching and strategic approach toward human rights across all dimensions of external action.

In response to today’s challenges, EU and member state foreign policy cannot be reduced to a single limited course between isolationism and “rash intervention”, nor risk a “principled pragmatism” that may leave the EU punching below its weight in acting against and speaking out about human rights violations anywhere in the world. Rather, a truly strategic approach to promoting and protecting human rights through EU external action must identify tangible objectives and benchmarks, and aim for the most adaptive and ambitious approach possible in response to continually evolving human rights issues. It is critical that such an approach is adopted as thematic, geographical and sectoral strategies are developed in follow-up to the EUGS.

¹ “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy,” 28 June 2016.
https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/eugs_review_web.pdf

² “EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy,” 25 June 2012. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/131181.pdf

To achieve this in practice, the EU and its member states must address urgent human rights concerns not fully taken up in the EUGS:

1. **Promotion and protection of human rights will require building substantively on current forms of dialogue and support**, including redoubling political engagement up to the highest levels; support through funding matched by full political backing for and true consultation with HRDs and civil society; concerted and concrete action on human rights within third countries including trial observation, prison visits and other activities; and strategic use of public diplomacy in response to human rights violations
2. Beyond justice sector reform and support of international justice institutions, **accountability, justice and reparation for victims must form an integral part of EU comprehensive action including in response to conflict and crises**.
3. **Explicit EU action on human rights and support to civil society in general, cannot be a zero sum game**. EU work to ensure states uphold civil society space must be matched by intensive engagement to ensure those same states deliver on their human rights commitments in practice.
4. As the EU commits to multilateralism with a strong United Nations at its core, **any aspiration to transform the existing system must reaffirm human rights commitments and imagine ways in which to step up efforts to promote and protect the human rights** of people worldwide.
5. **A renewed EU culture of acting sooner in response to violent conflict must likewise aim to monitor and respond pro-actively to human rights violations** as they occur and where they become systematic and/or threaten to lead to conflict or crisis, as in Egypt or Burundi.
6. **The EU and its member states must develop a strategic approach to achieve a systematic, coherent use of public diplomacy on human rights**, giving itself the role and capacity to respond where human rights violations challenge the international rules-based order. A failure to respond, or responses that are not visible or impactful, represent a response in themselves, impacting on the global credibility of the EU and the rules based order it promotes.
7. **The human rights of refugees and migrants must be central to EU efforts to address the root causes of migration**, which must include the explicit political engagement of countries of origin and transit on human rights violations facing people on the move—at the same time, the urgency of the migration crisis must not allow other serious human rights issues in third countries to become secondary by comparison.
8. **Finally, as human rights are both a value and an interest of the EU, they must remain the compass for EU external action**. Only when the achievement of human rights through foreign policy is treated as an end in itself, above and beyond immediate political risks and benefits to the EU, can true coherence be achieved.

The EU and its member states now have the opportunity to adopt an ambitious, strategic approach that places human rights at the centre of EU external action as the Global Strategy moves forward. To this end, we look forward to continuing our discussions with you and building on our daily engagement with you and your colleagues throughout the European institutions and with member states in Brussels and at capital level. Some ideas of practical steps that could be taken in the short term can be found in the annex to our Global Strategy contribution³.

Thank you in advance for your and your colleagues' leadership and engagement on human rights.

Yours sincerely,



Ivorna McGowan

Advocacy Director, Head of the European Institutions Office

³ "EU Global Strategy must keep human rights at its centre," 15 February 2016 (rev 12 April 2016)
http://www.amnesty.eu/content/assets/Docs_2016/Public_Statements/AI_Public_Statement_Global_Strategy_with_Annex.pdf