

## Secretary-General cautions against new 'politics of polarization' in Europe



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addresses the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France

19 October 2010 – Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today warned Europe against a new “politics of polarization,” discrimination and intolerance over immigration, with Muslim immigrants as primary targets, as he delivered major addresses before two of the continent’s leading bodies.

“Almost seven years ago, my predecessor Kofi Annan stood before you,” he **told** the 27-nation European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. “In his address, he made an impassioned call for Europe to seize the opportunities presented by immigration and to resist those who demonized these newcomers as ‘the other.’ I wish I could report, today, that the situation in Europe has improved over the intervening years. But as a friend of Europe, I share profound concern.”

In a speech two hours earlier to the 47-nation Council of Europe, whose 800 million citizens number some 300 million more than those represented in the European Union’s parliament, he highlighted the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights’** proclamation of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.

“That is our base line,” he **declared** at the session marking the 60th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights. “That is our standard. There are no exceptions. In a complicated and connected world, this mission is essentially simple and simply essential.”

In his address to the parliamentarians, Mr. Ban said Europe has served “as an extraordinary engine of integration, weaving together nations and cultures into a whole that is far, far greater than the sum of its parts. But for Europe, ‘winning the peace’ was the narrative of the last century.

“The 21st century European challenge is tolerance within. Inclusion, building diverse communities, is as complex a task as the one Europe faced after the Second World War. None of this is easy,” he added.

Migrants, he noted, suffer disproportionately, whether they are from within Europe or beyond, and he pointed to “a new politics of polarization” as a dangerous emerging trend.

"Some play on people's fears. They seek to invoke liberal values for illiberal causes. They accuse immigrants of violating European values. Yet too often, it is the accusers who subvert these values – and thus the very idea of what it means to be a citizen of the European Union," he said.

"Europe's darkest chapters have been written in language such as this. Today, the primary targets are immigrants of the Muslim faith. Europe cannot afford stereotyping that closes minds and breeds hatred. And the world cannot afford a Europe that does this."

In his address to the Council, Mr. Ban cited evidence of backsliding on civil and political rights and a growing anxiety in many developed countries over migration and economic hard times that are used to justify policies of discrimination and exclusion.

He appealed to all to seize every opportunity to reaffirm the universality and indivisibility of human rights, without selectivity, citing democratic countries that choose not to ratify certain international conventions or reinterpret those to which they have subscribed.

He regretted that none of Europe's largest and wealthiest powers had signed or ratified the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers 20 years after it was adopted. "In some of the world's most advanced democracies, among nations that take just pride in their long history of social progressiveness, migrants are being denied basic human rights," he said.

He commended the Council for speaking out strongly and welcomed its convening of a meeting tomorrow to discuss the integration of the Roma people in Europe.

"We must respect cultural diversity, while never compromising our fundamental principles and never tolerating intolerance. Lasting social change, including respect for human rights, and particularly women's rights, cannot be planted from afar. It must take root within societies," he said.

"The anniversary we celebrate today is important. The European Convention, and the Court, has made a tremendous difference in peoples' lives. They have brought human rights to life in tangible and lasting ways," he concluded.

"We are here today to celebrate that progress and more, to push that work forward: For women in conflict living in daily terror; for opposition politicians beaten or imprisoned for speaking their minds or demanding a say in power; for children in need asking why they go hungry while their leaders enrich themselves further.

"I have met these victims. I have heard their stories. This is why we at the UN do what we do. Wherever I go whoever I speak with whether they are national leaders or ordinary citizens I try to deliver this basic message loud and clear: Human rights, human rights for all, is not an impossible dream. It should not even be spoken of as a 'dream.' Together, let us work to make it a universal reality. The people of the world deserve nothing less."

In a **meeting** with Council of Europe Secretary-General Thorbjorn Jagland, Mr. Ban discussed UN-Council cooperation, particularly on issues relating to refugees and migrant workers, as well as on regional matters, including Kosovo and Cyprus.

In a joint press conference with Mr. Jagland, he voiced hope that the many serious human rights challenges facing the world today can be met by consistently and universally applying the principles of the UN and the Council. "Democratic countries should lead by example, and the European Union, European Council of Europe, have a very special role to play in leading this campaign," he **stressed**.

Later today, Mr. Ban spoke at Strasbourg's City Hall, hailing European leadership on a host of issues.

"Europe remains a beacon for the fundamental universal values that are the bedrock of civilization and progress," he **said**. "It is essential that we never relent in their defense."

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