

Vienna+25

Building Trust – Making Human Rights a Reality for All

International Conference on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna City Hall, 22 – 23 May 2018)

Concept note

The year 2018 marks the 25th anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights which took place from 14 to 25 June 1993 in Vienna, Austria. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA) adopted at the World Conference together are considered a landmark document for the promotion and protection of human rights. The World Conference affirmed, among others, the universality and indivisibility of human rights. It determined the realisation of human rights as a priority objective of the United Nations and a legitimate concern of the international community and provided a major step in the protection of the human rights of women. The creation of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and his office (OHCHR) provided a powerful impulse for fully establishing human rights as third pillar in the UN system. In the wake of the Conference the special responsibility of cities in realizing human rights was recognized.

On the occasion of the VDPA's 25th anniversary, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the City of Vienna and the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights (BIM), is organising a High Level Expert Conference in Vienna. Human rights stakeholders from diverse backgrounds are invited to give their perspective on current challenges and best practices in the promotion and protection of human rights. Based on their analysis, practical recommendations shall be developed to encourage States and other stakeholders to pursue further legal, institutional and practical improvements of human rights protection, both domestically and internationally.

25 years after the adoption of the VDPA, the enduring relevance of our commitments to address human rights challenges seems more and more confronted with indifference and even mistrust. Many people seem to consider human rights of little relevance to their own lives. Human rights are perceived as an instrument of support to marginalized groups. Populist attitudes intersect with this approach in numerous ways such as in political discourse. In order to adequately tackle this development and to make human rights more tangible for the general population, human rights actors need to understand correctly the roots of the diminishing confidence in human rights on the part of significant sections of society across many UN Member States. Effective communication of human rights as rights benefitting all parts of society is crucial in this regard.

The conference therefore intends to make a contribution to a future-oriented discourse that underpins the relevance of human rights to all of us. The human rights agenda of the next decades will be shaped by global trends which will have an impact on each and every human being: urbanisation, digitalisation, climate change, demographic changes. In these processes, human rights are more essential than ever – as a stabilizing factor for effective rule of law, as a concept against social exclusion, as an important driver for sustainable security, as a guarantor and creator of justice and equality in a spirit of solidarity. Cities as increasingly important human rights stakeholders will play an integral role in the Vienna+25 Conference with the Human Rights City Vienna as a co-host of the conference.

The Expert Conference will gather high level representatives of the UN, including special procedure mandate holders and treaty bodies; regional/sub-regional/national/local human rights institutions;

human rights defenders; independent human rights experts from civil society and academia; youth; private sector and government representatives.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

- **Day 1**
 - Afternoon:
 - High Level Opening “Vienna+25: Building Trust – Making Human Rights a Reality for All”
 - High Level Panel Discussion
 - Parallel Working Groups
- **Day 2**
 - Morning:
 - Continuation of Working Groups
 - Presentation of Working Group Recommendations in the Plenary
 - Concluding Panel

WORKING GROUPS

Working Group 1: Human rights and Security

Safety and security are central elements of the functioning of any society and ensuring a life free from fear for all their citizens is one of the key functions of States. In tackling recent security threats across the world by increasing security measures and with the additional challenge of an ever growing pool of instruments of surveillance and data collection readily available, the relationship between freedom and security requires a permanent process of concretisation in our societies. The protection of human rights is often perceived as an obstacle, rather than an instrument, to effectively preventing and combating security threats, such as terrorism.

This Working Group will discuss the link between freedom, human rights and security. It will address what measures can be taken to ensure a human rights-based approach while fostering safety and security in our societies, and vice versa, how human rights can be used to guarantee a safe environment. Special attention will be paid to the role of cities as human rights promoters, non-state actors as developers and providers of technology products and young people as their key users.

The discussion will be guided by the following questions:

- *How can we broaden the security discourse to arrive at a holistic understanding and ensure sustainable security?*
- *How can we guarantee that security measures are designed in a way that any restrictions of freedom are compatible with international human rights law?*
- *How can we provide human-rights and evidence-based answers to security issues and what role do media have in promoting and disseminating those answers?*
- *How do we better communicate the relevance of human rights, including in the security discourse, for each and everyone of us? How can we empower all citizens, in particular women, as human rights claim-holders?*
- *Urbanisation and security: Which measures can cities develop to strengthen a human rights based approach to urban security policy?*
- *Digitalisation and security: Which groups are most at risk? What is the right policy mix to make use of the benefits of digitalisation while ensuring both security and respect for human rights? What is the role of new actors and the private sector in this regard?*

Working Group 2: Promotion of equality in our societies

The promotion of equality has been at the heart of efforts towards the implementation of human rights since the Vienna World Conference.

At the International Conference on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the VDMA five years ago in Vienna – “Vienna+20” – experts discussed how to ensure a human rights based approach for the post-2015 agenda. The single most important development on the human rights agenda since then was the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals which are strongly grounded in international human rights standards.

At the same time, over the past years social and economic changes and challenges, such as the effects of globalisation, demographic changes, migration, but also the sometimes misleading representation of these challenges through traditional and new media, have led to a changing political landscape. Political stakeholders are confronted with calls by citizens to tackle existing and emerging social demands, sometimes risking to overlook effects on human rights.

This Working Group will discuss how to address evolving concerns of citizens while – in the interest of all – upholding human rights commitments. It will examine what measures are needed to ensure that human rights principles such as equality and non-discrimination are integrated in responses to emerging issues.

The discussion will be guided, inter alia, by the following questions:

- *What are the main reasons and factors for (in-)equality in our societies? What role do the global financial system and phenomena such as corruption play in aggravating inequalities? In which areas did we make substantial progress and what can we learn from these examples? What is the contribution of the SDGs in this regard?*
- *Are the concepts of “equality/anti-discrimination” on the one hand and of “vulnerability/positive discrimination” on the other hand still helpful concepts to counter inequalities in society or should we develop new approaches? Are there specific grounds of discrimination that we will have to examine more closely, like age and inter-generational issues?*
- *How can we best integrate a human rights based approach to poverty prevention and poverty reduction policies?*
- *What do the Sustainable Development Goals mean on a local level and how can they be integrated in city strategies for sustainable urban development?*
- *What is the impact of new technologies, for instance on labour rights, and how can we address potentially negative consequences on equality?*
- *What are the benefits of an equal society for the general population? In what ways do we have to adapt our communication strategies to better pass the message about equality to all citizens? How can we reach out to people who feel disenfranchised by globalisation?*

METHODOLOGY

Each Working Group shall be composed of experts, a chair and a rapporteur. In preparation of the Conference, participants will receive a thematic outline for their Working Group as a basis for discussion. Each Working Group shall result in a number of short, practical recommendations to be addressed to States and other stakeholders for further action. In addition, a subsequent publication will document the Conference outcome.

The conference language will be English.