Interview with Eamon Gilmore, EU Special Representative for Human Rights

The Press Office of the Global Campus of Human Rights had the opportunity to interview the EU Special Representative for Human Rights Eamon Gilmore about his views on the most important challenges and
Could you tell us more about the 23rd EU NGO Forum 2021 and the main objectives of your event?

Engagement of civil society is crucial for the EU human rights policy, and each year, the EU-NGO Forum represents a unique opportunity to strengthen our cooperation, while exchanging views on current, essential, global issues. It gathers hundreds of NGO representatives, human rights defenders, academia, international organisations, EU Member States and European institutions. They share their experiences and ideas to guide EU’s actions in this field.

This year's 23rd edition will focus on recovery efforts from the pandemic. As I have said in the past, human rights remain at the core of the fight against COVID-19. The pandemic exacerbated existing human rights challenges and increased pressure on the most vulnerable. Although this battle is not over yet, we need to reflect on how to address the adverse impacts on human rights and fundamental freedoms by the pandemic itself, but also by the formal and informal measures implemented in response to the pandemic. With this perspective in mind, the forum will be structured around three main pillars: (1) ending states of emergency and restrictions on fundamental freedoms; (2) equal access to health care; and (3) reinforcing economic, social and labour rights, corporate accountability, the decent work agenda and social protection in the post-COVID-19 world. In addition, it will provide recommendations on how the EU can further protect civic space worldwide, at a time where it has been particularly restricted; and promote a rights-based recovery through the strengthening of health care and decent work for everyone, in view of the EU’s efforts to reinforce Social Europe.

Personally, I look forward to participating in the discussions on 7-8 December 2021.

Could you give us more details about the Strategic Dialogue that you have launched with Michelle Bachelet?

We are dealing at global level with a group of countries that are challenging the basic principles of international human rights law, international humanitarian law, democracy, and the rule of law, and promoting alternative narratives. In this context, the EU, together with its Member States, developed an assertive policy to strengthen its contribution to a rules-based international order and promote a more efficient multilateralism space, with the UN at its core, as provided by the EU Joint Communication on Multilateralism adopted in February 2021.

The EU-OHCHR Strategic Dialogue is part of this new approach, and aims at enhancing cooperation between the EU and OHCHR on key human rights issues, to anticipate challenges and promote partnerships.

I had the pleasure to co-chair, together with High Commissioner Bachelet, the first Strategic Dialogue on 13 October 2021, in Brussels, during which we touched upon a number of serious human rights issues, such as the protection of the universality and indivisibility of human rights, erosion of the rule of law, shrinking civic space, and deepening inequalities. In particular, we addressed the place of social, economic and cultural rights, human rights in the digital space, and the interface between the environment, climate change and human rights, as well as migration. But our discussion also covered geographic developments and ongoing country specific situations of concern. We agreed to continue discussing and working on these challenges and committed to enhance cooperation, including at country and regional levels through EU Delegations and OHCHR field presences.

This first edition thus demonstrated that these constructive dialogues not only allow confirming EU’s strong support to the OHCHR and its independency, but also provide clear outcomes and generate
synergies on which both the EU and the OHCHR will periodically follow-up, on an annual basis at the occasion of these dialogues, and during our regular exchanges.

**What is the added value for the EU to continue being a long time partner of the Global Campus of Human Rights network?**

Human rights, democracy, and rule of law are values shared and promoted by the EU, but they also represent what is at the very core of the EU's foundation: respecting and upholding such universal and indivisible principles is a treaty obligation for the Union and its Member States. Yet, in a world where human rights and humanitarian issues increasingly arise, challenging our capacity to meet our international commitments, being the partner of a network as important as the Global Campus, is not an added value, but rather an essential asset for the EU to achieve its goals and stand up for human rights, at all levels.

As it is indeed underlined in the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, advancing education and research on human rights is a key tool for raising awareness, defending human rights and promoting peace. With more than 5,500 alumni coming from all over the world, and one hundred member universities, the high quality programme provided by the Global Campus enables its network to advocate on crucial human rights issues, and empowers numerous human rights defenders by giving the necessary technical tools for them to conduct their work. At a time where general academic freedom is increasingly restricted, the EU is proud to support the Global Campus for 24 years, and stands ready to continue playing its part.

**In your opinion what are the most important challenges and topics in the Human Rights agenda of the EU external relations? What are your priorities in addressing the current global human rights and democracy challenges?**

In the course of the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly imposed its rhythm on the EU's international agenda. Because, from a practical point of view, it obliged us to change the way in which we conduct our daily work and implement our engagements. But above all, because it exacerbated human rights challenges, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable. We had no choice but to adapt our actions in strengthening international cooperation and solidarity. The COVID-19 indeed reminded us of our interdependency and of the necessity to adopt a joint and multilateral approach when addressing global crises, by putting human rights at the very centre of the answers we provide.

Yet, many other concerns persist: threats posed by climate change, potential challenges in relation to digital technologies, shrinking space for civil society, growing attacks against human rights defenders and journalists, lack of progress in gender equality, democratic backsliding, and breaches in the rule of law. Moreover, the human rights situation in many countries, driven by armed conflict, state repression, or attacks against minorities, continues to worsen. This includes Afghanistan, Belarus, Myanmar, Ethiopia and the Chinese region of Xinjiang, just to name a few of the most pressing human rights crisis at the moment.

In order to address these issues, I am engaging with relevant authorities, civil society and human rights defenders, and I am raising these issues in human rights multilateral fora to keep the international attention. Among other initiatives, every year, we launch bilateral consultations, we organise human rights dialogues with partner countries and international organisations, we implement projects to support human rights defenders and civil society organisations, and we observe trials and elections.

We cannot forget that we are also judged for what we do at home. Coherence and consistency of our internal and external actions are indispensable for EU's compliance with human rights standards at all levels. This is why the EU adopted a new internal European Democracy Action Plan, the new internal and external framework on gender equality, the Gender Equality Strategy and the third Gender Action Plan,
and of course, the Rule of Law mechanism, which all strengthen and complement our external and internal actions.

**Could you give a personal message to students, professors, partners and staff of the Global Campus of Human Rights?**

I had the honour to participate in two Graduation Ceremonies of the European Master in Human Rights and Democratisation since I became Special Representative for Human Rights, and I was able to see the value of the Global Campus of Human Rights: its uniqueness relies on its people, and on the solidarity and interconnectivity of its network.

Look, working on human rights is not easy, we are constantly faced with the ugliest part of humanity, governments turning against the people they are supposed to protect, individuals who are deprived of their fundamental freedoms, tortured, murdered for belonging to an ethnic or religious group or for simply being who there are. But at the same time, I see the best humanity has to offer; people who risk their lives to speak for those who have no voice, women human rights defenders from Afghanistan, fearless journalists in Russia, brave environmental and indigenous activists in Latin America, courageous protesters in Belarus.

I also have the opportunity to work with extremely committed and motivated people like you, who believe in human rights, in freedom and in equality. Continue to cultivate your specificity, and keep your enthusiasm high despite the frustrations that may arise given the magnitude of the challenges we must face – challenges in relation to human rights and democracy, but also to professional and personal paths.

Once again, the work conducted by the Global Campus of Human Rights, in terms of education, research, training, or advocacy, is of utmost importance to participate in building more human rights-centred and more sustainable societies. Human rights experts and human rights defenders are still very much needed today, if not more than ever. As expressed before, the EU is proud to count among the Global Campus’ supporters, and we will continue to support its students, professors, partners and staff.

For more information contact our [Press Office](#)

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