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Interview with the EU Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen



The Press Office of the Global Campus of Human Rights had the opportunity to ask the **European Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen**, about the importance of human rights education around the world and her impressions about our academic network.

Please elaborate on the European Commission vision in driving education to achieve the respect of Human Rights and Democracy and deliver quality education in times of crisis in communities in need.

In many parts of the world, civic and political space is shrinking – more power is concentrated in fewer hands, with less and less accountability. At the same time, poverty, inequality and injustice continue to blight the lives of millions. Youth, women and girls, and minorities in particular face huge challenges in having their voices heard and their needs addressed.

Democracy and democratic institutions must evolve to allow access for all, not building walls and instead opening doors to the outside world. Young men and especially women must necessarily own and drive these evolutions.

As a former teacher, I am deeply convinced of the powerful role that education has to play in tackling global challenges and transforming the world we live in.

Education is the key for young people to be empowered to shape tomorrow's world. And it is an enabling force in the achievement of other human rights as a driver of freedom, equality and democracy. Its financing must be protected.

This is why I have taken the decision to increase EU financing of Official Development Assistance to education in partner countries under my responsibility from 7% to 10%.

What motivates you as Commissioner to continue supporting the Global Campus of Human Rights activities in the field of human rights education & democratisation around the world?

One of my personal priorities is to have more young people involved in shaping and implementing EU external action. Young people are the change makers. This is why we also made sure that in our new strategy with Africa, youth is put on the frontline of a comprehensive approach.

My aim is to equip as many young people as possible with 21st century skills and motivate them to seek leadership roles, especially girls. We want to inspire them to get involved, exercise their rights, and uphold the rights of others.

This requires an education based on universal values, with equality, dignity, peace, sustainability and respect for human rights at the heart of the curriculum.

Global Campus offers a unique opportunity to build a community of true human rights ambassadors and defenders who, in turn, will inform and educate people in their own countries. They know that they can rely on a strong network with whom to discuss and challenge ideas.

What does the DG for International Cooperation and Development hope to achieve through continued support to this rapidly growing academic network of 100 Universities?

First, we are changing the name of the DG to International partnerships, which also is the title of my own portfolio. This new wording is already a message. We want to partner and mutually benefit of cooperation with wide range of stakeholders.

We also count on the Global Campus as a strong partner in furthering human rights and democracy education across the globe. Through its network of partner universities, Global Campus has formidable potential to bring in lasting changes in partner countries.

I would invite the Global Campus to further reach out to young people in countries where civic and political space is closing. We know there are technical and political risks and challenges involved in providing human rights education and in fighting for academic freedom in such countries. Know that you can count on our unwavering support in that endeavour.

What are the EU's main priorities for education, human rights and democratisation in your new strategy for 2021-2027?

We are currently finalising the negotiations on the new strategy of the EU and Member States on human rights and democracy for the next five years. Education, as a human right and as part of the solution, will be at the heart of the EU's investments in development.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced global leaders to re-think education systems. Education has never been more relevant or more at risk. Some 1.6 billion children have had their education interrupted by COVID-19, and we risk reversing gains made over decades. The most vulnerable students – girls, young people living with disabilities, those affected by crises and displacement – are at increased risk of never returning to the classroom.

We must ensure no one is left behind, particularly women and girls and this will be covered in our upcoming Gender Action Plan 3. And, crucially, all students need to learn 21st century skills, so that they can take on jobs that do not exist yet and tackle crises that we cannot foresee. They must graduate with skills in critical thinking, civic responsibility and communication, to be able to lead their societies towards a more sustainable and more prosperous, peaceful, equal and just future. We will obviously support teachers, the beating heart of the education system, in adapting to this changing world.

What are the main challenges you think the Commission will need to address in the next years related to Human Rights?

Human rights are a core value of the European Union, and their protection and promotion around the world is a key strategic priority for us. We support multilateralism and a rules-based international order. However, some countries take a different approach. The EU does not hesitate to make political statements and take action.

But we are well aware that change needs to come from within. We therefore need to keep supporting civil society on promoting human rights and democratic values, raising awareness and giving a voice to communities and youth, to help universal values flourish. We need to keep protecting human rights defenders so they can continue their important work of holding governments to account. More and more, we need to put a rights-based approach in all our international actions, with people at its heart so their voices are heard and their rights are upheld, even when we are helping to build a hydro-electric plant or supporting economic growth.

The EU plays an instrumental role at the global level and in its partnership with the other regional, international and multilateral institutions. How do you see EU's role in supporting the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals, as we face COVID-19 and a continued uncertainty of the future?

COVID-19 has deepened existing inequalities and has reversed decades of progress on SDGs. The EU will continue to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by putting them back on track through strong international partnerships based on mutual interests and shared values.

Our ability to address all inequalities will be crucial to achieving the SDGs and leaving no one behind. Here, the EU is taking forward a transformative agenda at global level. We are working with our partners

and within the multilateral system to deliver a global recovery that seeks to reduce inequalities by linking investment and debt relief to the Sustainable Development Goals, as proposed by President von der Leyen last May.

We will focus especially on youth, women and education, because without education there will be no global recovery, economic growth, human development or equality.

Could you give a personal message to students, professors, partners and staff of the Global Campus of Human Rights, a network of 100 Universities around the world supported by the EU, that are our followers and reading this interview? How could they be inspired and encouraged by your work as Commissioner leading your team of professionals?

Firstly, I would like to reach out to the youth and particularly young women reading this. I appeal to you to engage in public life, in your student life and beyond. Do not hesitate to go for leadership opportunities and to use your voice in political discussions.

Secondly, I want to commend you for overcoming the challenges of COVID-19 to continue your studies. I am deeply impressed by the resilience of students and teachers who are not only adapting to this new reality but also coming up with innovative solution to take learning online and the EU will support this.

I would like students, professors, partners and staff of the Global Campus of Human Rights to know that we are inspired and encouraged by their work over the past few months. The 2020 has been a particularly difficult year, and we have been closely following the increasingly difficult situation in which many of you have had to operate.

But we will overcome this crisis together.

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

Elisa Aquino – Alice D’Este – Giulia Ballarin

pressoffice@gchumanrights.org

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