



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Commission to South Africa

10 December 2008

Press Release

.../for immediate release

10 December 2008 – International Human Rights Day

This year's International Human Rights Day is of special significance as it marks the 60th anniversary celebrations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which represented the first step in establishing a comprehensive international framework for the protection of human rights. Today the Universal Declaration is one of the fundamental texts establishing respect for human rights as a guiding principle in international relations. The year 2008 also witnesses the 15th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action proclaimed by the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights as well as the 10th anniversary of the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

President José Manuel Barroso declared: *"I am always struck by the truly revolutionary nature of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which courageously stated in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War that "inherent dignity" and "the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" were the foundations of freedom, justice and peace. Sixty years on and against the background of the continuing critical human rights situation in many countries, the Declaration remains as pertinent as ever."*

Commissioner for External Relations and Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner said: *"Sixty years after the proclamation of the Universal Declaration it is widely accepted as part of customary international law – testimony to the genuinely universal nature of the rights it enshrines. But much more still needs to be done to make every citizen – women and men –aware of the impact of this declaration, so that its full potential as an empowerment tool for human rights defenders and promoters of human security around the globe will be enforced. Today's celebrations belong to all men and women who dedicate their lives to defending and upholding human rights worldwide I strongly affirm that the European Union continues to be on their side and is fully determined to contribute to promoting and protecting human rights as an integral part of its external policies".*

Vice-President Jacques Barrot added: *"Behind the European project there is a joint endeavour to the strengthening of pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men in our societies. The EU is not complacent with its own human rights record. The protection of human rights requires a constant effort to extend and update our legislative and policy initiatives in areas such as the fight against racism, xenophobia and all types of discrimination. This is our contribution to implementing every day the Declaration. "*

More information on the EU's Human rights & Democratisation Policy:
http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/intro/index.htm