

**UN Human Rights Office sounds alarm over threat of erosion of democracy in Europe,
calls on leaders to prevent further backsliding of human rights and rule of law**

On 12 June 2018, the UN Human Rights Regional Office for Europe (OHCHR) sounded alarm over the backsliding of human rights in Europe, the exploitation of people's fears to justify exclusionary measures and the erosion of civil society space.

At the press briefing, UN Human Rights Regional Representative for Europe, Birgit Van Hout, presented the Human Rights Office's observations after a one-day consultation in Brussels on human rights and the rule of law in Europe -- and in Hungary and Poland in particular -- with participants from regional organisations, umbrella groups, national human rights institutions, academia, and civil society.

"Human rights defenders are under mounting pressure, rights-holders are losing protection, and the very institutions designed to protect them are being weakened," Van Hout stated, "In Hungary and Poland, human rights defenders fear reprisals just for carrying out their work; starve-and-strangle policies are making it increasingly difficult for them to operate."

The EU is a strong and vocal advocate for human rights in other parts of the world, providing assistance and protection to defenders in many countries. Van Hout called for coherence from the EU, with equal attention to and support for human rights defenders within and outside EU borders.

The consultation followed expressions of concern by UN human rights bodies over measures taken by Hungary and Poland, including as regards freedom of expression and media pluralism, the independence of the judiciary, and incitement to hatred. She urged Hungary and Poland to comply with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - a treaty both States have ratified voluntarily.

Since the European Union (EU) was created as a Union of Values with human rights at its essence, it was up to EU leaders, both in EU institutions and in EU Member States, to prevent further backsliding of human rights and the rule of law. Noting developments in other EU countries as well, the UN Human Rights Office warned against a potential domino effect across Europe. "When human rights and the rule of law are abandoned, we are all at greater risk," Van Hout said.

To mark the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the UN has launched the Stand Up for Human Rights campaign, encouraging everybody to [#standup4humanrights](https://www.standup4humanrights.org). Join us at www.standup4humanrights.org