**Celebratory ceremony on the occasion of the**

**70th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights**

Athens, Greece

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Seventy years ago, Europe looked very different to today. The death penalty was widely legal and operative. Hundreds of thousands of Europeans were still waiting to be repatriated or resettled after WWII, while thousands of new refugees were escaping through the Iron Curtain. In a number of countries homosexuality was still considered a crime.

If today’s picture looks much better, it is largely thanks to the European Convention on Human Rights, which has been instrumental in protecting individuals from state abuse and paved the way for major societal changes. No wonder then that the Convention, its Protocols and the system that stems from it have become a lodestar for those pursuing justice, dignity and equality. At a time when freedom of expression is under threat, we have a duty to treasure the Convention which protects it.

But success stories too come complete with obstacles to overcome: the Convention system has been repeatedly attacked and delegitimised in some European countries; key judgments of its Court have still not been implemented; and states often fail to address the structural problems that deprive people of their Convention rights.

Fixing these problems is primarily the member states’ responsibility. Each individual should be able to seek and receive justice at home, in line with the subsidiarity principle. Recourse to an international court should be seen for what it is – essentially a failure to provide proper national remedies.

But we all have our role to play. As an institution enshrined in the Convention since the entry into force of Protocol No. 14 in 2010, I share the responsibility to help make the Convention’s rights a reality for all.

The Convention has been a permanent reference point in my work, be it in my country monitoring, thematic work or third-party interventions before the European Court of Human Rights. My third-party interventions before the Court give an indication of the structural problems that still stand in the way of the Convention’s full realisation. Most of my interventions actually deal with human rights defenders and migration issues, two areas where member states’ actions have often undercut the important protections provided by the Convention.

Third party interventions are not the only way I interact with the Convention system though. In my dialogue with national authorities, the Convention is a prime source of reference; I use it as common ground for advancing human rights and finding solutions to prevent repetitive applications to the Court. I have also been using the new right to submit observations relating to the execution of judgments to the Committee of Ministers. Non-execution of the Court’s judgments is still a major problem in many member states. Certain important judgments have still not been implemented, sometimes several years after they were delivered. This denies justice to the people concerned and undermines the very values and purposes the Convention was signed for.

As we blow out the Convention’s 70 candles, let’s not lose sight of our mission. Preserving the Convention system as the home of freedoms, justice and human dignity is the best birthday gift we can make.