



70 years since the European Convention on Human Rights entered into force on 3rd September 1953.

Statement of the President of the Court, Síoíra O'Leary

Strasbourg, 2.09.2023 – The President of the European Court of Human Rights has made the following statement on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the entry into force of the European Convention on Human Rights on the 3rd of September:

For seventy years, the European Convention on Human Rights has played a crucial role in preserving and protecting the common European values of pluralist parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and the indivisibility and universality of human rights across a legal space now serving 700 million persons.

When ratifying the Convention, the member States of the Council of Europe committed to a unique international system for the protection of human rights with the external supervision of the European Court of Human Rights in response to individual and inter-State complaints at its core. They reaffirmed this commitment at the 4th Summit of the Heads of State and Government in Reykjavik last May.

Since the entry into force of the Convention the Court has dealt with well over 1 million applications and handed down more than 26,000 judgments and many thousands of decisions. Through these judgments and decisions, the Court has sought to defend “the common public order of the free democracies of Europe with the object of safeguarding their common heritage of political traditions, ideals, freedom and the rule of law”. The judgments of the Court have saved many lives, transformed thousands of others, and contributed to the bettering of our societies.

By holding States to account the Court seeks to maintain and foster democratic stability and the effective functioning of the rule of law across the Council of Europe legal space. Through the exercise of its residual jurisdiction in relation to complaints lodged against the Russian Federation, the Court seeks to ensure that a former Contracting Party cannot evade, retroactively, its international legal obligations.

As evidenced by the invasion of Ukraine, instances of democratic erosion in transitional and previously stable democracies, rule of law backsliding, or signs of regression when it comes to issues such as equality or societal responses to gender violence, some of the fundamental values enshrined in the Convention are under threat in different parts of Europe and beyond. However, this 70th anniversary reminds us of what the Convention and the Court, as the ultimate guarantors of human rights across our continent, alongside domestic democratic and judicial systems, continue to achieve.

At this critical point in Europe's history, we should treasure the Convention's special character as a treaty for the collective enforcement of human rights and fundamental freedoms and remember our collective responsibility to pass on this unique international protection mechanism to future generations.