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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

**Statement on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary
of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

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As President of the COMECE Legal Affairs Commission, on the day that marks the 70th Anniversary since its adoption, I would like to recall the lasting, legal and political significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) for the promotion and protection of human rights, including on the European continent.

The Universal Declaration is literally defining what shared responsibility means with regard to fundamental human rights, including in Europe. The Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See stated at the Council of Europe for the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man: *“It is precisely the universal nature of human rights that requires that there be a constant dialogue between the regional systems of protection and the entire international community”*¹.

States receive legitimacy from their capacity to serve and protect their people and their fundamental human rights, as rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU can be seen as a reaffirmation of its universal principles in the European context.

¹ *Intervention of the Secretary for Relations with States at the Council of Europe for the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, Strasbourg, 10 September 2018, available at the link <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/09/11/180911d.pdf>.*

In a time when core principles that had been given for granted for decades are questioned - when not frontally attacked - this celebration provides a fitting opportunity to encourage a rediscovery, including at the EU level, of a global reference framework grounded on the concept of fundamental human rights being universal, inviolable, inalienable, indivisible, interdependent, interrelated and non-hierarchised.

There is a clear need to overcome current tendencies, according to which the interdependence between human rights can be broken and human rights themselves can be selectively placed in a hierarchy. This vision endangers the entire architecture of human rights.

Human rights are not conceded by governments, but derive from the inherent human dignity of each person. Human rights are the transposition of the very principle of human dignity in legally binding obligations for public authorities.

The Church also recalls that human dignity is the primary foundation of all fundamental human rights. As recently highlighted by Pope Francis: *"From a Christian perspective, there is a significant relation between the Gospel message and the recognition of human rights in the spirit of those who drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Those rights are premised on the nature objectively shared by the human race. They were proclaimed in order to remove the barriers that divide the human family and to favour what the Church's social doctrine calls integral human development"*².

Looking not only to the past, but also to the future, this Anniversary provides the opportunity to restate the primary responsibility of public authorities in promoting and protecting human rights, while involving all stakeholders in the relevant process; as well as the importance of human dignity, reason and universality in the context of the next European Elections.

² Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See for the traditional exchange of New Year greetings, Regia Hall, Monday, 8 January 2018, available at the link http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/january/documents/papa-francesco_20180108_corpo-diplomatico.html.

The promotion and protection of human rights is the foundation upon which a just society - national and international - can be built. All of us have to be actors, not merely spectators, and to stand ready to assume in Europe our shared responsibility to promote and protect the dignity of the human person and of the fundamental human rights deriving therefrom.

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