

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

First of all, I would like to thank the Mission of the Holy See to the Council of Europe to ask my organization, the International Catholic Child Bureau, to moderate this panel with such distinguished personalities.

Let me share just a few thoughts in order to introduce our discussions.

As Jan Martenson, former UN Under-Secretary General for Human Rights, stated “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has inspired, guided and directed national and international energies toward the achievement of a worldwide awareness of the human person as well as standards and machinery to protect human rights.”

70 years after its adoption, the Universal Declaration has assumed ever-greater importance by acquiring significant moral and political force, influencing legal instruments and measures of implementation and contributing to customary international law. Its broad context and especially its provision on the right to life for all people also influenced the creation of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. And by the next year members of the Council of Europe specifically referred to the Declaration by name and its aim of “securing the universal and effective recognition and observance of the rights contained therein” in signing the European Convention on Human Rights.

Never before in history has there been what is now described as a universal culture of rights in which the rights of so many men, women and children are given attention in so many diverse places and in which the international community refers to human rights as the common language of humanity. However, gaps between theory and practice still exist, abuses still occur and at times there even appears to be retrogression, sources of resistance remain, and problems persist. There, thus remains what has been called the “unfinished ethical agenda of our time” and the “unfinished revolution of placing the human person squarely at the center of national and international values”. But, in the tasks that lay ahead in the next decades, the perspective of history may offer considerable hope not only for the future, but also for the power of visions seen.

Le caractère universel et indivisible des droits de l’homme affirmé par la Déclaration et réitéré lors de la II Conférence mondiale des droits de l’homme de Vienne (1993) n’est souvent pas dans la pratique vécu comme un socle qui engage tous les Etats ainsi que les organes de la société. C’est pour cela que nous avons demandé à Emmanuel Decaux, Professeur émérite à l’Université Panthéon-Assas - Paris II et expert internationalement reconnu en la matière, d’intervenir aujourd’hui sur le thème des défis qu’ils se posent à l’universalité des droits de l’homme dans le cadre du droit international.

Set up in 1959, the European Court of Human Rights rules on individual or State applications alleging violations of the human rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. The Court’s case-law makes the Convention a powerful instrument for meeting new

challenges and consolidating the rule of law and democracy in Europe. We are, therefore, much honored that its President, Judge Guido Raimondi, has accepted our invitation to talk about the principle of universality in the Convention and the Court's jurisprudence.

In particular, since the II Vatican Council and the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963), the Holy See has clearly recognized human rights as the moral standards to which all should adhere. A number of initiatives, including this one, are precisely taken this year up to December, 10 to mark the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration. Hence, it is in this framework that Mgr Paul Gallagher, Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States, will deliver his reflections on the human integral development and the universality of human rights in a multilateral context.

Alessandra Aula,

BICE.