



## **LEUVEN DECLARATION ON THE BACKLASH AGAINST INDEPENDENT HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS**

Meeting at the University of Leuven for our annual conference, we, the Association of Human Rights Institutes (AHRI), condemn the recent backlash against human rights, the rule of law and democracy, and the alarmingly shrinking space for civil society actors, including human rights defenders, academics and the media.

As a global network of academic human rights institutes, AHRI strongly believes that the universal and regional human rights systems must be able to carry out their work effectively. Independent human rights mechanisms are being attacked from several sides, by threats of withdrawal, reduced financial contributions and reprisals against civil society representatives for interacting with international mechanisms.

At the global level, the United Nations (UN) has come under increasing pressure, as Member States threaten to drastically reduce their assessed contributions, causing serious cutbacks and uncertainty at various UN agencies, programmes and funds. Governments have shown too little willingness to address the multiple threats against international, state and civil society mechanisms, local leadership and experts, such as human rights treaty bodies and Special Procedures.

At the regional and subregional levels, and despite their differences, human rights mechanisms across the world face a variety of common constraints and challenges in fulfilling their mandates effectively and efficiently: these range from poor ratification records to a lack of political support, underfunding, contestation and outright refusal to implement judgments, antagonism towards civil society organizations and an inadequate insurance of access to justice for individuals. In Europe, an increasing number of states, including some EU Member States, attack the European Court of Human Rights and refuse to implement certain judgments. In 2016, the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights announced that it was experiencing an “extreme financial crisis” that seriously affected its ability to fulfil its mandate and basic functions. The African Commission and Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights similarly face financial constraints so severe as to threaten their proper functioning.

As human rights scholars, we unanimously condemn these practices and express our appreciation for the institutions, experts and judges who have to operate in increasingly difficult circumstances. We urgently appeal to governments to respect independent human rights mechanisms and allow them to function to the full extent of their mandates.

*Leuven, 28 April 2017*