



## MAASTRICHT DECLARATION ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS BACKSLIDING IN POLAND

Meeting on the occasion of our annual conference, we, the Association of Human Rights Institutes (AHRI), as a global network of academic human rights institutes, observe with growing concern the unprecedented decline of the rule of law and human rights protection currently taking place in Poland. Poland, a role model for Central and Eastern European states for the last decades, pioneer in advancing human rights, and member of the Council of Europe, European Union (EU) and United Nations and their respective human rights systems, is turning into a state that openly violates fundamental human rights and freedoms, as well as values and principles of democratic and constitutional order.

In particular, highly worrisome developments in four fundamentally important human rights areas should be named:

- **Independence of judiciary**  
The systemic violations of and structural attacks against judicial independence by the current Polish authorities, in particular the legal denigration of the judicial system, have been confirmed by the European Court of Human Rights, the Court of Justice of the EU, the Venice Commission, and numerous judicial organisations. With deepest concern we also observe how the Polish Government and the leading party in parliament are thwarting the independence and authority of the European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice of the EU, openly disrespecting and trying to circumvent their decisions.
- **Women's human rights**  
Introduction of a near-total ban on abortion dramatically affects women's human rights. We are highly concerned about hostility towards the women's rights movement, including repressions of activists and participants in mass protests. The Polish Government's official expression of its intent to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention seriously undermines Poland's commitment to counteract violence against women.
- **Freedom of speech and media freedom**  
Recent attempts to drastically limit the freedom of the media in Poland, as well as the rapidly growing number of strategic lawsuits against public participation, so-called SLAPPs, against journalists, activists, academics and opposition members, stand in clear violation of most fundamental democratic principles and free speech protection standards.
- **LGBTQ+ rights**  
We are deeply concerned about the lack of proper recognition and protection of human rights and freedoms of persons belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. State-sponsored homophobia, including "LGBT-free zones", homophobic speech, violence and other forms of repression of LGBTQ+ activists, either by state officials or private persons must be condemned, prevented and adequately sanctioned.

We believe that this situation requires a common and unambiguous response on the side of

the EU institutions, the Council of Europe, their Member States, UN human rights bodies as well as all other bodies and organisations involved in protecting human rights and freedoms.

All relevant legal and political procedures aimed at stopping further decline of the rule of law and human rights protection in Poland should be implemented. We request the EU Commission to use all available oversight mechanisms to ensure full and uniform implementation by Poland of existing binding standards, and we urge the Member States to support the EU Commission in its efforts.

Human rights violations caused by the conduct of the Polish authorities must be given due attention by the competent human rights bodies at the international and regional levels. In addition, wherever possible, victims should be given legal assistance and support from human rights NGOs.

AHRI will remain vigilant regarding further developments in Poland and expresses its solidarity with all those who are persecuted and harassed for their firm stand in defence of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in Poland.

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