

Welcome address
2018 WORLD HUMAN RIGHTS CITIES FORUM
GWANGJU

**Annual Theme: Whom Do We Live
With? – Diversity, Inclusiveness, and Peace**

Global challenges, local solutions: Re-engaging human rights

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Firstly, I would like to thank Mr. LEE Yong-Seop, Mayor of the city of Gwangju for the invitation to speak here today. I would also like to thank the hosts: Gwangju city; the National human rights commission of Korea; and the the Gwangju Metropolitan Office of Education. Also, a special thank you should go out to the cooperation hosts, of which I am particularly happy that the Swedish Embassy here in South Korea continues to be a supporter of this great event. Finally, I want to extend a thank you to the hard working organisers from the Gwangju International Centre and all its volunteers, as well as the United Cities and Local Governments Committee on social inclusion, participatory democracy and human rights

For this speech I was asked to not put on my historical glasses and look back at the 70 years that have passed, but instead to look into my crystal ball, to see the challenges that lie ahead and what human rights might address in the coming 70 years.

In preparing for the speech I realised that there are three mistakes one can make in relation to the future: Counting on that tomorrow will be the same as today, or counting on that the future will be completely different from what we know today. The third mistake is simply not giving it a thought at all.

I will try my best for this speech to give you my balanced suggestions. But first, I want to underscore that we meet here in Korea at a time where a remarkable peace process may yield promising results for the Korean people. We all hope for the best. And I cannot help

but briefly commemorate the year of 2018, in term of the 70th anniversary and celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 2018 is also the 25th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action and it happens to also be the 20 years anniversary of both the Asian Human Rights Charter and the European Charter of Human Rights in the City. A lot of remarkable achievements to look back on in deed.

Despite the fact that we live through very troubled times, there is no doubt that these achievements have had a major positive influence on the generations of people living during the last 70 years. I am sure that if you asked, the vast majority of people would prefer to live today as oppose to any earlier period of time. Gender equality, LGBT rights, stronger recognition of the rights of the child, and a deeper appreciation of the inherent dignity of the individual are all areas where the world has progressed. And these developments have only come about because some people had a moral imagination. They had the spirit and courage to think of a better world not only for themselves but in particular for their fellow citizens. However, the world is not standing still, and new human rights challenges have emerged that we need to respond to. So, despite the fact that critiques are questioning of the relevance of human rights today, I am certain that human rights will still be relevant 70 years from now. Although, new tactics are required: better communication, creative minds and a higher level of collaboration than ever before will be needed to continue to give human rights significance. The big global trends and challenges of today have real, practical, impact on the day-to-day lives of people in local communities all around the world. They are challenges that we as a human rights community cannot ignore if we want human rights to continue to be a key tool for societies respecting the inherent dignity of the individual. Shifts in powers and changes in the global governance landscape are challenging our conceptions of what we once thought we knew with certainty would be an open and more human rights friendly future for all. There is today a significant risk of international- and national governance systems failing. We are witnessing what I am tempted to call a rising culture of irresponsibility amongst some of the world's national leaders. This shift can be demonstrated by what we are not doing in 2018. This year a state should have convened the 3rd World Conference on Human Rights. So far, they have been held every 25 years. It is telling that no country would host it.

In such scenario people naturally look for new actors to rely on and put their faith in. Here, cities have proven to have real potential to pick up where nation states fail. In cities there is an approach to face the challenges of tomorrow with a real sense of urgency. It is obvious, since it is at the local level human rights violations and societal changes first become visible.

This is particularly true when it comes to climate change and global warming, which is affecting local communities all over the world, leading to rapid demographic shifts. We witness these so-called natural disasters occurring: earthquakes, floods and earth quakes affecting millions of people. However, we should remind ourselves that most often natural incidents only become disasters because of lack of human rights considerations in city planning or in implementation. Marginalised minority groups being housed at the most exposed places for flooding; houses and schools poorly constructed due to corrupt behaviour by construction firms, as was uncovered after the earthquake in Italy a few years ago when 250 people died. And many more examples are there to learn from. Climate change and disasters alter our demographic make-up due to mass migration and we move closer to each other in different ways because of it. Cities and local authorities have a big part to play in leading the way forward both to slow down global warming and accommodate for its human rights consequences.

Another major challenge is that the future is also *futuristic*. The title of this forum is: whom do we live with? Will robots be some of our future neighbours? The new technological advancements offer many promising developments. Artificial intelligence has the prospects to solve many of society's logistical challenges in the city, improving accessibility to services, not only in terms of infrastructure and transportation but also in terms of securing better health services and improving access to quality education. New technology has the potential to secure many of the social and economic rights in the city. So, we live in a time of great innovation. We are more interconnected than ever before. More informed and more empowered by new technologies. At the same time, we also see ourselves increasingly at risk of isolation, and disempowered by the rapid pace the developments are taking. It becomes increasingly difficult to navigate how to make meaningful contributions to societies in constant movement and with great levels of uncertainty. Across the globe people feel left behind not only in terms of subsistence but also in terms of not being part of the global technological development.

Artificial intelligence makes regular people worry for their safety, privacy and livelihoods – and for good reason. What will the many taxi drivers and people in the transport sector do in the future when cars have become automated and drones are delivering our packages? How many ordinary doctors, lawyers and economist will be substituted by artificial intelligence in coming years? How will these people secure an income to support their families? Will the small rural villages benefit from these technological advancements, or will they only be for the big SMART cities? And will the SMART cities soon be oppressive places

to live, since all our movements and whereabouts are followed and registered, no longer the safe haven that the city has often been? There is a real risk that new technological advancements and artificial intelligence will become a driver of inequality and fragmentation in our societies, rather than something that benefits humanity as a whole. To prevent the rising sense of fatalism and the rising sense of collective disempowerment, we need to be progressive, as a human rights community, and we need to make new alliances and learn from experts within new fields. We need to make artificial intelligence work for all of us. Human Rights by Design should be the outset whenever new technologies are developed in order to avoid that human beings become the servants of the robots. Therefore, SMART cities are only smart when they integrate a human rights-based approach.

Issues such as rapid unmanaged urbanisation, social polarization and rising inequality and wealth disparity are trends that bear the risk of enhancing social unrest and instability in our societies, if not confronted. Today 8 families own more than 50 percent of the entire world population. Corruption, use of tax havens and other economic crimes are tools used to deepen the inequality. This leads to fear and distrust, in institutions at national- and international levels. People are questioning if the structure and international systems put in place the last 70 years are up to the challenge of confronting today's new and complex human rights and social justice issues. To really promote and protect diversity, inclusion and peace – to promote human rights today and in the future, we need to re-establish trust. Trust in institutions and trust in each other.

Reflecting on all these challenges and trends, in relation to this forum and particularly related to this year's theme, "Whom do we live with", one question to ask, could then very well be, looking ahead "who will we live with in the future?" Here I already mentioned the robots but other aspects are surfacing still more clearly. The changing demographics, urbanisation, new technological advancements, climate change and globalisation have made the world simultaneously bigger and smaller, and it has changed the way we engage with each other and depend on one another. Today, teenagers often have more in common with a fellow teenager across the world than with their senior neighbour or their grandparents, who might find themselves abandoned, increasingly a burden, feeling lonely and isolated. Families might be spread across continents. There is, in today's digital world a possibility to stay connected across such great distances, but there is also a real need to re-emphasise the importance and sense of local community, and promote shared norms and values around human rights, as a way of life and as a way to secure social cohesion across diversity and ensure trust.

Trust is not something we can just establish with a new law, a new set of policies or with a new app. Trust is something that is gained, generated and established over time, and through meaningful interactions between people and institutions, especially at the local level. Studies show that the more we know of “the other” the more unlikely it is that we fear them. We build trust by focusing on inclusive societies and by facilitating meetings between those who are different. And a good place to start is to get to know our neighbours and those we live amongst. But, this requires the opportunity to meet through meaningful participation and interactions in our day-to-day life, something which becomes increasingly difficult as more and more interaction is happening from behind a screen. Still, knowing who we live with is indeed the first necessary step to build strong, supportive and resilient communities and foster active civil societies. Here the human rights environment is creating new alliances with the architects and other key constructors of our local community to foster the future spaces to meet and interact – going forward while taking inspiration from the past. We need these strong and resilient communities because it is from them that we, in the future, will be able to effectuate human rights. Human rights both as a way of life, through the deliberate consciousness of all of us, but also through local authorities and responsive governance systems that can meet the needs and human rights claims of people, where they are.

This is why initiatives such as the Asian Human Rights City Network are so important. Because such networks facilitate local actors to engage with each other across national boundaries, learning from each other, inspiring each other, strengthening the voice of each other. Creating such networks is a way to enhance solidarity and bolster a sustainable urban agenda in Asia from below. I have no doubt that in the future, international human rights systems need to become more responsive and open to local needs. I believe that with the SDG’s and the New Urban Agenda, we have already come a long way in this regards – in terms of developing common ground, from which to step into the future. Reflecting on the many interlinkages between SDGs and the human rights city it becomes increasingly clear that human rights of the future cannot continue to be defined by old paradigms but also need to re-invent itself in response to what indeed is a new reality. Because of this realisation, we already see today a rise in demand and a call for creative, inventive and inclusive new human rights mechanisms. I am certain that in the future the UN and other regional and international bodies will have powerful city platforms. Human rights can contribute a solid framework for the global dialogue about what kind of future we actually *want* to live in and how we get there. The moral imagination that dares to envision the future

society. I do believe that this is exactly what we are trying to do at this forum, with what is one of the most prominent recent innovations: The human rights city.

While the international human rights community has much of the expertise on international human rights law, it is from within the local communities and through horizontal mobilisation at that level that the real problem solving – and the solutions – ought to be found in the future. It is local governments and civil society in the cities that know what the barriers for social change look like and how to make human rights mechanisms that really work in practice. It is at the local level where legal frameworks are translated into action and where human rights can make the biggest impact.

Let me conclude by looking back and forward. Taking a perspective of 2500 years from the first human rights text that was found in Persepolis in Persia until today. When taking that perspective, I see that human rights protection has greatly improved. So, I am confident that it will continue. However, the 2500 years of development has not been a linear progression. Human kind has dug itself into some deep holes on the journey with immense sufferings for millions of people. Today we are again at a cross roads where new technologies, climate change, inequality can converge in a dramatic manner. This is where the cities and civil societies may jointly create a force of responsibility. Pushing, innovating and urging for steps to be taken that bring human beings into the centre of attention, in building trust, solidarity and peace.

Thank you.