

**TAV 2****States must give a renewed impetus to realising human rights for all**

*UN High Commissioner for Human Rights delivered this speech at the Council of Europe*

Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the deadliest event since WWII for many of our member states. Like 9/11 and the 2008 financial crisis before it, the pandemic deeply shook our societies and led to a series of measures that are taking a huge toll on people's lives.

What is at stake indeed is the type of society we want to live in and pass on to the next generations. The choices we are making now in the middle of the pandemic and the ones we will make in the future will determine whether we strengthen our freedoms or relinquish them, promote participation or undermine democracy, empower people or marginalise them. I see in particular three lessons that we can draw from the pandemic and that should inspire our response.

The first is that we need more equality. Indeed, we have not all been equal in the face of the pandemic. Those who were poor before it became poorer; those who were disadvantaged faced even greater disadvantages. The case of older persons is emblematic. In many of our member states they have paid the highest toll, not only for the health vulnerabilities associated with age, but also for the social settings in which many of them are kept. Those living independently also suffered because of the lockdown measures that further isolated them from their families and the rest of the community. Although different problems have been affecting different groups of people, such as persons with disabilities, women, children, Roma, detainees, migrants, LGBTI people and media professionals, they all share a common denominator: their rights were not fully implemented before the pandemic. If these people's rights had not been neglected in the past, the pandemic would probably have taken a less dreadful toll and we would face a less daunting task today.

The second lesson is that we can no longer procrastinate in realising human rights for all. There is no easy fix, but already taking the decision to address the long-standing shortcomings together is a good start.