

Press release – Human rights and COVID-19: MEPs denounce measures taken by authoritarian regimes



In their annual report assessing the human rights situation in the world, adopted on Wednesday, MEPs highlight that several authoritarian regimes have used the pandemic to justify exacerbated measures aimed at weakening democratic principles and fundamental freedoms, severely undermining human rights, repressing dissent and limiting space for civil society.

Growing aspirations and mobilisation of citizens

While noting that many negative trends persist and are on the increase, they also welcome citizens' growing aspirations. Younger generations in particular are mobilising to bring about political and societal change in support for human rights, democratic governance, equality and social justice, more ambitious climate action and better protection of the environment.

Strengthening democratic institutions

The report asks the EU and its member states to continue supporting the strengthening of democratic institutions, transparent and credible electoral processes worldwide, to fight against impunity, to ensure that civil society organisations can continue to work and to combat inequalities.

It also urges them to develop an explicit strategy to counter increasing state withdrawal and pushback against the international human rights framework.

EU human rights sanctions mechanism

MEPs finally push for the new EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime to be

implemented urgently, as an essential part of the EU's existing human rights and foreign policy toolbox. Such a mechanism should serve to strengthen the EU's role as a global human rights actor, they say, allowing for targeted sanctions against individuals and state or non-state actors and other entities responsible for or complicit in serious human rights violations around the world.

The text was approved by 459 votes in favour, 62 against and 163 abstentions.

Quote

"As MEPs, it is our duty to speak out, loudly and clearly, when it comes to human rights and the need to protect and recognise all those who work tirelessly and in difficult situations to uphold them. To achieve true credibility as the European Union, it is vital that we act and speak with a strong and unified voice on human rights. We should not fail those who look towards Europe with hope", said rapporteur [Isabel Santos](#) (S&D, PT).

Additional information

Members [discussed the content](#) of the new report with EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell on 19 January. The text was originally prepared by MEPs in the [Subcommittee on Human Rights](#).