**BELGIUM**

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**A climate of lawlessness**

The Universal Declaration of and the European Convention on Human Rights were drawn up seventy years ago. It was no coincidence that something like that occurred when it did. Shortly before, the world had been ablaze; the fire had only scarcely been extinguished and there was a desire to prevent the flames from breaking out again. The UDHR and the ECHR were supposed to take care of that. Substantively, the two treaties are very similar, although there are a number of articles that can be found in the declaration but are absent in the convention. Article 28 of the UDHR is one of them.

Article 28 is the article that protects all the other articles. It calls on nations to create an order that will allow all human rights to be realised to the full. Yet the ECHR did not adopt this idea in its treaty. It is, however, stated in the introduction to the convention. The aim of the ECHR, as stated in the introduction, is to defend the application of human rights.

Seventy years later, we can ask ourselves whether the ECHR has done its job. The answer to that is an irrefutable ‘yes’. Europe is one of the best places in the world to be born. Yet the work is not yet complete. Nor will it ever be, because the world in which human rights must be guaranteed is constantly changing. It is up to the Council of Europe to face this challenge and to create the order necessary for the full realisation of human rights. For, just like seventy years ago, the world is again ablaze, although there are two differences. Firstly, it is not a war between nations that threatens us, but rather a conflict between man and nature. Secondly, there is nobody who is trying to extinguish the fire.

Since the industrial revolution, our CO2 emissions have increased dramatically, so dramatically in fact that the climate is changing. We have known that for some time, and we also know that the consequences are pernicious. And yet we have allowed things to continue unchecked and we are still cheerfully moving towards the same precipice. Time is running out and that is reflected in our weather. The unusual weather of today - the periods of drought, the flash flooding - is a harbinger of the climate of tomorrow. It is, for the time being, habitable, although that will quickly change if the earth warms up further. If we want to see what our lives will be like, we only need look at those regions that have a less fortunate location on the planet: the horn of Africa is undergoing extreme drought, South-East Asia is suffering floods from disrupted monsoons, the Caribbean and the United States are facing increasingly devastating hurricanes... But it is not just the weather that will have an adverse effect on us, there is much more. There will be more tropical diseases, drinking water will become scarce and agricultural yield will plummet. Everything that today’s politicians prioritise above climate will collapse: the economy, social security, national and personal identity. Thousands of people are already fleeing climate change from which there can be no escape. What has happened to them is laying in wait for us too: life as we know it will be wiped out.

Throughout the world, climate change is threatening the very rights that were granted everybody by the UDHR. Article 25, for example, is in jeopardy. It states that all people are entitled to everything they need to guarantee their well-being. The same is true of article 22 - the right to social security - and article 3 - the right to liberty and safety, although the emphasis there is on liberty. Anyone who violates article 3 of the UDHR, violates article 5 of the ECHR. The two articles are, in fact, the same. To put it briefly: only an effective climate policy can maintain the order in which all human rights can be realised to the full.

Is this an argument for adding article 28 to the ECHR? That wouldn’t be a bad thing, but article 28 is somewhat vague and can be easily circumvented. It would therefore be better to add a new article to both the UDHR and the ECHR: the right of every generation to inherit a habitable world from its predecessors: a world that is habitable in political, economic, social and above all climatological terms. For people do more than just live together on this planet; they live together with this planet. Whoever disrupts the natural balance shall, sooner or later, pay and those human rights for which we have fought so hard will be the price.

I am an eighteen-year-old girl, who happens to be Belgian. Consequently, it is my right that the United Nations and the Council of Europe keep their seventy-year-old promises to me. I have the fortune to have this, because I happen to have been born in the right place. Strangely enough, it is mainly the people from the same region - who claim to champion human rights - who are putting my rights and those of all the other people in the world at risk, in order to maintain an unsustainable lifestyle, afraid of change. But change is inevitable. The good news is that we can choose which type of change will take place: we can keep the world habitable in a sustainable way or we can make it uninhabitable. It is our duty to do everything in our power to support the first possibility. It is the task of the Council of Europe to play a pioneering role in this and to create the proper conditions for pursuing an ambitious climate policy that serves the interests of nature and thus too those of the people, and not those of money and corporations. That begins by acknowledging the environmental problem and by making all excuses for tackling it impossible. In that light, everybody should officially have the right to inherit a healthy world from their forefathers, because otherwise all their other rights would be compromised.