



EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
COUR EUROPÉENNE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

20 November 2014

# Meeting with NGOs and applicants' representatives

## Opening Remarks

Dean Spielmann  
President of the European Court of Human Rights

*21 November 2014, Strasbourg*

**Dear friends and guests,**

It is a pleasure to welcome you to Strasbourg on behalf of the Court, and to welcome back those of you who have visited us in the past. We have delegates present from all corners of Europe and also from outside our continent. Thank you for travelling here to attend this conference. You are all very welcome.

We are meeting today to consider the issues that affect the practice and procedure of the Court. We will have the opportunity to discuss these topics throughout the day, and I am grateful to my colleagues Ineta Ziemele and Josep Casadevall for facilitating further discussion later in the programme.

You are all strong advocates for human rights in your countries and you have a significant track record of participating in cases before the Court. The work that you do in representing applicants, third parties, and also by providing research to the Court is integral to the work that we do here.

You will be aware of the well-established principle of the Court that the Convention is not intended to guarantee rights that are theoretical or illusory but to guarantee rights that are practical and effective. The work that you do as part of civil society makes our Convention a reality across Europe.



Your positive and thoughtful approach to the Court reminds us that it is by strengthening and improving our procedures we can continue to uphold our universal values and fundamental human rights.

However, it is important to recognise that we are in a time of change, both in procedure but also in membership of the Court. All three of the judges here today, including myself, will be leaving the Court in the course of the next year. With that comes some uncertainty, but the new judges that will be coming to the Court will be arriving at an institution that has performed beyond expectations and that is going from strength to strength.

The reforms that stemmed from the Interlaken Declaration are already producing positive outcomes for us. As an example, there are approximately 74,000 current cases pending before the Court; at the beginning of this year, that figure stood at 100,000. We can all take real satisfaction from this strong performance – it demonstrates the robustness of our system – and it shows that, despite some challenges, the Court continues to show its resilience and strength. I am confident in our future and in the future success of the Court.

I would encourage you to make the most of the sessions today so that we can have an honest and open dialogue about the reforms that we have made. There are a number of senior members of the Registry present and I know that all sides will find this to be informative. We will all be able to take things away from the meetings today.

I look forward to participating in discussions with you and I hope that you have a fruitful day. I will officially open the conference as we begin the first session, on questions of procedure and practice before the Court.

Thank you once again.