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In a round-about kind of way, the reason I'm here today is that my biological grandmother, Marianne, was able to charm a German official in Warsaw in late 1939 into issuing travel documents allowing her, her sister, and their mother to leave Poland. Passing through Austria on their way to Italy, they were detained and placed in a camp, from which they eventually managed to escape into Switzerland. Then on to Cadiz, Spain, where they boarded a ship departing for Rio de Janeiro. Other members of the Rosenbaum and Tisch families from Bielsko-Biała ended up in the UK, others in the US. Many of those who didn't ended up in Auschwitz. I begin with this story for two reasons: first, because of the special significance this amazing museum holds for me, and because I think there is still a conversation to be had about what happened back then – not only in Poland, but throughout Europe. But also because earlier this year, I was helping to prepare our Office's input to the UN Human Rights Committee's periodic review of Hungary, which took place in Geneva last March. One of the areas I looked into was hate-speech. I came across the following statement, amongst many others like it. It's how the Director of Hungary's government-funded Veritas Institute for History, Sandor Szakaly, described the deportation of some 15,000 Jews from Hungary to Ukraine in August 1941, where they were murdered by the SS – I quote: "Police action against aliens". ***Police action against aliens***. But this is actually what he said.

Mr. Szakaly, however, is not considered part of Hungary's extremist scene. Rather, he's associated with that country's government. This type of remarks, issued not from the fringes of the far-right but from the corridors of power, have become progressively more commonplace in

today's Europe. And while remarks such as these ought surely to cause outrage and condemnation, they are too often explained away or met by shrugs.

In effect, as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – perhaps the most gripping document penned in the 20th century – a mounting wave of anger and discord is unleashing violence, creating fissures in our societies, and damaging our efforts to defend peace and progress towards common human rights goals. We are celebrating 70 years of human rights achievements in an increasingly divided and unsettled global context. A context where memories of the destruction and evil which ultimately led to the drafting of that very Declaration fade with every passing year.

As illustrated by the statement I just quoted and many others like it – targeting Jews, Muslims, Roma, LGBTI people and other minorities, this polarisation has also reached Europe – with potentially devastating consequences for a wide range of rights which many of us had somehow come to take for granted. Besides the rights of members of the communities I just mentioned, vital gains in women's equality and the rights of LGBTI people are also being contested. Alluding to so-called "traditional" values, some politicians are calling on women to stay at home and have lots of children. They are attempting to pass legislation limiting sexual and reproductive health rights. Even within this European Union of values – with its robust human rights benchmarks for countries that aspire to join it, and its admirable foundational principles – some governments are deliberately undermining judicial independence, curtailing press freedoms, and constraining civic space.

In many EU countries, much remains to be done to fully include in society persons with disabilities, older persons and the poor. Roma communities continue to suffer at the margins of society – often deprived of basic dignity and condemned to segregation. And approaches to migration governance that view migrants as a threat and fail to focus on the experiences and needs

of the individuals concerned are preferred over humane, common-sense policies. The result: in several EU countries, improvements made over past decades have stalled or are being reversed.

And to this, we must add new challenges which will have human rights repercussions not only for us, but for future generations: the growing inequalities – today very often *within* nations – which threaten the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – with its transformational human rights promises to the people of the world. Add to that the tremendous risks posed by intensifying climate change – as highlighted once again during the COP 24 in Katowice, which ends today – and we have our work cut out for us. Nationally, within the EU, and beyond.

Today, we stand on a threshold. We can go backwards, to an imagined past that never really existed, or we can continue to build on the considerable progress made – ones step forward, two steps back, maybe – but progress nevertheless. The 70th birthday of the UDHR is an occasion for us to reaffirm the vital importance of multilateral, norms-based approaches to countering global challenges. To let our actions be guided by the level-headedness and objectivity of international law. Whether we talk about challenges related to migration, nationalism, climate change, inequality, the rule of law, freedom of speech and assembly, or mass surveillance – at their root lie core issues of universal human rights. To thwart or remedy the consequences of these challenges, we must work together, within the international framework established at the end of WW2. For all the criticism, it's the best framework that we have, and if it is allowed to fall apart, it would likely be either very difficult or even impossible to replace.

Part of our challenge is to make these international norms and standards more acceptable to policy- and decision-makers by better communicating the ways in which they, and their people, will benefit from human rights-based policies. We must do more to showcase how human rights can work for everyone. But if we want to preserve the progress which has indisputably been made, we also have to push back against those who perceive human rights as yesterday's message, not

relevant for today's world. Push back – with courage and conviction – against the vilification of migrants, minorities and other scapegoats. Push back against agendas of animosity, by shining a light on the values of the Universal Declaration, and showcasing the advances that have been made.

We must revive the European vocation for freedom and civil liberties, for social progress and dialogue, which blossomed so strongly outside these walls only a few decades ago, in a movement which inspired millions throughout the world and ultimately led to the downfall of authoritarian regimes from the Baltic to the Adriatic. A Europe which has the conviction to sustain and uphold, in these troubled times, the values which constitute its greatest strengths; and a Europe which has the courage face down those who fuel demonization by proposing positive solutions. We need to re-build a culture of conviction and of exchange, bringing in the contributions of multitudes of diverse voices.

And we must this now. So that the children of Poland and Europe, the children of the world – and their children, too – can grow up in the knowledge that all human beings are truly born free and equal in dignity and rights, as proclaimed by Article 1 of the Universal Declaration.

And now to conclude - my remarks wouldn't be complete without a reference to the work carried out by the formidable Adam Bodnar and his colleagues; ombudsmen and national human rights institutions are key to the functioning of democracy. When they are truly independent, they provide a crucial safeguard against governmental abuses of civil liberties, and they act as enforcers of the rule of law. You have done all of this, and much more. We will be watching this space carefully when your term comes to an end.

Thank you.