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**Declaration by the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on  
behalf of the European Union on the occasion of Human Rights  
Day, 10 December 2011**

On Human Rights Day, the European Union pays tribute to human rights defenders who dedicate their lives to promoting and protecting people's fundamental rights around the world. This year, Human Rights Day focuses on the work of human rights defenders, and on how social media can be used to promote and underpin change.

The Arab spring vividly reminds us that human rights are universal and that people everywhere aspire to live in dignity and freedom. In 2011, thousands of people decided that the time had come to claim their rights. Social media carried their message, and allowed activists and individuals to break free from their isolation, to disseminate ideas and to denounce oppression.

Use of social media to promote human rights should not be restricted by governments. The EU has repeatedly and publicly condemned restrictions on freedom of expression and on access to the internet, as well as the arrest of bloggers, witnessed in many countries around the world.

**P R E S S**

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The Acceding Country Croatia\*, the Candidate Countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, Montenegro\* and Iceland<sup>+</sup>, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and the EFTA countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this declaration.

\* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

<sup>+</sup> Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.

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