

President of the European Commission

José Manuel Barroso
Berlaymont Building
1049-Brussels

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



European Institutions Office

Brussels, 5 September 2013

Our ref: B1475

Dear President Barroso,

A PIVOTAL MOMENT FOR THE STATE OF THE UNION'S HUMAN RIGHTS

Further to our letter of 7 September 2012, and in advance of your fourth "State of the Union Address" to the European Parliament next week, Amnesty International takes this opportunity to ask you, in the final year of your presidency, to ensure that this Commission leaves a positive human rights legacy.

We welcomed the ambition set out in your 2012 address to tackle human rights violations within the EU, in which you acknowledged the 'limits of [the EU's] institutional arrangements' and called for 'a better developed set of instruments'. We are also very encouraged by the speech made by Commissioner Viviane Reding in Brussels yesterday on 'the EU and the rule of law – what next?'. As you will know we have been closely following and engaging in this debate, in particular through our recent work with the Irish EU presidency. In August, you received a statement from the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN), of which we are members, which recommends immediate measures that the EU could take to enhance its response to human rights abuses inside its own borders (attached).

Following the Council Conclusions on rule of law and fundamental rights adopted in June, all eyes are now on the Commission to show leadership and map the way forward. For this reason it will be vital that next Wednesday's address announces the Commission's decision to frame a more comprehensive internal human rights strategy with ambitious proposals for its implementation. To lend credibility to the Commission's commitment to human rights, it will also be crucial that it live up to its role as guardian of the Treaties and announce infringement procedures against member states which persistently violate human rights standards. As you will know from our previous submissions to the Commission we have expressed particular concern about the treatment of Roma people in many EU member states.

On EU foreign policy the Commission still has an important role to play. A great deal remains to be done to make the ambitions of the EU Action Plan for Democracy and Human Rights a reality. All too often, the EU's rhetoric on human rights externally is undermined by other perceived interests and by a lack of consistency of message by all EU actors, including the Commission. It would send a powerful message if you reaffirmed in your address the Commission's intention to truly mainstream human rights effectively and to ensure that human rights protection and promotion is at the core of its external action – including in trade, energy, migration, security and development policies.

We should like to take this opportunity to wish you luck with your address and the ensuing debate. Amnesty International stands ready to provide any further information you may require.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Nicolas J Beger
Director