

Special Envoy/Ambassadors for Human Rights in the EU/Likeminded

Background Note

Ten EU Member States have Ambassadors/Envoys for human rights and at EU level, there is a Special Representative for Human Rights (Eamon Gilmore). The UK and US have a number of thematic Envoys/Ambassadors. The EU Ambassadors and the EU SR meet several times a year and regularly release joint statements. In the month of March alone, the group (+ UK on occasion) released statements on the EU Human Rights Sanctions Regime, gender equality, the protection of journalists, Sri Lanka, Belarus and violence against women belonging to the Uyghur minority in China.

Estonia

Ambassador Minna-Liina Lind is the first Estonian **Ambassador at Large for Human Rights and Migration** and took up her mandate in 2020. According to Estonia's Foreign Minister "her appointment shows Estonia's determination to participate actively in various human rights associations" e.g. the Media Freedom Coalition and the International Religious Freedom Alliance.

Finland

Finland first appointed an **Ambassador for Human Rights and Democracy** in 2008. The current incumbent is Rauno Merisaari. His mandate includes promoting Finnish foreign policy on human rights and democracy and his identified priorities are democracy cooperation, Roma rights and the Freedom Online Coalition (currently chaired by Finland).

France

The post of the French **Ambassador at Large for Human Rights** was created in 2000 but is currently awaiting a new appointment.

The Ambassador represents France on diplomatic human rights missions and in multilateral fora including the presentation of France's Universal Periodic Review and charring sessions at the UN Security Council e.g. on child soldiers. The Ambassador is also in charge of Holocaust issues for the French government and has launched initiatives to raise awareness about contemporary antisemitism.

Francois Croquette stepped down in October 2020 after 4 years. (His sign off was dedicated to Hong Kong activists who he had welcomed to his home "since in diplomacy we talk to everyone but not to democrats apparently"). His predecessor, François Zimeray held the position for five years and drafted a Strategy for Human Rights for the French Government. He also monitored trials of politicians and human rights defenders including Khodorkovsky and Tymoshenko in Russia and Ukraine respectively.

Germany

The post of **Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Assistance**¹ was created in 1998 to ensure the protection of human rights and to mainstream human rights into all areas of German foreign policy. Dr Bärbel Kofler² holds the position since 2016.

The Commissioner is the "contact point" for all issues relating to human rights policy and humanitarian aid. They follow political developments in these areas and submit proposals to the Federal Foreign Minister in order to help shape foreign policy. The Commissioner liaises closely with other institutions such as other ministries, the German Bundestag, and national and international non-governmental organisations. She engages regularly with the EU, OSCE, Council of Europe and the UN and she heads the German delegation to the Human Rights Council.

¹ <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aamt/koordinatoren/mr-koordinatorin/uebersicht/228992>

² https://www.bundestag.de/en/members/kofler_baerbel-521198

Italy

Italy's **President of the Inter-ministerial Committee for Human Rights** (CIDU) is a Minister Plenipotentiary, career diplomat Fabrizio Petri³. While not aligning with the other EU MS Ambassadors, he is particularly active on LGBTI rights as well business and human rights.

Lithuania

Lithuania appointed its first **Ambassador at Large for Human Rights** Ms. Laima Jurevičienė in 2020. She has used her position as Ambassador to highlight Lithuania's commitment to the topics of inclusion, women's participation in public life and gender equality. She has also promoted Lithuania's initiatives to support democracy movements in countries such as Belarus.

Luxembourg

Luxembourg's current **Ambassador at Large for Human Rights** is Ambassador Marc Bichler (since 2016). The role promotes Luxembourg's commitment to an ambitious human rights agenda and strengthens its voice in multilateral fora. The Ambassador has prioritised the protection of human rights defenders and business and human rights as well as the link between human rights and sustainable development.

The Netherlands

The Netherlands has had a **Human Rights Ambassador** since 1999. The position allows The Netherlands to have a visible and distinct profile in human rights fora as well as creating greater coherence in between human rights and other policy fields. Ambassador Bahia Tahzib-Lie has stated that she uses her mandate to foster an inclusive and diverse media landscape as well as championing gender equality. The Ambassador also engages with NGOs, civil society and business in The Netherlands and abroad.

Since 2019, the Netherlands has also had a **Special Envoy for Religion and Belief**, Ambassador Jos Douma.⁴

Spain

Spain is awaiting a new appointee to the role of **Ambassador at Large for Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of Law** (previous incumbent Mr Pablo Ruiz Jarabo). The Ambassador represents Spain in multilateral fora and has led the Support group of the International Commission against the Death Penalty.

Sweden

The Swedish government created the position of **Ambassador for Human Rights** in 1980 to stress the centrality of human rights in their foreign policy. Current Ambassador, Annika Ben David, described the role as consisting of communicating Sweden's role in the protection and promotion of human rights and ensuring that it is mainstreamed throughout their foreign service. The Ambassador represents Swedish policy in multilateral fora and in relations with other countries and maintains a close dialogue with civil society. Ambassador Annika Ben David also acts as the Swedish Head of Delegation to The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

³ <https://www.fabriziopetri.com/index.php/en/biography>

⁴ **Denmark** also has an Office and Special Representative for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ambassador Michael Suhr (established January 2018).

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom recently created the mandate of **International Ambassador for Human Rights** and appointed Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, Rita French to the position. The Ambassador is tasked with the enhancement of the UK's profile and leadership within the multilateral system, working with other countries to support and advance human rights, acting as an advocate of human rights inside the government and internationally, as well as the promotion of the UK's priority campaigns.

In 2018, the United Kingdom created the role of **Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief** and in 2020, Fiona Bruce, MP was appointed to the position. The role is intended to bring together the government's efforts with faith actors and civil society to promote religious tolerance internationally. The Special Envoy works alongside the Minister responsible for Human Rights and aims to bring about the implementation of the Bishop of Truro's recommendations on Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) support for persecuted Christians around the world. She also examines how the UK can protect and promote the fundamental freedom to religion or belief around the world and work to raise awareness of cases of particular concern.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon is the current Prime Minister's **Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict** since 2017. He works with governments, the UN, civil society and others to combat sexual violence through a number of initiatives. The Special Representative is tasked with strengthening accountability and tackling violence, providing greater support to survivors, ensuring gender equality is integrated in all peace and security efforts as well as delivering a more effective multilateral response to crimes of sexual violence in conflict. He also chairs the ministerial committee that examines UK commitments and the additional support that it can provide to ensure progress and also chairs the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI) Steering Board with NGOS, academia and experts.

United States of America

In June President Biden [appointed](#) Jessica Stern as **Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBTI Persons**, a position created in 2015 under the Obama administration. (Note: in the US Special Envoys are approved by the Senate) The role was established to oversee the government's efforts to support the human rights of LGBTI persons internationally.

The role of the **Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom** was created in 1999. The ambassador heads the Office of International Religious Freedom in the US State Department and aims to promote universal respect for freedom of religion or belief. It also highlights this freedom as a core objective of US foreign policy. The Ambassador monitors harassment, discrimination and religiously motivated abuses on a global scale, which allows them to recommend, develop and implement programmes and policies on areas of concern.

The United States also created the position of **Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues** in 2009. The Ambassador heads the Secretary of State's Office of Global Women's Issues (S/GWI) and is mandated to promote the rights and empowerment of women and girls through US foreign policy. The aim is to integrate women's empowerment into US policy, diplomacy, partnerships and programmes. The Office leads on priority areas surrounding women's equality, economic empowerment, the Women, Peace and Security agenda and combatting violence against women. Appointments for both roles are awaited.

Human Rights Unit

29 July 2021