

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

### Key points:

Special Envoys are a regular feature of government in many states.

Their role is to represent a state (or international organisation).

Having regard to the increased prioritisation attached to human rights by many states on the one hand, and the push back against the very definition of human rights by some states on the other, many states have appointed Special Envoys with mandates in the area of human rights, e.g.:

- In June, President Biden nominated the Executive Director of NGO [OutRight Action International](#), [Jessica Stern](#), as U.S. Special Envoy to Advance the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons. The following month, Emory [Prof. Deborah Lipstadt](#) was nominated Special Envoy to combat and monitor antisemitism with the rank of Ambassador.
- In March 2020, [Bob Rae](#) (former Premier of Ontario & former interim Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada) was appointed [Special Envoy on Humanitarian and Refugee issues](#) by PM Trudeau. Mr Rae had previously served as Special Envoy to Myanmar (appointed 2017).
- In the UK, [Fiona Bruce MP](#) was appointed as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief in December 2020 while [Helen Grant MP](#) was appointed the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Girls' Education in January 2021. [\(Lord\) Nick Herbert](#) was appointed UK Special Envoy on LGBT rights in May 2021. His role is to "lead efforts to champion LGBT equality at home and abroad and will chair the 'Safe to be Me: A Global Equality Conference' in June 2022."

At EU level, there are a number of EU Special Representatives, including a Special Representative for Human Rights ([Eamon Gilmore](#)). Mr Gilmore previously served as the EU HR/VP's Special Envoy for the Colombian Peace Process).

Ten EU Member States have Ambassadors/Envoys for human rights including:

- **Estonia:** [Ambassador Minna-Liina Lind](#) is the first Estonian **Ambassador at Large for Human Rights and Migration** Appointed in 2020 to demonstrate "*Estonia's determination to participate actively in various human rights associations*" e.g. the Media Freedom Coalition and the International Religious Freedom Alliance.
- **Finland:** The post of **Ambassador for Human Rights and Democracy** was created 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:** [Delphine Borione](#) is the French **Ambassador at Large for Human Rights**. The post was created in 2000. The Ambassador represents France on diplomatic human rights missions and in multilateral fora including the presentation of France's Universal Periodic Review and chairing 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.

- Germany:** The post of [Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Assistance](#) 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 Kofler](#) 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.
- Italy:** Italy’s **President of the Inter-ministerial Committee for Human Rights** (CIDU) is a Minister Plenipotentiary, career diplomat [Fabrizio Petri](#). 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.<sup>1</sup>
- 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

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<sup>1</sup> **Denmark** also has an Office and Special Representative for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ambassador Michael Suhr (established January 2018).

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).

**Human Rights Unit**

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