

MAIN ACTIVITIES OF HUMAN RIGHTS DIPLOMACY SO FAR

The text below will provide an overview of all activities performed by Estonia up to this point in our priority areas starting from the mid-1990s; these are focused on three areas:

- 1) protection of the rights of the most vulnerable groups, primarily women, children, and indigenous peoples, as they are more often victims of discrimination and violence;
- 2) freedom of speech and expression, including online, freedom of the media;
- 3) advancement of democracy, including supporting civil society and combating impunity.

We continue to advance all of these rights through international organisations, bilateral relations, as well as through development cooperation and humanitarian aid:

Rights of women and children

- The principle that women and girls should be ensured all human rights is incredibly important for Estonia. We support gender equality (including the UN Sustainable Development Goal No 5), empowerment of women and girls, and ensuring their equal opportunities.
- We actively support the fight against sexual and gender-based violence, including cyberviolence. The Action Against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence of the Council of Europe (the so-called Istanbul Convention), ratified by Estonia in 2017, is the most important framework document in the context of combating violence against women and domestic violence. The Action focuses on protecting the victim and implementing the idea that the victim is not at fault in what has occurred. In this area, Estonia supports the actions of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe.
- The extensive and conflict-related sexual violence and its use as a weapon of war that is often carried out with impunity is a very serious issue. Sexual violence is often used as part of a broader military strategy. It is performed to, for example, oppress, degrade, terrorise, and control certain groups of people, gain control of resources or to force those groups to flee or relocate. Survivors of such violence are often stigmatised, and crimes are underreported.
- Estonia supports the access of women and girls to education to ensure that quality education is provided at a level equal to the education provided to men and boys. In this area, progress has been made but inequality is still common.
- We support ensuring sexual and reproductive health and related rights, and we are taking part in the core group of the UN Human Rights Council resolution on maternal mortality. This topic is important from both the perspective of ensuring quality healthcare as well as everyone's right to make decisions regarding their own bodies, including regarding questions of family planning. In addition, we support the accessibility of sex education.
- We support the objectives of the UN Security Council resolution 1325 as both a thematic and a horizontal priority, focusing on the topic in all national discussions, as well as in the context of peacekeeping and political special missions. For the first time ever, resolution 1325 emphasises the need to involve women in peace and decision-making processes in conflict resolution and post-conflict restructuring at the local and UN levels. Additionally, the resolution addresses the need to combat the sexual violence related to conflicts. The resolution emphasises the importance of the principle of taking into consideration the gender aspect in all areas: gender equality should be taken into account in planning any policy measures and actions. The benefit and effect of a decision on men and women should be purposely assessed separately in making any decisions and proposals. The full participation of women in all stages of conflict resolution and in peacekeeping contributes to preventing conflicts, to a more coherent society and longer lasting peace. Estonia is in the final stages of preparing its third national action plan on women, peace,

and security.

- We support female human rights advocates, especially by way of our activity in the European Human Rights Ambassadors network.

Important bodies and initiatives:

- UN Commission on the Status of Women — Estonia is a member in 2017–2021;
- UN gender equality agency UN Women — Estonia contributes €80,000 per year;
- UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly Third Committee — Estonia is an active participant in discussions held in Geneva and New York;
- UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict — Estonia contributes €30,000 per year;
- UN Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict — Estonia contributes €50,000 per year;

- UN Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund — Estonia first contributed €20,000 in 2020; going forward, we will contribute €200,000 per year in relation to the action plan on women, peace, and security;
- Task Force of the UN Security Council on Women, Peace, and Security;
- Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe, and the Council of Europe Commissioner of Human Rights.

Important documents:

- UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, agreed conclusions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), resolutions of the UN General Assembly Third Committee and of the Human Rights Council, UN Security Council resolution on women, peace, and security.

Children's rights

- Estonia deems it important to combat violence against children, including the abolition of corporal punishment of children in all settings, provision of quality education, protection of children in the digital environment, and protection of children in armed conflict (Children and Armed Conflict — CAAC). We stand for children's rights in accordance with, among other things, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, as well as with the Lanzarote Convention of the Council of Europe.
- We are active participants in the UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The working group focuses on six sub-topics: recruitment and use of children in conflicts, killing and injuring of children, sexual violence targeted at children, abductions of children, attacks on schools and hospitals, and hindering access to humanitarian aid. We support the creation of mandates for child protection officers in peace missions and their sufficient funding from the budget of the UN. We deem it important for sanctions committees to handle violations against children, including as a criterion of imposing sanctions.

Important bodies and initiatives:

- UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict — Estonia's priority in 2021;
- UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict — Estonia contributes €30,000 per year;
- UN report on violence against children;
- UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) — Estonia contributes €150,000 per year, Estonia is a member of the UNICEF Executive Board in 2020–2022;

UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly Third Committee.

- Committee on the Rights of the Child of the Council of Europe (CDENF); main documents: UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, Lanzarote Convention of the Council of Europe.

Rights of indigenous peoples

- Protection of the rights of indigenous peoples, including the rights of Finno-Ugric peoples, has been one of Estonia's human rights priorities for a long time.
- Over the years, Estonia has contributed to the preservation and development of indigenous culture, education, and languages, focusing primarily on the situation of the Finno-Ugric peoples, who are closest to us, and on the protection of their rights.
- Estonia has financially supported the activities of the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples since 1996 (most recently, we contributed €40,000 in 2021). We have supported the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues since 2006 (most recently, we contributed €50,000 in 2021). Additionally, we are contributing to the preparations of the international Decade of Indigenous Languages (€30,000 in 2021).
- Estonia focuses particularly on the situation of the Finno-Ugric peoples in the Russian Federation. In addition, we are monitoring the situation of Crimean Tatars in occupied Ukrainian territories and are responding in cooperation with the EU and other likeminded states.
- Estonian representative — independent expert Sven-Erik Soosaar — participates in the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues held annually in New York.

Freedom of speech and the media online and offline

- Freedom of speech is important for Estonia both online and offline.
- In September 2019, Estonia joined the Media Freedom Coalition, which is a group of likeminded countries working together to advocate for the freedom of the media and safety of journalists. The Coalition is led by the United Kingdom and Canada. In relation to joining the Coalition, we are focusing even more on the freedom of the media and safety of journalists. The Press Freedom Index ranks Estonia as 14th in the world.
- We contribute €20,000 per year to the Global Media Defence Fund, connected to the Media Freedom Coalition and managed by the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).
- Estonia has joined or supports Groups of Friends on the Safety of Journalists established by various organisations.
- Estonia is a supporter of the Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism of the Council of Europe.
- An Estonian diplomat is a part of the Bureau of the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI) of the Council of Europe.

Freedom of the Internet

- As a founding member of the Freedom Online Coalition, we emphasise that the same rights apply both online and offline. In addition to the freedom of speech and expression, the freedom of assembly and association, as well as the right to privacy in the digital environment (i.e. digital rights in general) are also important. Estonia is ranked second, after Iceland, for internet freedom based on Freedom House's 'Freedom on the Net' 2020 report.
- Estonia supports the Digital Defenders Partnership, related to the Freedom Online Coalition, with €50,000 per year. We comply with and use in our messages principles and statements agreed upon in the Freedom Online Coalition.

New technological solutions and human rights

- In developing artificial intelligence (AI), Estonia supports an anthropocentric approach that is based on human rights. The regulation of artificial intelligence should be guided by the risks involved and it should avoid excessively inhibiting innovation.
- Estonia has been an active participant in the ad hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAHAI) of the Council of Europe, which is developing a framework for regulating the relationship between artificial intelligence and ensuring human rights; a representative of the Ministry of Justice is a member of the CAHAI Bureau.
- The Permanent Representative of Estonia to the Council of Europe has fulfilled the role of Thematic Coordinator for the Information Policy at the Council of Europe since September 2020.

Civil society and human rights

- A pluralist civil society is one of the main characteristics of liberal democracy and involving civil society in decision-making processes plays an important role in democratic societies.
- A safe and supportive environment should be ensured for civil society and human rights advocates. We call attention to the fact that female human rights advocates are often subjects of violence and discrimination: killings, forced disappearances, torture, and illegal detentions of human rights advocates are frequent.
- All punitive measures against people cooperating with the UN and other organisations should be stopped. We support the right of assembly and association, as well as the inclusion of civil society in discussions and decision-making processes.
- In supporting and advancing democracy, Estonia is guided, among other things, by the principles provided for in the Warsaw Declaration of 2000 (founding document of the Community of Democracies).
- Estonia contributes to the LifeLine Fund that helps protect non-governmental organisations from persecution.
- Estonia allocated €10,000 to the UN Trust Fund in 2021 to support the involvement of third-world civil society in the UN review process of Sustainable Development Goals.

Fighting impunity

- We expand the judgement of international communities towards crimes which are driven by ideologies that go against humanity and which are committed by criminal regimes.
- We support countries and the ICC in their fight against impunity to ensure that perpetrators are criminally prosecuted and to prevent and combat the most serious international crimes.
- We support blocking and restricting the use of the right to veto in the UN Security Council in questions of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.
- We support and use strong wordings throughout statements and resolutions on fighting impunity.
- We call on all countries and the UN Security Council to cooperate with the International Criminal Court, as no serious international crime should go unpunished.

Supervision proceedings of judgements of the European Court of Human Rights

- We expand our judgement to violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- We support the execution of judgements of the European Court of Human Rights by all Member States of the Council of Europe.
- We are active participants in the Committee of Ministers that supervises the execution of judgements of the European Court of Human Rights.
- At every opportunity, we emphasise the authority of the European Court of Human Rights as well as the mandatory nature of executing its judgements.
- In cooperation with partners, we work to ensure that all countries execute the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights.
- We support strongly worded judgements and resolutions regarding countries that are resisting the execution of court judgements.

Freedom of religion and belief

- In its activity, Estonia is guided, among other things, by the EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside of the EU, supporting documents of the UN on human rights, and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.
- The main principle is that every person should be guaranteed freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (which also entails freedom of belief). The freedom of religion and belief is a fundamental human right and it entails the freedom not to associate with any religion as well as the freedom to change your religion or beliefs.
- Human rights are interrelated and indivisible. The freedom of religion and belief is an integral part of other human rights.
- It is important to protect the rights of all people, regardless of their religious background or beliefs.
- In early 2020, Estonia joined the International Religious Freedom of Belief Alliance, established under the leadership of the USA, based on which Estonia developed the Declaration on Safe Places of Worship, approved by the Alliance ministers in November 2020.