**REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS: RESPONSE TO THE NOVEL COVID -19 VIRUS**

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| **AFRICA-**Press Release**,** African Commission on Human and People’s Rights Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, Commissioner Lawrence Mute8 April 2020 | Press Release by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa on the Importance of Access to the Internet in Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic[[1]](#footnote-1). The Special Rapporteur (SR) reiterated state obligations in times of public health emergencies and highlighted the following points* Expressed concern over internet shutdowns amid the Covid-19 pandemic
* States should ensure members of the public receive accurate, regular, accessible and science-based information on the threat COVID-19 poses to their health, the role and impact of the measures adopted for preventing and containing the virus, the precautionary measures that members of the public should take, and on the scale of the spread.
* SR noted that any attempts by states to restrict, slow down, block access to the internet restricts public access to health information, valuable for protection from the virus and its containing.
* Stated that the public needs internet for educational and economic reasons following the closure of schools and businesses and restrictions limiting movement.
* Stated that Internet shutdown curtails journalists” ability to keep the public updated on measures governments are taking to contain the spread of the virus.
* In Ethiopia, Government cut mobile phone networks, landlines and internet from 3 January 2020 to 31 March 2020 in response to unrest in Oromia region.
* In Guinea, Government imposed an internet and social media shutdown from 21 to 23 March 2020, coinciding with Parliamentary elections and a Constitutional Referendum.
* Issued a reminder to states that social media and internet shutdown violates the right to freedom of expression and access to information as provided in Article 9 of the ACHPR.[[2]](#footnote-2) Furthermore, such actions are contrary to Principle 38(1) (2) **Declaration on Principles of Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa**, adopted during the Commission’s 65th Ordinary Session in November 2019.
* SR called on states to respect and protect the right to freedom of expression and access to information and that states should give regard to rule of law dictates and not exploit the pandemic through issuance of overreaching interventions.
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| African Court on Human and Peoples RightsPress Statement  | * The Court issued a statement, 23 March 2020 on the suspension of its 56th ordinary session because of the Corona virus outbreak.[[3]](#footnote-3) The short statement was made as a precautionary measure to prevent risk of contracting Covid-19 by its staff.
* As an emergency measure, the Court ordered all non-essential staff to work from home and key departments with limited staff to carry out their duties on shift-basis until further notice.
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| African Commission on Human and People’s RightsPress Statement on human rights based effective response to the Novel Covid -19 virus in Africa ,24 March 2020[[4]](#footnote-4) | * Statement was made following the response of states to Covid -19.
* Reiterates relevant key provisions such as Article 4 the right to life, Article 9 right to access to information, Article 16 right to health.
* ACHPR raises concern on the spread of the pandemic amid limited testing, increase in cases (1788 as at 24 March 2020) and the threat to the rights to life, health and safety in 43 countries.
* Expressed grave concern on the risk of the pandemic to vulnerable members of society such as persons with disabilities, homeless people, prisoners, the masses of people living in highly congested and poor neighbourhoods like slums lacking sanitation and those who survive on a hand-to-mouth basis, people in IDP camps, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants with devastating consequences, including risk of enduring severe illness and losing their lives without receiving adequate care.
* ACHPR bemoaned the inadequate health systems and capacity and called for well-crafted preventive and containment plans, public health emergency plans that are timeously executed, with predictability and consistence.
* Reaffirmed obligations of states under Article 1 in the Charter to take appropriate measures to give effect to the rights, duties and freedoms enshrined in the Charter including through taking measures necessary for preventing threats to the life, safety and health of people.
* Expressed Concern about inadequate response measures adopted by some state parties to the African Charter, indecisiveness and inconsistent implementation of adopted measures and lack of compliance by the public thereof.
* Called on states to ensure that the measures adopted comply with the principles of legality, proportionality and are accompanied by contextually tailored policy measures.
* Urged countries to comply with the principles of legality, non-discrimination and equality, ensuring access to information, primacy of preventive and containment measures, to address non-implementation and non-compliance, ensure protection of vulnerable groups, consider the plight of people in prisons and places of detention, facilitate access to the right to health, recognise solidarity from individuals, private sector, community leaders, media and religious institutions.
* Urged states to ensure respect for human rights during public emergency measures and ensure there is mitigation in the disruption of the normal functioning of individuals, communities and businesses.
* Called on states to ensure the setting up of effective and efficient monitoring, investigation and corrective measures in cases of allegations of violations of human and people’s rights.
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| Press Statement of the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights on the Corona Covid 19 virus[[5]](#footnote-5) 28 February 2020 | * Statement expressed concern over the risks of the Coronavirus becoming a pandemic and its effects on the health and safety of the people of Africa.
* Commission reaffirmed provisions of the Charter particularly Articles 4 right to life, 9 right to access to information, Article 16 right to health
* Called upon states in terms of Article 1 of the charter to take appropriate measures to give effect to the rights, duties and freedoms enshrined in the Charter.
* While welcoming efforts made for prevention and response, states were urged to put public health and social services on higher alert, follow World Health Organisation planning and technical guidelines in preparedness, prevention and response to Covid-19.
* States urged to ensure humane and dignified treatment of those affected by the virus, mobilise resources to carry out proper inspection in all ports of entry, provide comprehensive and timely information on coronavirus to citizens, ensure targeted efforts to prevent and contain the disease, and ensure adequate resource allocation to healthcare systems and healthcare personnel.
* States called on to ensure that restrictions imposed on public grounds are lawful, respect human and people’s rights, are necessary and proportional.
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| The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)[[6]](#footnote-6), 8 April 2020Press Release | * ACERWC released a Guiding note, which raised concern on the ongoing global outbreak of COVID-19 virus and its devastating impacts on the overall rights and welfare of children in Africa.
* Recognised efforts taken by member states in scaling up laboratory diagnosis, enhancing screening at ports of entry and surveillance, strengthening infection prevention and control measures to limit the spread and mitigating the impact of COVID-19 virus.
* Applauded the Bureau of the Heads of State and Governments’ decision to establish a continental anti-COVID-19 Fund and the role that the Department of Social Affairs and the African Centre for Disease Control (Africa CDC) plays in designing and coordinating the continental response
* Highlighted the harmful effects of the outbreak of Covid -19 on parents, caregivers and children’s health as well as the socio economic disruptions.
* Highlighted reports of millions of children likely to experience gender-based violence, exploitation, separation from families, dropping out of school, with the most vulnerable being disproportionately affected (girls, children with disabilities, from economically disadvantaged parents and from rural areas)
* The Guiding note pointed out the likelihood of limited access to adequate nutritious food, health care, appropriate shelter and other basic needs, which have long term effects on the lives, development and survival of children in Africa.
* Recommended member states to implement protective measures namely ( i) Establish child friendly information and communication procedures, (ii) Establish child friendly quarantine procedures and environment, (iii) Ensure every child’s right to education, (iv) Ensure continued provisions of essential services which are crucial to life, survival and development of children (v)  Ensure that children enjoy their right to parental care and protection in terms of the Article 19 of the African Children’s Charter, (vi) Tailor responses in line with the special vulnerabilities of the concerned group of children.
* The Guiding note urged member states to count the cost of the pandemic on children, identify measures to mitigate losses, thus forming an assessment, which can be used to inform intervention strategies post the Covid-19 era.
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| African Union Group of Ambassadors to the UN in New York on Covid 19, 14 April 2020[[7]](#footnote-7), Statement to the United Nations in New York | * The statement underscored the need to strengthen international cooperation and partnership through the stewardship of the United Nations system particularly that of the World Health Organization.
* Reaffirmed the right of every human being to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health without distinction.
* Expressed concern over discrimination and stigmatisation towards individuals and groups believed to be associated with Covid -19.

 Condemned stigma, hate speech, hate crimes, xenophobia, racism and all forms of discrimination, which are an affront to universal human values and rights, in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.* Called on adherence to global actions such as SDGs.Called upon World Bank, IMF, multilateral regional and regional development banks to accelerate financial and technical support to developing countries, particularly in Africa, in order to contain the spread of the COVID-19, sustain economic activity, protect jobs, and alleviate liquidity constraints and consider easing the burden of debt.

Urged the international community to take necessary measures in favour of countries under economic sanctions, particularly in Africa, facing the COVID-19 pandemic, to allow them to adequately respond to it and save lives. |
| African Union Chairperson[[8]](#footnote-8)Letter to the United Nations Secretary General  | * Reported that African Heads of States established an African Union Covid- 19 response fund to which members of the Bureau pledged USD12,5million and an additional USD4,5million to the Africa Centre For Disease Control.
* Called for rapid, concrete support through pledged funds from G20, international partners and the World Bank.
* Revealed the urgent need for African countries to buy personal protective equipment, vaccines and therapeutics.
* Called for a comprehensive stimulus package for Africa, including, deferred payments, the immediate suspension of interest payments on Africa's external public and private debt in order to create fiscal space for COVID-19 response measures.
* Called for the immediate lifting of all imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe and Sudan in order to enable these countries to adequately respond to the pandemic and save lives.
* Highlighted the special case of the Sahel region, whose countries are grappling with the twin menace of terrorism and COVID-19 and called for special assistance programmes need to be provided for these countries
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| **AMERICAS**The [Committee of Experts](https://mail.oas.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=40ffd262e68249c596170aeb4cadf5da&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.oas.org%2fen%2fmesecvi%2fExperts.asp) of the Follow-up Mechanism of the [Belém do Pará Convention](https://mail.oas.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=40ffd262e68249c596170aeb4cadf5da&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.oas.org%2fen%2fmesecvi%2fdocs%2fBelemDoPara-ENGLISH.pdf) ([MESECVI](https://mail.oas.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=40ffd262e68249c596170aeb4cadf5da&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.oas.org%2fen%2fmesecvi%2fprocess.asp))[[9]](#footnote-9)18 March 2020, Press Release | * The Committee called for the incorporation of the gender perspective in the measures taken to mitigate Covid- 19.
* Noted that many of the measures being taken to mitigate the consequences of COVID-19 may have a disproportionate effect in relation to women and girls, and, in some cases, may exacerbate violence against them.
* Against this background the Committee highlighted that the quarantine was identified as a means that force women and girls to co-exist with their aggressors hence the need to (i) establish decent shelters that women, their children, older adults and anyone at the risk of violence could access, (ii) strategic dissemination of information easily accessible in by women in quarantine to enable them to report gender based violence, (iii) establishing immediate response teams to deal effectively with complaints and cases of gender-based violence, (iv) strengthening protection measures for women and girls at risk , (v) reducing or avoiding the sale of alcohol, drugs, weapons and any other trigger for gender violence during periods of isolation and quarantine, (vi) maintaining all necessary services and actions to prevent, attend, prosecute and punish violence against women and girls.
* Generally, women were identified as the ones caring for the elderly, children, sick people and other vulnerable people, and doing housework. In line with this, states were urged to:
* (i) prioritise services to women according to their specific needs
* (ii) establish measures for the care of people who are in charge of people infected by Covid-19
* (iii)Put in place policies which ensure women and are able to take care of their children after schools close, without losing their labour benefits
* (iv) Avail flexible healthcare and other policies for those who are in charge of caring for others
* (v) Have contingency plans in the event of a generalized quarantine for assumption of tasks done by women and men who acre for others without affecting their income and labour rights
* (vi) Put in place guidelines to ensure the care of people who cannot be cared for by those responsible for them due to the imposition of restrictions on mobility or other measures related to the prevention of COVID-19.
* (vii) Measures to be taken to ensure universal access to health and decent life regardless of their immigration status, working conditions or any other category.
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| **Inter-American Court Press Release[[10]](#footnote-10) 14 April 2020** | * Urged that efforts made by member states to address and contain Covid-19, which involves issues of life and public health, be undertaken within the framework of the rule of law, with full respect for the Inter-American instruments for the protection of human rights and the standards developed in the Court’s case law.
* Encouraged the use of dialogue, regional international cooperation implemented jointly, transparently and in a spirit of solidarity between all the States as a means to address extraordinary challenges brought by the pandemic.
* Called on cooperation between multilateral agencies, and States, with a human rights-based approach, to seek solutions brought by the pandemic.
* Advised states to ensure that all measures taken to address the pandemic would not impair, restrict or limit the enjoyment of human rights.
* Called on exercise of use of force to be done out of necessity, with proportionality and precaution, pursuant to the case law of the Inter-American Court.

 Called on guaranteed economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, without discrimination especially to vulnerable groups* Urged for the right of health to be guaranteed respecting human dignity and fundamental bioethical principles, as well as in accordance with Inter-American standards concerning its availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality, as appropriate for the circumstances resulting from this pandemic.
* For member states to give due regard to the rights of women to be free from gender based violence and provide measures for receiving complaints and render assistance.
* Highlighted the need for the respect of labour rights.
* Stated that Access to accurate and reliable information, as well as to the internet, is essential and that measures should be established to ensure that the use of surveillance technology to trace and monitor the propagation of the COVID-19 coronavirus is limited and proportionate to health.
* Called for access to justice and complaints mechanisms and that special protection be accorded to activities of journalists and human rights defenders.
* Called on competent organs or agencies to combat xenophobia, racism and any other form of discrimination, so that they take special care to ensure that, during the pandemic, no one encourages flare-ups of this nature with fake news or incitements to violence.
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| The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and Office of the Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural, and Economic Rights (OSRESCER) Press Release [[11]](#footnote-11)20 March 2020 | * Acknowledged the complex circumstances that states and societies in the Americas are facing as a consequence of the exceptional measures being taken in response to the global pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus.
* Acknowledged the extraordinary challenges to healthcare systems, people’s daily lives, and the protection of human rights within democratic systems brought by Covid-19.
* Acknowledged significant efforts made by states to adopt measures to provide care and treatment for people who have contracted COVID-19.
* Reaffirmed measures recommended by International health organisations which entail respect for fundamental guarantees and freedoms, providing the population with complete information on the measures and policies being implemented in their countries, and making resources available for these purposes.
* Reminded states that they must guarantee the right to health for all people within their jurisdictions, without any form of discrimination, in accordance with inter-American and international human rights standards and instruments.
* Stressed on availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality to ensure the right to health.
* Noted that states must prioritize the integrity and well-being of healthcare professionals and acknowledge those carrying out formal and informal care work.
* Called for special measures for protecting and training health workers, including the provision of protective clothing and disinfecting equipment, as well as duly guaranteeing their labour and social security rights.
* With regard to containment measures, the IACHR and the OSRESCER urged states to ensure that any actions they take to reduce the spread of the virus show the strictest respect for international human rights treaties and standards, guarantee the rule of law, and comply with the obligation to cooperate in good faith.
* IACHR and the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression acknowledged that states may impose temporary restrictions on human rights while a state of emergency has been declared.
* States were urged not to suspend or prohibit rights and freedoms in a blanket fashion and must specifically refrain from limiting the freedom of the press or restrict social or political organizations or leaders from seeking and disseminating information via any means.
* States and human rights institutions were called to ensure access to mechanisms for reporting possible unlawful limitations on or violations of human rights
* Stated that states should provide full, ongoing, accurate information on the epidemiological evolution of the pandemic, measures being taken to combat it and issue precise directives to healthcare providers to preserve the privacy of those whose state of health is affected by it.
* Emphasized that the rights of all people who are affected by containment measures must be protected especially those whose livelihoods are endangered by being subjected to a quarantine regime due to loss of income, their basic needs being jeopardized, the risk of being evicted, and the absence of institutional support networks.
* Called for the adoption of an appropriate combination of regulatory frameworks and short- and medium-term public policies to effectively respond to the impacts of the pandemic on human rights.
* Regards business and human rights states were called to ensure companies and employers respect human rights and behave ethically and responsibly, particularly giving regard to how the crisis affects workers, consumers, and local communities.
* Called on states to assist vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples, campesinos and rural workers, migrants, people who are deprived of their freedom, people living on the outskirts of cities, and people who are neglected by social security networks such as informal sector workers, people living in poverty, and the homeless.
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| **Statement** by the President of GREVIO,[[12]](#footnote-12) Marceline Naudi, on the need to uphold the standards of the Istanbul Convention in times of a pandemic[[13]](#footnote-13)  | * Expressed Concern about women and children for whom the home is a place of fear, not a place of safety.
* Reported that some women victims of violence were deciding against seeking medical attention for fear of contagion.
* Statement stated that domestic violence shelters in some areas stopped all admissions because they were unsure how to manage the risk of infection.
* Highlighted that online or telephone support to victims, still carries many risks for women who are in close quarters with their abuser.
* Pointed out that economic consequences of the pandemic, such as loss of job or income, created or exacerbated women’s financial dependency, reducing their ability to leave abusers.
* Reiterated that The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention, continues to apply to all Parties, be it in times of conflict or in times of a pandemic.
* Called on state parties to ensure continuity in service provision and to keep offering support and protection to women and girls at risk of violence, with the involvement of all relevant actors: law enforcement agencies, social services, the justice sector, specialist support services and all relevant ministries.
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|  **EUROPE** European Union Agency for fundamental rights (FRA) Press Release [[14]](#footnote-14) 8 April 2020 | * Stated that the outbreak of COVID-19 affects people’s daily life in the 27 EU Member States.
* Governments put in place urgent measures necessary to save lives, while in some instances limiting other rights such as freedom of movement and assembly.
* The report focused on main issues, namely measures to contain COVID-19 and mitigate its impact in the areas of social life, education, work and freedom of movement, as well as asylum and migration; the impact of the virus and efforts to limit its spread on particular groups in society; incidents of xenophobic and racist discrimination, including hate crime; States were alerted to the spread of disinformation concerning the outbreak and the implications of related containment measures on data protection and privacy.
* EU member states introduced physical and social distancing as well as quarantine measures to which states were cautioned so that they would not lead to isolation.
* Schools were largely closed down in EU member states and many sectors of economies in member states were shut down as well.
* The vast majority of countries that are part of the Schengen area have introduced restrictions at their internal borders, for example introducing requirements to undergo health checks, self-isolation after entry and permitting entry to only certain non-nationals.
* The pandemic affected the judiciary leading to the postponement of some hearings, while others would be held via video link. In some cases, leading to the public being excluded due to distancing measures.
* EU Member States took various measures that acknowledge vulnerability including of groups such as older people, people with disabilities, homeless people and Roma communities .EU member states were called to protect but not isolate people in institutional settings, such as nursing homes, prisons or refugee centres. They should develop targeted measures to address the specific needs of other vulnerable groups such as shelters for victims of domestic violence and accessible healthcare information to those who regular messaging may not reach.
* The Coronavirus pandemic triggered an increase in racist and xenophobic incidents against people of (perceived) Chinese or Asian origin, including verbal insults, harassment, physical aggression and online hate speech.
* Statement called on EU countries to closely monitor racist and xenophobic incidents and effectively report, investigate and prosecute such crimes.
* EU member states were urged to be vigilant and ensure they implement all data protection safeguards when protecting health.
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| European Commissioner For Human Rights[[15]](#footnote-15), Press statement | * On 23 April 2020, the European Commissioner For Human Rights reflected on the resilience of the European health systems, the effectiveness of health policies, the unprecedented pressure doctors, healthcare staff, medical staff were exposed to due to the pandemic, the fulfilment of the right to the highest attainable standard of health under the current pandemic, and if healthcare workers are sufficiently protected against the pandemic.
* The Commissioner acknowledged the lack of answers to these reflections but highlighted some of the fundamentals of a health care system which seeks to meet the needs of the entire population and which builds resilience in order to respond to public health emergencies, namely:
1. Universal health coverage as a basis for everyone to access health;
2. Mental health as an important component of universal health and it being useful to manage fear, anxiety and depression during the epidemic;
3. Those civic society organisations expressed concern that the UN Declaration does not in fact reaffirm the right to health as an entitlement and that it leaves too much discretion to governments and the existent funding gaps, which threaten to be obstacles to comprehensive response to Covid-19;
4. In Europe, the unaffordability of health care has been an important barrier to the full realisation of universal health coverage.
5. The right to health is interconnected with other rights such as social protection, housing;
6. The need for gender-responsive approaches to health which take gender norms and inequalities into account and act to reduce their harmful effect;
7. Made reference to gender differential effects of the pandemic such as fatality rate for men appearing to be up to twice as high as for women, women victims of violence experiencing additional difficulties, women being a clear [majority](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/311314/WHO-HIS-HWF-Gender-WP1-2019.1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) among health care staff and as informal and family carers;
8. Called on non-discrimination of Covid- 19 services including sexual and reproductive health on the basis of gender.
* Recommended that as a way out of crisis, there is need for all population groups to have access to healthcare without discrimination.
* Recommended that Everyone’s human dignity must be respected without putting into question the fundamental equality of every person’s life.
* Urged governments to prioritise access to effective personal protective equipment, regular coronavirus screening and antibody testing and pyscho- social support.
* Healthcare workers should be entitled to childcare arrangements and social protection measures to cover their work related hazards.
* Governments urged to promote integrated approaches which combine universal coverage with protection against poverty, the eradication of homelessness, inclusive education and training, and access to employment.
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| **Declaration by the Committee of Ministers on the COVID-19 pandemic, 22 April 2020**[[16]](#footnote-16)**, Press Release** | * The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe recalled that measures to combat the disease and its wider consequences must be taken in accordance with the Organisation's principles and the commitments entered into by member States.
* Made reference to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe’s information document “Respecting democracy, rule of law and human rights in the framework of the Covid-19 sanitary crisis: a toolkit for member States”[[17]](#footnote-17) for provision of useful guidance during the pandemic
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| Council of Europe[[18]](#footnote-18) Speaking notes and toolkit for European governments | * Paper presents a toolkit for governments to deal with Covid-19 while still respecting fundamental values of democracy, rule of law and human rights.
* Toolkit acknowledged formidable challenges governments face in an effort to protect their populations from the effects of Covid 19 and made the following points.
* **Derogations:** Accepted that measures governments take will encroach on other rights and freedoms.
* States called on to assess if derogation from obligations under the European Convention[[19]](#footnote-19) in times of emergencies are warranted.
* The European Court of Human Rights will assess any derogation in cases brought before it.
* States given a margin of appreciation[[20]](#footnote-20) with regards derogation and that it is subject to formal requirements, and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe must be informed.
* Toolkit highlighted that there cannot be derogation from the right to life except in the context of lawful acts of war (Article 2), the prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Article 3), the prohibition of slavery and servitude (Article 4§1) and the rule of “no punishment without law” (Article 7), death penalty and the right not to be tried or punished twice
* Derogations must not go against lawlessness and proportionality.
* **Principle of legality:** entails that in every emergency, the rule of law will prevail and state action be in accordance with the law. The law includes Acts of Parliament, emergency decrees of the executive, provided that they have a constitutional basis
* **State of emergency and measures must be for a limited duration** to contain the development of the crisis and return as quickly as possible to normality.
* **The principle of necessity** requires that emergency measures must be capable of achieving their purpose with minimal alteration of normal rules and procedures of democratic decision-making.[[21]](#footnote-21) As a general rule fundamental legal reforms must be put on hold during a state of emergency.
* **Distribution of executive powers and checks on the executive in emergencies** entails on simpler decision making procedures and easing on some checks and balances. Parliament must keep the power to control executive action and the core function of the judiciary maintained.
* Certain core human rights should not be subjected to derogation during emergencies namely, right to life (Article 2 Convention) and Prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Article 3 Convention); right of access to health care (Article 11 of the revised European Social Charter). Underscored the need to protect staff as well as ensure continuous access to detention facilities by independent monitoring bodies.
* **Right to liberty and security Article 5, right to a fair trial Article 6,** states urged to observe prohibition of detention without legal basis and provide detainees with access to doctors, lawyer or next of kin.
* **Rights to private life[[22]](#footnote-22), freedom of conscience[[23]](#footnote-23), freedom of assembly[[24]](#footnote-24)** are a benchmark of modern democratic societies and **r**estrictions on them are only permissible if law establishes them and proportionate to the legitimate aim pursued, including the protection of health.
* **Freedom of information and expression**, important for dissemination of information on the pandemic.
* **Prohibition of discrimination,** Article 14 Convention, entails obligations to ensure substantive equality. Particular attention must be paid to ensure members of vulnerable groups continue to access eg education means and materials during confinement.
* **Protection from crime, protection of victims of crime,** called for the need for heightened protection from domestic, sexual and gender based violence caused by isolation and confinement in line with the Istanbul Convention[[25]](#footnote-25). State parties to work to improve criminal provisions, procedural powers and international cooperation to detect, investigate and prosecute crime, and protect victims of crime including children.
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| Council of Europe, Commissioner For Human Rights, Statement issued on the release of 2019 Annual Activity report | * Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatovic, published her annual activity report covering 2019 on 21 April 2020[[26]](#footnote-26).
* The report provides an overall picture of the main problems, challenges and opportunities that European countries are facing in the field of human rights.
* Highlighted that she got an image of Europe circling around, uncertain about its direction and the human rights obligations which member states voluntarily agreed upon.
* Emphasised the weaknesses of Europe’s human rights protection system and added that the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating long-standing problems.
* Observed that hostility to human rights as universal, indivisible and legally binding has increased, fuelling a corrosive narrative that endangers the principles and standards on which Europe has been built over the past seven decades.
* Key issues covered in the report are the growing political and societal acceptance of racism; the disregard of the human rights of migrants and refugees; the threats to women’s rights; the repression of dissent; and the erosion of judicial independence.
* Highlighted that “Antisemitism, Islamophobia and anti-Gypsyism have reached alarming levels in Europe.
* Expressed concern about European countries’ handling of migrants and asylum-seekers, gender inequality, freedom of expression of the judiciary and journalists being under threat.
* Warned against the risks that unregulated uses of digital technologies and artificial intelligence pose to human rights, in particular privacy, equality, and freedom of expression and assembly, stressing that much remains to be done in order to find the right balance between technological development and human rights protection.
* Reiterated that states’ attention, resources and efforts are rightly devoted to heading off the COVID-19 pandemic but once the pandemic is under control states should redouble their efforts to solve long-standing shortcomings in law, practice and discourse that are so damaging to human dignity and human rights”.
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| Council Of Europe[[27]](#footnote-27)Website, Press statements | * Has a website dedicated speaking on the effect of the Covid -19 pandemic on human rights and the rule of law.
* Contains statements on guidance to governments on respecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law during the pandemic.
* The statements speak on the right to health in prison, torture prevention, right to protection of health, human rights and bio medicine, access to information, challenges to freedom of expression and its corollary media freedom, data protection, artificial intelligence, and the unprecedented challenges Covid -19 presents for the audio visual sector.
* The website highlights the vulnerability of individuals and society to cyber-crime, how the pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerability of people to counterfeit medical products, the adverse effects of bribery in the health care sector, how it makes medical services more expensive and of a lower quality, and undermines patients' trust in the health services.
* Underlined that State security and public safety can only be effectively guaranteed in a democracy which fully respects the rule of law.
* The European Commission For the Efficiency of Justice[[28]](#footnote-28) setup a blog to share and compare experiences and practices in the field of emergency organisation of court operations, and to help member States when they design emergency measures and respond to the current challenges.
* The website includes [Guidelines](https://rm.coe.int/guidelines-on-electronic-evidence-and-explanatory-memorandum/1680968ab5) on the use of electronic evidence in court proceedings, offering national courts invaluable guidance in this respect[[29]](#footnote-29).
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| Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission of the organisation of Islamic cooperation[[30]](#footnote-30) Press releases | * 23 March 2020 press release flagged the loss of lives due to Covid 19 and called on states and the international community to take all measures to protect their populations while paying attention to the rights of vulnerable people.
* 3 April 2020 press release appreciated the global response to the pandemic and called on the international community to ensure protection of the marginalised such as those living under foreign occupation or in conflict zones, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.
* 8 April 2020 press release expressed concern over the plight of Palestinian prisoners and detainees languishing in Israeli prisons during the Covid-19 pandemic. Urged those concerned to pressurise Israeli authorities to respect the rights of the detainees as guaranteed by international human rights law.
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| Human Rights Committee of the League of Arab States | * The Arab Human Rights Committee has not made any official announcements regarding the coronavirus pandemic, although its chairperson through the Committee’s Twitter feed [urged](https://twitter.com/ahrcommittee/status/1240196073760620545) States to mitigate the social and economic impacts of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. On March 24, 2020, the League of Arab States announced [restrictions](http://www.lasportal.org/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=2411) on staff working in person at headquarters, specifically excluding female employees with children and employees with health conditions from entering the premises.[[31]](#footnote-31)
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19. See Article 15, European Convention on Human Rights [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
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