



**2025**

# **CELEBRATING HUMAN RIGHTS IN EUROPE**

## **Celebrating Human Rights in Europe Closing Words – Lisbon, 21 Nov 2025**

**Isabel Capelo Gil  
Rector of Universidade Católica Portuguesa**

Your Excellency, the President of the Court of Justice of the European Union, Prof. Koen Lenaerts,

Dear Deans of the School of Law, Global School of Law,

Colleagues, Distinguished Guests,

Dear Students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Rector of Universidade Católica Portuguesa, it is a privilege to close this important Conference. Allow me to begin by recalling a foundational truth: the European project is inalienably linked to a human rights agenda. It was built from the collective moral imperative that emerged from the devastation of the Second World War—a solemn mandate that continues to guide us today: never repeat, never forget. This imperative is not merely historical; it is a living responsibility that shapes the identity and mission of the European Union.

This timely conference that celebrates human rights in Europe, has reflected on the complexity, richness, and evolving nature of human rights in our Union. To

“celebrate” human rights is not to rest on past achievements, but to acknowledge the progress made while recognising the obligations that remain. Europe has constructed one of the most robust systems of human rights protection in the world, but this system relies on constant vigilance and renewal.

We are honoured by the presence of the President of the Court of Justice of the European Union. The Court’s jurisprudence has been essential in ensuring that fundamental rights remain operational, effective, and harmonised across all Member States. Through its work, the Court reminds us that Europe is not defined solely by economic integration, but by its profound commitment to the rule of law and human dignity.

Our discussions these past days have also highlighted an important reality: the human rights agenda is expanding in response to the challenges of our time.

Climate justice has emerged as an indispensable dimension of human rights. The climate crisis affects lives, livelihoods, health, and the very possibility of a dignified future. The protection of the environment is no longer an abstract policy question—it is a matter of intergenerational justice, of fairness, and of responsibility toward the most vulnerable. Europe has a decisive role in ensuring that sustainability and human rights progress hand in hand.

At the same time, the digital transformation is reshaping the contours of rights and freedoms. Issues such as data protection, algorithmic transparency, digital exclusion, online safety, and the ethical use of artificial intelligence require new forms of legal interpretation and robust institutional oversight. The digital world holds extraordinary potential, but it also raises profound questions about autonomy, privacy, equality, and democratic integrity. Protecting human rights in the digital age is one of the defining tasks of Europe today.

Universities—and especially a Catholic university—have a critical role in meeting these challenges. We educate the next generation of jurists, leaders, and citizens. We foster spaces for ethical analysis, intellectual courage, and rigorous debate. And we are called upon to uphold the dignity of the human person in every dimension: social, environmental, technological, cultural, and spiritual.

As we conclude this conference, I hope we do so with renewed commitment and confidence. The European human rights project remains one of the most important moral and legal achievements in history. It is not complete; it will never

be complete. But it continues to offer a horizon of hope and responsibility for all of us.

Let us move forward inspired by the legacy we inherit and by the future we are called to build—one in which the lessons of the past are honoured, the challenges of the present are confronted with integrity, and the expectations for the future remain worthy of Europe's highest ideals.

Thank you.



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