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Paying Homage to Victims of Terrorism

VI European Day on Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism

Brussels, 11 March 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 11th of March 2004 was a sad day for all Europeans. Six years later, we remember that dark day and pay homage to the victims of the Madrid bombings and their families. Hundreds of people who were innocently going to work, school or just going about their business became victims of a cowardly terrorist attack. Today we remember those victims as well as those of other terrorist attacks.

The 7th of July 2005 is another black day in our collective memory. The explosions in London inflicted, killed and injured innocent citizens. Terrorism must be stopped.

Very recently, on the 23rd of February, a car bomb was planted outside a courthouse in Northern Ireland. It was a miracle nobody was killed or injured. Unfortunately, not all terrorist attacks can be prevented.

In 2009, the Spanish terrorist group ETA caused three more victims in Spain. EDUARDO PUELLES, officer of the National Police; CARLOS SAENZ DE TEJADA and DIEGO SALVA, both officers of the Guardia Civil, were coldly murdered by ETA. These were three brave men. We remember and honour them today. Our hearts are with their families and friends. When an EU citizen becomes a victim of terrorism, it is the entire community of citizens of the Union that is affected.

I want to express my heartfelt sympathy and solidarity with the families who lost their loved ones in a terrorist attack and with all those who still bear the mental and physical scars of such tragic events. I am particularly touched to be here today with you, the families of the victims. You have lost your loved ones in cowardly acts of violence that have no place in our Union. I am talking to you as a person, as a European citizen whose actions are based on our most powerful values and principles such as democracy, freedom, tolerance, the rule of law and fundamental rights. I am talking to you as a European citizen who rejects terrorism and any sort of violence and whose action will never be driven by fear or by the cowardly acts of terrorists.

I am touched to see some students attending this event today and expressing their support to the victims and their families. Young people showing solidarity and rejecting violence is inspiring. Solidarity, tolerance and a firm belief in the respect of fundamental rights should be your guiding principles as you reject and deplore all kinds of terrorist acts.

We remain convinced that terrorist acts can never be justified. All acts of terrorism, without exception, must be firmly condemned.

There can never be an appropriate compensation for those who suffered a terrorist attack and for their relatives. We intend nevertheless to contribute, to the extent possible, to alleviate and protect victims and relatives. We will continue to support victims of terrorism by assisting projects aimed at improving victims' lives and by actively promoting solidarity with them. We hope our small contribution can offer victims some assistance in the difficult task of coping with the terrible experience of terrorism.

Unfortunately, there will always be cowards who will continue to threaten our lives and our way of life by plotting and committing acts of terrorism. We will continue to oppose them. We will also ensure that all our tools to prevent and fight terrorism will always fully respect our values and our fundamental rights. This is the way we, and our democratic societies based on the rule of law, will continue to prevent and fight terrorism. We will stay firm to our principles.

Our actions will never be driven by fear but by our values. All our actions need to be solidly anchored in a legal framework that assures full respect for fundamental rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Let me assure you that the interests and needs of victims of terrorism and crime are directly reflected in this Charter, which is based on human dignity and places the individual at the heart of the EU's activities.

As soon as I took up office as Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship I began a thorough examination of the problems faced by victims, including victims of terrorism. I will look at the effectiveness of existing legislation and of the implementation of that legislation. I am very pleased that the European Network of Associations of Victims of Terrorism is playing a key role in this work; their contribution is greatly appreciated.

On the basis of this work I will propose new solutions in early 2011, including new legislation. But we must also translate the law into reality. That is why I will look at practical measures to assist Member States, non-governmental organisations and individuals to implement laws, to provide victim support services and to access rights as victims of crime.

Today is the day to demonstrate our clear support for the democratic values and human rights that we share across Europe and on the basis of which we build the European Union. No terrorist act or terrorist threat will ever undermine our common belief in these rights and principles. We must continue to take all the necessary steps to bring those who engage in or support terrorist acts to justice.