

Municipal : Human rights start at the town hall... And it doesn't stop at borders!

On the occasion of World NGO Day on February 27 and the imminent approach of the municipal elections, the Human Rights Platform recalls, through this forum, that the protection of human rights begins at the municipal level.

At each municipal election, the same themes come up: security, schools, cleanliness, local taxes, transport, housing. We talk about management, budgets, priorities. But we often forget to name what connects all these public policies: human rights.

Human rights are not limited to international tribunals or diplomatic crises. They are built or weakened in local decisions, are lived on a daily basis and start at the town hall.

It is at the town hall that a birth is declared and that an administrative identity is obtained, the first condition for access to rights. It is also at the municipal level that people send their children to school, apply for social housing, vote and participate in local democratic life. The municipalities are the first level of the Republic and the first area of effectiveness of human rights. Each local policy — social, educational, urban, security — translates, in practice, universal principles: dignity, equality, non-discrimination, participation.

These principles are those of international commitments that France has freely adopted and that all public authorities must implement. They thus play a central role in the defence of human rights in relation to the world around them. Their missions of welcoming exiled people or human rights defenders, supporting, securing and protecting actors (citizens, inhabitants, associations) in contexts of repression. They are involved in global alliances or twinning and are committed to decentralized cooperation policies.

In a context marked by democratic tensions, the rise of hate speech, persistent territorial inequalities and strong budgetary constraints, local authorities are under pressure. Endowments are decreasing while social expectations are increasing. Budget cuts combined with the desertification of some municipalities directly affect local public services and local solidarity, directly impacting the inhabitants but also future generations.

These tensions cannot justify the decline of fundamental rights. **On the contrary, it is in these times that human rights must serve as a compass.** France is bound by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international covenants and European conventions, obligations that are binding on all public authorities, including local authorities. A town hall is not only a local administration: it is a public authority responsible for respecting, protecting and promoting human rights on its territory, and beyond, through its action of solidarity and cooperation beyond its borders.

A municipality that acts for human rights locally is a municipality that:

- **Guarantees the right to exist and to participate** through its civil status mission, which gives every individual, equal before the law, access to all civil and political rights such as the right to vote. The organization of democracy at the municipal level guarantees the right to vote, to be represented, to access transparent and reliable public information, and to participate in bodies and decisions, such as consultations in participatory budgets.

- **Guarantees the right to education, leisure and culture** through an inclusive, accessible school, ensuring access to local, quality food for all children as well as the development of extracurricular, cultural, sports or leisure activities.
- **Guarantees the right to housing**, through investment in social housing and the fight against substandard housing and fuel poverty.
- **Guarantees the right to health by fighting** against medical deserts and facilitating the reception of competent health professionals, French or foreign.
- **Guarantees the right to security** through a municipal security policy based on human rights, prevention, social mediation and a trained and supervised municipal police, without disproportionate use of force or discriminatory practices.
- **Guarantees freedom of association, expression and opinion** through respect for freedom of association, open municipal councils, accessible elected officials and a public space where everyone can express disagreement, contradiction being the foundation of democracy.

Human rights are not "international" on the one hand and "local" on the other: they form a continuum. What is guaranteed in a municipality contributes to France's credibility and coherence on the international scene.

A municipality that is committed to human rights in the world is a municipality that:

- **Guarantees the right to come and go**, to the local by accessible transport, an inclusive public space and also by a dignified and non-discriminatory reception and installation policy.
- **Guarantees international solidarity** by supporting and defending actors engaged in international solidarity, particularly in a national or international repressive context
- **Guarantees the dignified reception and protection** of exiles or human rights defenders,
- **Guarantees stability here and there**, through twinning, territorial alliances and international cooperation programmes that illustrate the diplomatic role, based on human rights, of municipalities.

These actions are not incidental. They are both at the service of the local population and embody a territorial diplomacy based on solidarity, protection and democratic commitment. Welcoming, protecting, cooperating: these are political choices that extend France's international commitments at the local level.

Being mayor is therefore not just about managing a budget. It is exercising a political and moral responsibility towards all the inhabitants. Every deliberation, every budget arbitration, every municipal by-law has an impact on fundamental rights here and there.

In the run-up to the municipal elections, we call on candidates and future elected officials to explicitly put human rights at the heart of their agenda, to evaluate their public policies against the principles of dignity, equality, participation of all and non-discrimination, and to ensure transparency and accountability.

Municipal elections are not just a management election. They are a societal choice. Human rights are not an ideological option. They are the foundation of the Republic. And this foundation is being built every day at the town hall.

Presentation of the PDH

The Human Rights Platform (PDH) is the collective of French NGOs committed to the promotion and defense of human rights internationally. They support their partners, local civil society actors and human rights defenders, in their activities and advocacy for a more just society, based on the rule of law, the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of populations.

List of PDH member organizations:

- **Aide Humanitaire et Journalisme**
- **Alliance des avocats pour les droits de l'Homme (AADH)**
- **Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture (ACAT – France)**
- **Association d'aide, de défense homosexuelle, pour l'égalité des orientations sexuelles (Adheos)**
- **Association Francophone des Commissions Nationales des Droits de l'Homme (AFCNDH)**
- **Agir ensemble pour les droits humains (Agir ensemble)**
- **Avocats sans frontières (ASF – France)**
- **Centre Européen des Droits de l'Homme**
- **Coalition mondiale contre la peine de mort**
- **Comité contre l'esclavage moderne (CCEM)**
- **Collectif des familles de disparus en Algérie (CFDA)**
- **Comité Vietnam pour la défense des droits de l'Homme (CVDDH)**
- **End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Child for Sexual Purposes France (ECPAT – France)**
- **Ensemble contre la peine de mort (ECPM)**
- **Equipop**
- **Fédération euro-méditerranéenne contre les disparitions forcées (FEMED)**
- **Fédération internationale des ACAT (FIACAT)**
- **Fédération Internationale pour les Droits Humains (FIDH)**
- **Forum réfugiés – COSI (FR- C)**
- **Human Dignity**
- **Justice Makers Bangladesh – France**
- **La balle aux prisonniers (LaBAP)**
- **Les Orchidées Rouges**
- **Ligue internationale contre la détention arbitraire (ILAAD)**
- **Observatoire international des avocats en danger (OIAD)**
- **Prison Insider**
- **Reporters sans frontières (RSF)**
- **Réseau Euromed France**
- **Ressources Humaines Sans Frontières (RHSF)**
- **Solidarité internationale LGBTQI (SIL)**
- **SOS Africaines en danger**
- **Terre des Hommes (TDH)**
- **Tournons La Page (TLP)**
- **We are not Weapons of War (WWoW)**