Excellencies,

Dear students,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Tomorrow marks the International Day of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 66 years ago, Europe and Lebanon were both part of the drafting process of this important document which makes human rights one of the most important milestones in our common history. Personalities such as Charles Malek, Renée Cassin and Charles Duke united their forces to create one of the most important declarations of
our recent history, recognising that "the inherent dignity and (of) the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world". (Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

This year's theme provides us with a strong message: **Every day is a Human Rights Day**! It reminds us that everyone, everywhere and at all times is entitled to the full range of human rights. But it also points out that support for human rights is a daily responsibility and constant endeavour that every individual, every society, every state has to undertake. Lebanon has been a forerunner for human rights in this region for a long time, and it needs to be even so in a region that is in turmoil. Last year, Lebanon has adopted a law protecting women and children from domestic violence. In the most recent vote at the United Nation's General Assembly in November 2014, Lebanon has – at least - not opposed a Resolution calling for a De Facto Moratoriums on the death penalty worldwide. Lebanon's State Council, in a landmark decision, has recognised the “right to know” of the families of those disappeared during the civil war. Those are just a few examples of recent progress.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2014 has not been the best year for human rights. Not across the world and not in the Arab region in particular. Lebanon has not remained
unchallenged. We receive daily reports of serious violations of international humanitarian law and abuses of people perpetrated by armed groups on the borders of Lebanon. These groups seek to bring down more than buildings, roads, frontiers: they try to destroy the very foundations of nations and communities – the respect for human dignity and the physical integrity of human beings. At the same time, the extraordinarily high number of refugees and displaced people having come to Lebanon in search for shelter and protection since 2011 brings additional challenges, also when it comes to human rights.

Lebanon is not alone in its efforts to assure human rights. Human rights are the founding principles of the European Union and key in our relations with all our partners across the world – all the more with close partners such as Lebanon. The European Union provides financial assistance to Lebanese institutions to develop and implement human rights policies and reforms and we support civil society organisation that are advocating human rights in Lebanon vis-a-vis the public and vis a vis the Lebanese authorities. We support the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice in advancing the reforms of the justice system and prison management.

Human rights talk without meeting the basic needs of the people and creating an enabling environment is vain indeed. For that reason much financial assistance is given to support vulnerable Lebanese
communities strained by the presence of Syrian refugees. Our direct support to both hosting communities and Syrian refugees is based on a deeply humanitarian and human concern and much has been achieved already, yet many challenges need to be further addressed.

Human rights in Lebanon and in the region nowadays can certainly not be taken for granted. What I hope however is that the discussion today will serve you as inspiration and guidance and that the famous words of Kahlil Gibran - with which I would like to close - will linger on and resonate for a long time: “Safeguarding the rights of others is the most noble and beautiful end of a human being”.

So much that you will make them happen every day.

Thank you.