

Thank you.

I thank you all.

Thanks to you, I am ready to embark on a life-changing experience. Needless to say this is one of the most important moments in my life. It's been nineteen years since I arrived to my first FIDH congress in Dakar. Then, Casablanca, Quito, Lisbon, Erevan, Istanbul where I decided to run for Vice President of FIDH... And now here I am in Johannesburg, **incoming president of this great, yet complex in its magnificence, Federation.**

I am deeply honored. I look forward to start working with all of you - member organizations, board and staff - in order to strengthen our common commitment to our founding principles in dialogue with the novel challenges of the 21st century. This is the spirit of our Conference: **fighting back for human rights! And in this process, every little step counts.**

Dear friends, dear comrades,

This is **your** Federation. **Collective ownership** of FIDH is a continuous and fundamental feature that in turn creates an existential challenge: **FIDH can only operate collectively**; otherwise it will betray its own principles and undermine its future. Our Federation is the major worldwide human rights movement. And this is what makes it unique. **Ownership, as the ultimate and exclusive right conferred by a lawful claim or title**: this is **our** Federation. We have good reasons to **consolidate its moral authority**, since our statutory cause is going through hard and even harder times across the world.

We are the weak side in this great struggle. Our force lies in our unity. It is in our profit to consolidate our connection. We are not on our own here. **Togetherness**: this is the pillar of our strength - whatever our strength is - given the power of our opponents. **This is the reason of our considerable successes despite the power of our opponents.** We have been fighting - despite different viewpoints, different traditions and backgrounds - together!

Let me share with you my personal experience. For 8 years, from 2003 to 2011, I chaired the board of the Greek League for Human Rights. I was always satisfied with our FIDH membership but, on the other side, I confess I had not been doing much in order to consolidate our links within the Federation. When, after 2009, things

got from bad to worse in my country, I started to think otherwise: how can we make the Greek cause part of the international setting? How can our global aims be in dialogue with the local issues we confront on a daily basis? And now, due to our FIDH membership, I know that we are stronger, our cause is stronger.

Dear friends and comrades,

Designing a strategy from the national to the regional and from the regional to the global level is always a challenging intellectual operation. But it is something more than that. It **is a struggle**.

This is where we come to the world of politics. Not the world of political parties or the realm of political elites. Here the issue at stake is **the core of Politics: the struggle against inequality**, the struggle for altering the power structure in favor of the weak, in favor of rule of law, **in favor of** our own vision for a just world. This is where we meet social movements, gaining radicalization from them, offering rationalization to them. In this difficult struggle, **our weapon is strategy. Strategy is the weapon of the weak**. This is why we are here, strategizing our priorities.

Across the world, social and political movements, local initiatives and global campaigns, institutions and organizations are in dialogue with us. The strengthening of this dialogue, the strengthening of transnational ties of solidarity, the exchange of ideas and practices are a major priority for us.

Because this is the way to reverse the tide of reactionary and repressive policies across the world, this is the way to make our voice heard, this is the way to achieve all those little steps of advancement that, in turn, will make our world a better place to live in.

I am privileged and honored to participate in this great effort.

I am here thanks to you all. I would like to **express my gratitude to the representatives of the Leagues**- your participation and your vote empower the Federation. We've got work to do and we owe this work to ourselves.

I am here **thanks to the Greek League for Human Rights**, the organization who proposed my candidacy, for which I've been serving as a member ever since 1990 and I chaired from 2003 to 2011.

I am here thanks to the extraordinary staff of our secretariat. Their paradigm was a major motivation for me to take the decision to run for president. I will be with you, one among you, in Paris, starting in two weeks time.

I am here thanks to our outgoing President, my close friend ever since the FIDH congress in Dakar, **Karim Lahijdi.** It is an honor and a heavy duty to try and fill his shoes- his wisdom and dignity. Karim, my comrade, I will do my best.

Yet, last but far from least, **I am here thanks to my wife Marilena,** who for the last 18 years of our shared life has been the pillar in every intellectual, political and personal step I have made. Σ'ευχαριστώ Marilena, I thank you.

I cannot promise much. I can only promise one thing: for the next years we will keep fighting back for rights by thinking, analyzing, reacting and acting. We will work hard. But I am confident. This is what I already do in my life, and I know that this is what most of you, people, are doing regardless of positions held.

This is our discourse, our wisdom, this is our power, but also the inescapable, sometimes even puzzling complexity that makes our lives more difficult, even dangerous, for many of you here. But above all this is **our** civil society.

I thank you all.

Dimitris Christopoulos, Johannesburg, August 28th 2016.