

Dear Honourable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express my gratitude for receiving the Rafto Memorial Prize. It is a great honor for me and for my team, working in the Office of the Polish Ombudsman. I would like to thank the Award Committee for this honorable distinction. I would like also to thank the Rafto Foundation for Human Rights as well as Students Rafto Group for the whole work connected with the Award. You are giving a wonderful example of true hospitality and perfect organization. You really inspire how to do things well. After this experience I start to understand what *koselig* means in practice.

On a personal note I would like to thank my wife Magdalena Bodnar, who is here with us today. You cannot perform well in the role of the Ombudsman in a difficult political times, if you do not have the overwhelming support of your beloved one.

Professor Thorolf Rafto in 70s and 80s was travelling often to Poland. He took his students and showed deep interest in Polish matters. He met Lech Wałęsa, Adam Michnik or Karol Wojtyła – key figures for Polish contemporary history. By providing his expertise and sharing internationally knowledge on Polish dissident movement, he showed what is his personal understanding of “Solidarność” (Solidarity). I treat this award as the solidarity of citizens of the Human Rights City of Bergen not only with myself, but with all those who fight in Poland for freedom, human rights and rule of law: civil society, members of academia, judges, prosecutors, attorneys, and each and every member of the society who is concerned with the process of undemocratic changes.

Polish poet, Nobel Prize winner Czesław Miłosz in 1947 wrote that “*The avalanche changes direction depending on what rocks it encounters in its path.*” (Moral Treatise).

Unfortunately, when we celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights we also see that the avalanche of authoritarianism, populism, hatred, illiberal values, and undermining the rule of law is becoming bigger and bigger, with every day and with every month. This process takes place in different countries and on different continents. The avalanche on its path takes more and more snow. It is sudden, unexpected and determined.

But we all here could be rocks which are encountered in the avalanche path. It depends upon us what kind of rocks we are – whether we are truly devoted to human rights and rule of law, whether we can defend what we believe in and what was created as a consequence of mass tragedies of the Second World War. If we take the Constitution, rule of law and human rights as granted, the avalanche may just go – rocks will be flat and easy to overcome. But if we stand up to rights, each rock might be sturdy, massive, colossal or even monumental. All together we may

change the course of avalanche or even stop it.

Thanks to international solidarity between Norwegian and Polish civil society we can stand together. For the sake of Polish democracy and rule of law, but also for the sake of other countries suffering similar problems. So – Let's Stop Avalanche. Together.