Joint Letter from the Foreign Ministers of the Nordic countries
(Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden)
to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ms. Marija Pejčinović Burić

6 May 2020

Dear Secretary General,

The current Covid-19 sanitary crisis is unprecedented. It takes many lives, it has altered our daily life and it poses serious threats to our democracies, the rule of law and human rights.

In the Council of Europe, we, the five Nordic countries have fully supported the Georgian Presidency’s proposal for a declaration on the Covid-19 response of the Council of Europe. We think it is important that the Committee of Ministers has made a statement on behalf of all 47 Member States with regard to the crisis.

We also very much welcome and thank you for your report on “Respecting democracy, rule of law and human rights in the framework of the Covid-19 sanitary crisis: a toolkit for member states”. The toolkit provides timely and useful guidance for our governments and it has been well received in our capitals. The report illustrates the broad variety of tools, mechanism and responses available for the Council of Europe and its Member States in this crisis, and clearly demonstrates the relevance of the organization.

We also welcome your letter of 24 March 2020 to Prime Minister Orbán and we share the concerns expressed in that letter. Even in an emergency situation the rule of law must prevail. Furthermore, we fully support your reminder – to all of us Member States - in the same letter and in your report that the measures, which Member States take in the present exceptional circumstances of the pandemic, must comply with both national constitutions and international standards, and observe the very essence of democratic principles. They must be proportionate as well as limited in time.

In her many public statements, the Human Rights Commissioner has identified the most vulnerable individuals in our societies in the context of the Covid-19. She has also pointed out how the sanitary crisis affects these vulnerable individuals in a particularly harsh way. We would like to express our appreciation for her knowledge and dedication as well as our full support for her ongoing work as well as the important work carried out by other parts of the organization.

Yours Sincerely,

Jeppe Kofod
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark

Pekka Haavisto
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Guðlaugur Pór Þórðarson
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland

Ine Eriksen Søreide
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway

Ann Linde
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden