

General Debate

Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: Fighting intolerance

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TALKING POINTS

**Madam President/Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is an honor for me to contribute to this general debate.

On behalf of the Romanian delegation, I would like to thank our Bahraini hosts for their warm welcome and hospitality. We are very happy to be here, in the beautiful city of Manama.

Let me take this opportunity to express our deepest sympathy to our Turkish and Syrian colleagues, whose countries and peoples have been so painfully affected by the devastating earthquake of 6 February. We stand in solidarity with you and all those who have lost their loved ones, their homes, their cities, and their places of livelihood in this horrific tragedy.

Dear colleagues,

Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies is a task that requires our constant attention. It requires continuous efforts to adapt mindsets, legislation and policies to the transformations taking place in the political, social, economic and security environment.

Parliaments, by virtue of their representative nature, have a vital role in countering hatred and intolerance, in promoting a model of society that embraces diversity and respects human dignity.

Our action is all the more urgent since racism, hate speech, discrimination, in all their manifestations and forms, particularly in the digital sphere, have been on the rise in last years, exacerbated by the multiple challenges before us: economic and security crises, climate change, and the post-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

My country is fully engaged in efforts to fight intolerance and has continually strived to act as an example in this matter.

I should start with our Constitution, which guarantees the parliamentary representation of national minorities living in Romania, by stipulating that “Organizations of citizens belonging to national minorities, which fail to obtain the number of votes for representation in Parliament, have the right to one Deputy seat each”.

In 2021, Romania adopted the first *National Strategy for preventing and combating antisemitism, xenophobia, radicalization and hate speech*, whose main objectives are: *the protection of vulnerable groups; increasing societal resilience through educational and cultural programs; and enhancing international cooperation*.

The Parliament last year amended the Penal Code in order to strengthen penalties for public incitement to violence, hate or discrimination on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, political opinion or affiliation, social origin, wealth, age, disability or illness.

At European level too, my country has been an active supporter and contributed significantly to the drafting of the first European Union *Strategy on combatting Antisemitism and fostering Jewish Life*, a key-document adopted in 2021.

These are just a few examples illustrating our continued commitment to preventing and combating intolerance, nationally and internationally.

Dear colleagues,

In recognition of its engagement to uphold the fundamental human rights and liberties, Romania has been entrusted with a third mandate as member of the UN Human Rights Council starting with 2023.

And, I want to confirm, based on our experience in Parliament, that the Universal Periodic Review performed by the Council remains a critical tool for improving human rights legislation in line with international standards, including in the area of non-discrimination.

Romania is preparing its fourth national report under this mechanism, and our parliamentary committees for Legal Affairs, Human Rights and Equal Opportunities are fully engaged in providing input and monitoring the process.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tolerance and inclusiveness are prerequisites for peace.

From this perspective, today’s debate has a particular significance for the Romanian delegation, given the horrific war and huge humanitarian crisis unfolding in our vicinity since 24 February 2022.

Russia’s unprovoked, unjustified, illegal aggression against Ukraine has led to massive violations of human rights, targeting mainly the civilian population.

As a neighboring state to Ukraine, we have provided humanitarian support to the more than 3.4 million Ukrainian citizens who crossed our borders. And for the more than 100.000 of them who chose to remain in Romania we put in place an integrated package of protection, inclusion and social cohesion measures, focusing on housing, labor, education, health, children and youth, and vulnerable persons.

But let us be clear: more than an attack against Ukraine and its citizens, this war is an attack to the fundamental principles of international law and the democratic values that underpin the existence and mission of this prestigious organization we belong to – the IPU.

And we should take this opportunity of being here together, parliaments from across the world, to renew our call for solidarity and cooperation in defending the international legal order, freedom, democracy, and respect for diversity and human rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, on the occasion of the *International Day to Commemorate Holocaust Victims – 27 January*, the Senate of Romania adopted an official statement reconfirming our commitment to further enhance legislation and take all necessary action against hate speech and all extremist attitudes.

And from this statement I will borrow my final remarks to conclude this intervention:

"Defending human rights is not an option. Human rights are the only answer and the only solution for peace, security, humanity, and for the present and future of democracy worldwide".

Thank you!