

General debate: Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: Fighting intolerance

Esteemed Chair and colleagues,

Inclusive societies and the elimination of all forms of inequalities are among of the goals which the IPU has been pursuing for years. I am therefore particularly pleased to see this topic taking centre stage in today's debate.

The mere fact that it is included among the Sustainable Development Goals, the achievement of which has gained momentum with the 2030 Agenda adopted by the United Nations in 2015, proves that it is indeed a key development issue that, to my great pleasure, has also been put at the core of the IPU Strategy – our key development document.

A major concern is that peaceful coexistence and inclusion worldwide are in decline, while intolerance and discrimination are rising in all spheres of society. We see growing polarisation and criticism of administrative structures along with a decreased tolerance towards opposing views. Particularly worrying is the rise of online hate speech, which sows hatred and division under the guise of anonymity.

We are witnessing a trend of growing social and economic inequalities and deteriorating trust in democracy and human rights standards. Likewise, we are facing violent extremism and the spread of misinformation. All of this poses a risk to social cohesion and global peace.

Slovenia acknowledges the importance of fostering inclusive societies and creating equal opportunities for all and considers these issues to be highly relevant. In this respect, I would like to highlight the Protection Against Discrimination Act – the umbrella law in this area – and the Equal Opportunities of Women and Men Act.

In addition to the already adopted legislation, Slovenia is also drawing up a new Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, specifically aimed at overcoming stereotypes and sexism and ensuring that the gender equality perspective is included in all policies and measures.

To effectively tackle discrimination in society, Slovenia has set up two autonomous state bodies: the Human Rights Ombudsman and the Advocate of the Principle of Equality.

While we have certainly made progress over the past years, we cannot afford to be complacent with the current situation. What worries us, besides the fact that the changes were not as effective as we would have liked them to be, is that although the risk of discrimination in Slovenia was among the lowest in the European Union according to international figures from 2019, it still increased over 2017–2020.

Greater risk of discrimination is also associated with the situation during the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to curb the spread of the virus. These have disproportionately affected vulnerable groups, already disadvantaged by their personal circumstances. Here, I would like to draw particular attention to children from vulnerable families, the elderly, the Roma, foreign nationals, persons with disabilities, the socially disadvantaged, women and other groups.

With this in mind, I would like to point out that long-term discrimination adversely affects the person or group discriminated against, ultimately leading to social exclusion and higher healthcare costs. More than that, it undermines productivity and social prosperity.

Therefore, greater transparency and accountability in decision-making and increased involvement of the interested public and civil society in decision-making processes at local as well as national and global levels are vital.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Efforts targeted at combating intolerance and promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies require engagement from all of us. And as representatives of the people we, parliamentarians, play a particularly important part therein.

We are the mirror image of our society, while we also set an example for it to follow. So, if we succeed in making parliaments the environments with zero-tolerance for discrimination and if we consistently draw attention to, condemn and defy such reprehensible practices, then the society will follow our lead. This will slowly bring a change in mindset and behaviour, restore trust in politics, and raise political and general culture. It is therefore incumbent upon us, parliamentarians, to foster and develop these values and fundamental rights.

Thank you.