

**UN Human Rights Council: 31st Session (June 13-July 1, 2016)  
Item 3, General Debate**

**Speaker: Michael De Dora, Main Representative**

**The Freedoms of Opinion, Expression, Assembly, and Association**

Mr. President,

We welcome the complimentary new reports of the special rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, who stresses the importance of protecting freedom of opinion and expression online,<sup>1</sup> and the special rapporteur on the rights to peaceful assembly and of association,<sup>2</sup> who warns that fundamentalism in various forms is fueling growing intolerance that threatens peaceful assembly and association worldwide.

Our world and its respective societies are increasingly pluralistic, filled with individuals of diverse established and emerging religions, beliefs, values, traditions, sexual orientations, and gender identities. As Maina Kai stated last week, “The people of the world speak some 7,000 languages, practice 270 major religions, live in 193 UN Member States and belong to thousands of cultures. But we share only one planet. We will not always agree.” Sometimes, disagreement engenders fundamentalism and intolerance.

In undertaking efforts to combat fundamentalism and intolerance, we urge states to place considerable focus on protecting the freedoms of opinion, expression, assembly, and association.<sup>3</sup>

The rights to freedom of opinion, expression, assembly, and association have played a vital role in fostering a better world. Together, they create a public space that welcomes persons and groups of all political, moral, and religious backgrounds to hold, practice, and express their deeply-held views — while also protecting the rights of freethinkers and dissidents to question and challenge norms and customs — while also protecting the rights of minorities, including sexual and gender minorities, to live out their inner truths free from harm.

Sadly, many member states seek to punish or censor persons for exercising their rights, or else not protect persons exercising their rights from harassment, discrimination, and attacks.<sup>4</sup> These actions clearly violate states’ obligations under international law.<sup>5</sup> We therefore urge comprehensive efforts to ensure the protection of the freedoms of opinion, expression, assembly, and association. Thank you.

---

<sup>1</sup> See: <http://bit.ly/1Oynxm5>; see our past statement on free expression online here: <http://bit.ly/1WChjmA>

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://bit.ly/1sMFxBB>

<sup>3</sup> Also important: freedom of religion or belief. In his last report to the Council, the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief explored the link between the freedoms of religion or belief, and expression: <http://bit.ly/1SJxPO4>

<sup>4</sup> See: <http://ti.me/1ZTMmMk>, <http://bit.ly/1UlfXMU>, <http://bit.ly/1mRNH87>, and <http://bit.ly/1Xrs66x>

<sup>5</sup> Especially, but not limited to, the ICCPR: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>