



UN Human Rights Council: 34th Session (February 27-March 24, 2016)

Item 9: General Debate

Speaker: Michael De Dora, Main Representative

Speech and Counter-Speech

Around the world we have witnessed a disturbing rise in state and non-state actors promoting and enforcing discriminatory, xenophobic, and intolerant views, which often form the basis of exclusionary nationalist movements.¹

We have been heartened by the number of states this session that have stressed the importance of countering these developments. However, we are deeply concerned that so many states have done so while neglecting to mention their own records of promoting intolerance, tolerating intolerance, and suppressing and stamping out any form of dissent.

In terms of fact, crackdowns on freedom of conscience — including freedom of religion, belief, opinion, and expression — simply don't work. The strong arm of the government can never change a person's mind.

They also violate Durban, which urged states to address “stereotyping based on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance ... *while taking all necessary measures to guarantee the right to freedom of opinion and expression.*”

And, they serve against the interests of any state truly seeking to counter intolerance. The best way to counter intolerant views is not to restrict freedom of opinion and expression, but to protect the right of others to think and speak in opposition. As Durbin further stated:

“We recognize the positive contribution that the exercise of the right to freedom of expression, particularly by the media and new technologies, including the Internet, and full respect for the freedom to seek, receive and impart information can make to the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.”²

We urge states to realize the central importance of protecting freedom of conscience and inquiry in their efforts to counter what they deem to be intolerant.

¹ These two phenomena are not mutually exclusive and, in fact, can be mutually reinforcing. Hateful statements by state actors can fuel social hostility and violence that can, in turn, lead to greater support for discriminatory state policies. Additionally, state failure to address social hostility and violence can create a culture of impunity that leads to increased intolerance.

² http://www.un.org/en/durbanreview2009/pdf/DDPA_full_text.pdf