

**OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism  
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**Statement  
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**Session I: Legislative and Institutional Mechanism and Governmental Action,  
Including Law Enforcement**

Mr. Chairman,

The evolution of human rights and freedoms in Albania has followed a difficult path in the recent 13 years since the collapse of the communist regime. From that particular and very important moment in the Albanian modern history, after nearly five decades of totalitarianism, the aspirations of our people were rightly echoed: Albania should become a developed country in the economic context, with a democratic society where rule of law is established. Empowering the mechanisms of human rights protection, through creation of human rights standards, would ensure survival of a prosperous democracy. This has been the vision of our nation in our preparations to the challenge of Euro-Atlantic integration.

The Albanian Constitution enshrines one of the basic principles of democracy that every citizen in the country has the right to live with dignity in freedom; every citizen has a right to aspire for a better life, availability of a large number of opportunities to resort to just and fair means in order to attain that dignity. This is the very foundation of the democratic values which we believe is our civilization heritage and is the very soul of our ancient nation.

Like religious moderation and tolerance, hospitality has long been part of our country's fabric. Together, these traits have created a region in which intermarriages between Moslems and Christians, between Jews and non-Jews and between different races and nationalities have long been one of our society's distinct characteristics.

The peaceful and harmonious coexistence, with no strife whatsoever, between Albanians and the minorities (Greek, Macedonian, Roma, Montenegrin, Aromanian) that live in our country represent, I should say, an excellent example for the countries region and beyond.

Going back through the ancient history of my nation, let me highlight a few examples of tolerance and non-discrimination, characteristics of our nation and people that at different moments in time, have not only been just interesting words one wishes to hear today. They actually demonstrate an extraordinary courage and bravery which saved thousands and thousands human lives. Let me draw attention to the fact that during World War II, tens of thousands of ex-Italian soldiers deployed in Albania were sheltered and protected by the local population, so that they could return (as happened) safe to their country after the War.

Experience and historic data indicate to a co-habitation without prejudices, either of superiority, or inferiority, between Albanians and Jews for more than two thousand years. This is due to the open character of the Albanian society, the spirit of tolerance that

encourages it, assuring the living dignity of the Jewish community. I take pride in the fact that precisely at the time when, in order to justify anti-Semitism and mass extermination of Jews and when the so-called "international Israeli plot" was hatched up, in Albania, although the political administration was a collaborationist one, no episode of Holocaust support and anti-Semitism was witnessed. Avi Pazner, Israel's first ambassador to Albania has more than once highlighted that, and I quote: "Except for the Danes, the Albanians were the only people in Europe who rescued their country's entire Jewish community", unquote.

In our country, where all religious communities cohabitated peacefully during all the history, Albanians' absolutely high spirit of humanism, affection and heroism I should say in helping the Jews becomes even more extraordinary. We Albanians are proud to state that not only did our country and people protect all their own Jewish community - not a single Jew was handed over, deported or killed in Nazi-occupied Albania - but it also served as a shelter for the Jews coming from other countries during the World War II. Albania's successful saving all of Albania's Jews becomes even more remarkable when compared with what happened to them elsewhere. Consequently, the names of Albanian Moslem and Christian saviors of Jews join those of their Danish and Dutch counterparts as "Righteous Among the Nations" at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem. In Washington, D.C., many of the same names have been cast upon the "Rescuer's Wall" at the U.S. Holocaust Museum. We are very proud of our people and we will continue to be proud of their bravery and self-sacrifice.

Speaking on the crucial moments of the tragic history of the past and the present, let me draw some similarity between the Jewish and the Albanian peoples in general and that of Kosova in particular. I am certain all of you are aware of the extraordinary hospitality displayed by the people and the Government of Albania when, during the Kosova conflict in 1999, more than 500,000 Kosovars fled the province and found shelter in Albania.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me now briefly share with you some of the main legislative and institutional provisions and measures that have been taken in Albania with regard to respect for and protection of religious and other freedoms of the individual. All conditions are now guaranteed for the individual to freely exercise religious belief without being subject to discrimination. Impeding free exercise of religious activity is condemned and punished by law in Albania. Religious institutions have full opportunities to exercise their activity and receive assistance from the Government. This support originates from religious tolerance that traditionally has characterized the Albanian society. Against the phenomenon of religious intolerance that is often observed today in the world, traditionally, a peaceful coexistence has always existed among three main religious communities in Albania - Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic.

Apart from a modern legislation and democratic institutions, the institution of the Ombudsman has been established in Albania for the protection of the rights, freedoms and legal interests of individuals against illegal and irregular actions and non-actions of public administration. Each social group or individual is entitled, through this institution, to be protected from abuses and violations including those based on hatred, racial discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia. The Albanian legislation recognizes and protects the individual and collective rights belonging to national minorities. They have the opportunity to preserve and protect their national identity, traditions, customs, religious belief and their own

language as well. The national minorities enjoy the right to freely express their political will, to be organized in associations and political parties, and actively participate in the central and local government. Of course, in this area, there are still certain unresolved problems of a basically technical character which, in large part, are linked to our real capabilities and capacities to deal with them.

The Albanian legislation, drafted entirely after the democratic changes, has thoroughly embodied the principles and provisions contained in the most important treaties of the UN and Council of Europe, to which Albania is a party. Albania has already submitted a full report pursuant to article 9 of the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Actually Albania has taken very seriously its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and under all of the human rights instruments. Our commitment to protecting and advancing human rights is not just contained and reflected in our domestic and regional policies but also widely so in our domestic and international actions. Let me remind participants in this Conference, Mr. Chairman, to the exceptional direct commitment of Albania, including through troop deployments, in securing peace, stability, human rights and democracy in various parts of world, such as in Bosnia, Georgia, Afghanistan and recently in Iraq.

The Albanian Government's view is that racial discrimination cannot be tackled by government policies only. It requires an extensive consultation and involvement of a broader community. We therefore pursue a very active process of consultations and policy development that seeks to address long-term issues, to change the few remained unacceptable perceptions as well as attitudes and at the same time to watch over the challenges of the future, which could represent potential threat to the interracial and intercultural relations in our country.

I would like to mention here the recent establishment of a constructive and fruitful cooperation between the Foreign Ministry and the Albanian NGO-s dealing with human rights. We consider them as partners of the Government in our common mission to protect and observe the human rights and freedoms in Albania. In this contexts a number of have been and will be organized in this regard.

Evaluating the importance of human rights, attaching a great significance to the respect and improvement of their situation in the Republic of Albania, the Prime Minister issued the Ordinance No. 134 of 5 May 2000, on the establishment of a permanent inter-ministerial working group the prime duty of which is the compilation of the initial and periodic reports on UN human rights conventions. The activity of the working group is led and coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (UN and International Organizations Department).

In concluding, Mr. Chairman, let me assure the Conference that Albania will take all the steps necessary to effectively condemn and combat any manifestation or acts of anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia wherever they may occur and cooperate fully with the OSCE and its institutions, and all the interested NGO-s in order to translate into life the latest Permanent Council decision No 607 on combating anti-Semitism. Thank you Mr. Chairman.