

STATEMENT
UPR Pre-session on Slovakia
Geneva, 14 February 2024
Delivered by: Slovak National Centre for Human Rights

1 – Presentation of the Organisation (1. slide)

This statement is delivered on behalf of the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, a national human rights institution and equality body. The Centre is an independent legal entity, accredited as B-status NHRI, which fulfils a broad range of tasks in the area of human rights and equal treatment in Slovakia.

2 – National consultations for the drafting of the national report

The Centre is not aware of national consultations organized by the Government of the Slovak Republic for the purposes of the 4th Cycle of the UPR.

3 – Plan of the Statement

This statement addresses the following human rights issues: (i) rights of LGBTI+ persons (ii) media freedom (iii) situation of human rights defenders.

4 – Statement

I. Rights of LGBTI+ PERSONS (2. slide)

A. Follow-up to the third review

During the third cycle of the UPR, several countries gave recommendations to Slovakia concerning the promotion and protection of the rights of LGBTI+ persons, including to adopt marriage equality legislation, extending full marriage rights to same-sex couples and to reinstate work on a national action plan on LGBTI+ equality.

B. New developments since the third review

Despite commitments, no national action plan or other strategic framework document for the protection and promotion of the rights of LGBTI+ people has been adopted. Slovakia remains one of the last EU Member States without any form of legal recognition of same-sex couples. Two proposals for legal recognition of same-sex partnership were rejected in the parliament in 2022. There has been an alarming number of legislative attempts further stigmatizing and restricting the rights of LGBTI+ people. These included proposals to introduce the constitutional definition of gender identity as an irreversible concept defined by sex assigned upon birth, to prohibit discussing issues related to gender identity in schools, to exclude the possibility to change the name and surname of a person during or upon transition or to condition the change of a birth registration number (that includes a gender-specific marker) by submitting results of a genetical test confirming the gender of a person concerned. Even though none of these proposals were adopted, they create a hostile environment for LGBTI+ communities. In October 2022, a terrorist attack took place in Bratislava, during which two LGBTI+ people died and one person was injured. Accessibility of complex health care in relation to transition remains inadequate. In November 2023, the Ministry of Health has announced that it will cancel the expert guidance for the provision of health care for gender transition, which puts human rights of trans people at risk. Furthermore, blood donation by gay and bisexual men is restricted in Slovakia.

C. Recommendations (3. slide)

Therefore, we recommend the Slovak Government to:

- a) Adopt a comprehensive action plan for the rights of LGBTI+ persons, which would be a result of a participatory process.**
- b) Adopt measures to improve accessibility of medical transition and legal gender recognition.**
- c) Remove the restriction of blood donations by gay and bisexual men on the basis of sexual orientation alone.**

II. Media freedom (4. slide)

A. Follow-up to the third review

Slovakia received a number of recommendations concerning the protection of rights of journalists, including to take effective measures to guarantee the safety of journalists and prosecute all attacks against them.

B. New developments since the third review

Since the third cycle, no legislative changes to support journalists have been adopted. Slovak journalists continue to face threats and harassment, by both the general public and public persons. A survey conducted in 2023 by the Investigative Centre of Ján Kuciak found that 66.2% of Slovak journalists experienced an attack or threat in the past 12 months, 47% think the number of incidents has increased over the last 5 years and 33,3 % think the intensity of verbal attacks by politicians has increased. The crime of defamation is also frequently used to intimidate and bully journalists and the media.

Recently, the government ceased communication with certain mainstream media that have been traditionally seen as critical to the government. Journalists from the media concerned are still allowed to access the Office of the Government but they are not given responses to their questions. The Centre believes that these steps significantly interfere with media freedom.

C. Recommendations (5. slide)

Therefore, we recommend the Government of the Slovak Republic to:

- a) Adopt legislative measures aimed at increasing safety of journalists and media freedom, including abolishment of the crime of defamation.**
- b) Ensure available and efficient protection of journalists to prevent and investigate threats and violence, including from politicians.**

III. Human rights defenders (6. slide)

A. Follow-up to the third review

There were no specific recommendations given to Slovakia addressing the rights of human rights defenders in the third cycle.

New developments since the third review

The civil society space in Slovakia is “narrowed” with lack of systemic funding and fragmented regulation. Challenges also remain in inclusion of NGOs and human rights defenders in participatory processes and consultations when adopting important legislation and reforms.

According to our research, in particular women and LGBTI+ human rights defenders report on ongoing hate speech from political and religious representatives. Respondents also encounter strong “anti-gender movements” and rhetoric that have been taken up by state administration employees, top politicians and general public. The increasing intensity of hate speech was prevalent during the 2023 parliamentary election campaign. Environmental human rights defenders were also targeted and referred to as “eco-terrorists” by several MP candidates.

In January 2024, the Minister of Culture engaged in hateful slander campaign against LGBTI+ HRDs as “parasiting” on the Ministry’s budget and “sexualizing children”.

B. Recommendations (7. slide)

Therefore, we recommend the Government of the Slovak Republic to:

- a) **Ensure efficient protection of human rights defenders to prevent and investigate threats, violence and other restrictions of rights, including from politicians.**
- b) **Adopt sustainable and long-term institutional and financial support for civil society organizations, including those working on gender equality and LGBTI+ rights.**

Thank you for your attention. (8. slide)