

# Romanian Greek-Catholic Association

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May 13, 2009

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Madame Secretary:

Following your recent meeting with Cristian Diaconescu, Foreign Minister of Romania, I write to call your attention to the unconscionable discrimination against the Greek-Catholic community in Romania in clear violation of internationally recognized human rights guarantees.

In 1948, the communist regime abolished the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania, confiscated its properties and forced our believers to join the Romanian Orthodox Church. Anybody that did not comply with this communist law was persecuted and arrested, and many people, including bishops, priests and believers faced death in prison for their belief. Since the fall of communism in Romania in 1989, after 41 years of persecution, our Church is trying to re-take its place in the Romanian society by serving its believers and by trying to undo the damage caused to the Romanian people by the communist administration.

Over the last 20 years we have struggled to achieve restitution of our properties confiscated by the communist regime so our people can worship God according to their conscience in a proper place, but we are facing continuous hostility from the Romanian Government that does not want to do anything to repair this injustice done by the communist government in 1948.

We supported Romania in joining NATO and UE hoping that, once our country would join them, the democratic progress would take its normal course and Romania would rise to the standards of a real democratic country. Unfortunately, the situation has deteriorated in Romania in recent years, where we have seen an escalation of injustices toward us, a continuous violation of our human rights and civil liberties, people being threatened and harassed for their belief, our properties that were confiscated by the communists destroyed, etc. Furthermore, one of the parties that is currently in power in Romania has proposed a bill in the Romanian Parliament that would grant us fewer rights based on the size of our communities, which have been reduced numerically after 41 years of persecution and an additional 20 years of continuous discrimination. With this bill they are trying to legalize the injustice and crimes committed against our people after 1948 and make it impossible for us to recover any of the properties confiscated in 1948.

Often, while the government delays court cases involving restitution of our properties, those properties are intentionally demolished by representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church with the support of the Romanian authorities, who are either authorizing the demolitions or not doing anything to stop them even if there is a cease and desist order.

At present, our community is heartbroken and alarmed by the ongoing destruction of the Greek-Catholic church adjacent to the "Merry Cemetery" in Sapanta, Maramures County, which is known throughout the

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world for its beauty, uniqueness and the many lighthearted epitaphs that are inscribed on the burial crosses. The majestic, beautiful church built in 1886 is being systematically destroyed, even though there is a cease and desist order that mandates the stoppage of all demolition and work to the church. It is for this reason that we urgently request international intervention to save what is left of the church before it is too late.

We are currently facing a cultural and religious cleansing in Romania, and it is unbearably painful for us to stand by as our heritage is annihilated in this fashion, and our human rights and civil liberties violated in a state where law and justice should prevail.

These and other oppressive activities against us were continuously addressed in the *International Religious Freedom Report* and *Human Rights Report* for Romania of the United States Department of State, but the Romanian Government has not done anything to improve the situation.

Nonetheless, the existence of those reports confirms to us that the United States is committed to pursuing justice for all. Considering that soon other meetings will take place between US and Romanian officials, including a visit from the Romanian President, Traian Basescu, in United States, we ask you to address the issue of the discrimination of the Greek-Catholic community in Romania in any future discussions with the Romanian officials and publicly protest against the violation of the human rights and civil liberties in Romania.

I look forward to ongoing communications with you, Secretary of State Clinton, about these violations of the human rights and civil liberties in Romania today.

Respectfully,

**Fr. Chris Terhes**

President

Romanian Greek-Catholic Association

CC: Other elected officials and community members