

Scholars appeal to U.N. claiming discrimination against ethnic Hungarians in Romanian education

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) _ Academics have appealed to the United Nations in protest of the perceived discrimination against ethnic Hungarians in Romania's education system.

In a letter to U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour released Monday, four Hungarian scholars also asked for help in efforts to expand the number of university faculties for ethnic Hungarians in Romania.

"We are trying to raise awareness about these problems," said Peter Hantz, a lecturer in theoretical physics, during the letter's public presentation in Budapest. "Ethnic Hungarians in Romania have much fewer rights than those enjoyed by other minorities across Europe."

Romania and Bulgaria are scheduled to enter the European Union in January 2007.

"Although Hungarians represent 6.5 percent of the general population in Romania, only 4.4 percent of the students in higher education are ethnic Hungarians, of which only 1.6 percent enjoy the opportunity to study in Hungarian," said the letter also sent to UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education Vernon Munoz Villalobos.

Among other issues, the letter also mentioned the need for faculties for ethnic Hungarians in key disciplines such as engineering, agriculture and veterinary medicine; the lack of promotion of ethnic Hungarian professors; and a tacit ban on the use of the Hungarian language for many university affairs.

There are some 1.4 million ethnic Hungarians among Romania's 21 million people.