

# **FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES NINTH SESSION**

**"Minorities in situations of humanitarian crises"**

**24 and 25 November 2016  
Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva**

## **SUMMARY BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE FORUM**

**Mr Mario Yutzis**

Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 19/23 of 23 March 2012, the Forum on Minority Issues provides a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, as well as providing thematic contributions and expertise to the work of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Ms Rita Izsák-Ndiaye. The Forum identifies and analyzes best practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives for the further implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (hereinafter referred to as "the Declaration").

The Forum meets annually for two days, on a different theme each year. The Special Rapporteur on minority issues is responsible for guiding the work of the Forum, preparing its annual meetings and reporting on its thematic recommendations to the Human Rights Council.

The ninth session of the Forum took place on 24 and 25 November 2016 in Room XX of the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. Mr Mario Yutzis was appointed as Chair of the session, which focussed on **"Minorities in situations of humanitarian crises"**.

Around 500 participants took part in the session, including Member States and specialized agencies, intergovernmental and regional organizations, human rights treaty bodies, national human rights institutions, academics and experts, and civil society actors working on minority issues<sup>1</sup>. The wide range of stakeholders included persons belonging to national, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities who are actively engaged in minority rights advocacy and diverse areas of work related to the protection and promotion of the rights of minorities, as well as experts in the field of humanitarian assistance.

The report of the Special Rapporteur to the 71st session of the General Assembly, dedicated to the situation of minorities in situations of humanitarian crises (A/71/254), as well as a detailed programme of work and a set of draft recommendations, were made

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<sup>1</sup> The list of the organizations and delegations that participated in the Forum is available on the website of the Forum on Minority Issues: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Minority/Pages/Session9.aspx>

available to all Forum participants in advance of the Forum, and formed the basis for the discussions.<sup>2</sup>

### **Format of the Forum**

The Forum followed the procedure developed over its previous sessions. To help focus the discussions and ensure that they would be interactive, each agenda item was introduced by several pre-selected presentations, followed by interventions from other participants based on a sign-up sheet. This year, the panellists were also given the opportunity, time permitting, to answer or comment on the participants' questions and interventions.

### **Outcome documents**

The present document is prepared in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 19/23, which requests the Chair to prepare "a summary of the discussion of the Forum, to be made available to all participants of the Forum". This summary is to be complemented by the outcome document containing the recommendations of the Forum presented by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues to the Human Rights Council at its 34th regular session in March 2017.

This summary does not provide the full details of all presentations that were made during the Forum's proceedings. The consolidated list of speakers and, where available, the full text of their presentations can be found on the website of the Forum at the following address: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Minority/Pages/Session9.aspx>

### **Item I. Opening meeting**

**The Vice-President of the Human Rights Council, H.E. Ambassador Negash Kebret Batora**, welcomed all participants and hailed the unique opportunity that the Forum offers for minority representatives, governments and UN and other national and international entities to discuss and cooperate with each other. He welcomed the session's thematic focus and affirmed that the Human Rights Council, including through its Special Procedures, played an important role in drawing international attention to humanitarian crises in different regions across the globe, seeking to prevent, address and mitigate them. He hoped the Forum would act as a catalyst for action to better prevent and address the impact of humanitarian crises on minority communities. He concluded by recalling the commitment of the Human Rights Council to protect the rights and lives of all individuals who cooperate with the United Nations and its mechanisms in the field of human rights.

**The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein**, acknowledged that members of minority communities are among the most vulnerable victims in situation of humanitarian emergency, both because of pre-existing inequalities that are likely to be exacerbated in crisis, and because of sectarian ideologies that seek to dominate or crush other identities in conflict. He recalled the commitment by his Office

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<sup>2</sup> See A/HRC/FMI/2015/1 and A/HRC/FMI/2015/2 available on the Forum's website.

at the Istanbul World Humanitarian Summit to ensure due attention is paid to the needs of particularly vulnerable and at-risk groups as part of the call for greater collective responsibility for reducing risk and alleviating suffering in humanitarian emergencies. He stressed the importance of placing the protection of the rights of victims at the center of all humanitarian responses. The High Commissioner described the encouraging results of the Human Rights Up Front action plan, heightening the focus of UN protection and prevention in specific human rights crises, and of early warning initiatives, such as the deployment of a “light team” to places of particularly significant human rights concerns. At the same time, he acknowledged that the UN can and must do better, and he hoped the Forum would help to clarify the roles of all stakeholders during emergencies to ensure a coordinated and effective humanitarian response. He also called for stronger involvement of national human rights institutions in humanitarian structures and greater participation of civil society at every level of decision-making.

**The Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Ms Rita Izsák-Ndiaye**, welcomed participants to the 9<sup>th</sup> session of the Forum on minority issues, the last session she would guide in her role as a Special Rapporteur. She had dedicated her thematic report to the General Assembly in light of her observations, during the course of her mandate, that minorities can be disproportionately affected during a crisis or in the aftermath, owing to their minority status. Drawing from her recent visits to Iraq and Sri Lanka as well as from the experience of minority groups such as Roma, Dalits and Muhamasheen, she highlighted a correlation between the impact of crises and minority status. She regretted the lack of data disaggregated by ethnicity, religion and language necessary to adequately map affected groups in crisis and feed into much needed analysis. She raised four specific challenges facing minorities affected by crises: the threat to existence, when minorities are directly targeted during conflict, including violence and xenophobic attacks, restriction on freedom of movement; obstacles in accessing basic services due to marginalization or discrimination; difficulties in claiming housing, land and property rights during and after crises; and equal opportunities and fair participation in return processes and the search for durable solutions. She pointed out that minorities are also more vulnerable to disasters as they may both inadequately prepared for such emergencies, and disproportionately affected by them. Minority communities are less likely to be equal beneficiaries of adequate humanitarian aid and rehabilitation when disaster strikes. She invited all participants to contribute to the draft recommendations, which aim at ensuring that minorities, in particular minority women and girls, are not further marginalized during or as a result of a crisis.

**The Chair of the ninth session of the Forum on Minority Issues, Mr Mario Yutzis**, pointed out that issues related to migration control are putting human rights in the spotlight, with a particularly adverse effect on the rights of minorities. He regretted the restrictive migration policies adopted by a number of States and the growth of sectarian violence, which has led a number of ethnic and other minorities to leave their homes. He stressed that it is essential that governments, international organizations, local bodies and non-governmental organizations work together to protect minorities, protect them from racism, exclusion, and to protect their identities, but also their lives, particularly when humanitarian crises occur. He called for a more holistic approach to improve the links

between humanitarian assistance and development processes and for greater political will to bring to bear the necessary resources to do away with crises. He also affirmed that discourses on security in the face of terrorism had negatively affected the way we deal with our border control, which has become incompatible with the protection of the person.

## **Item II. Legal framework and key concepts**

*This session provided an overview of existing provisions of international human rights law, international humanitarian law, refugee law and disaster law as well as humanitarian principles relevant to non-discrimination and the respect, protection and fulfilment of the rights of minorities in situations of humanitarian crisis. The session explored ways to bridge gaps between international standards and national legislation and its implementation, and reviewed the role of legal and policy frameworks for increasing the accountability of international humanitarian actors towards affected populations, including minorities.*

**Prof. Geoff Gilbert, University of Essex**, remarked that for the vast majority of persons seeking international protection, protection is group-focused, in distinction to the individualized and judicialized process of refugee status determination in the North. He highlighted that the grounds for finding persecution of refugees mirrors the recognized criteria for minority groups in international law. He called for a comprehensive approach to minority protection in international law in times of displacement arising from humanitarian crises. He explored how refugees can themselves represent a minority. He recalled that the principle of non-discrimination embedded in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, in the statute of the UNHCR as well as in the protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 1977, is a fundamental element of international protection of refugees and displaced persons. He emphasized the importance of guaranteeing the right to education for refugees, particularly since many situations of displacement are of a protracted nature. He concluded by stating that upholding minority rights will help reduce the number of minority group members needing to flee and would help guarantee better protection where flight was the only real option.

**Dr Sandra Krähenmann, Geneva Academy of International humanitarian law and human rights**, remarked how the marginalization of minorities can be a structural precondition or be instrumentalized in the lead up to an armed conflict, and can constitute a factor in early warning and conflict prevention strategies. She discussed the impact of armed conflicts on minorities, and how such impacts tend to exacerbate pre-existing challenges that minorities face, and to deepen divisions along ethnic, linguistic and religious lines. Sexual and gender based violence is often employed in a symbolic manner to attack the identity of a minority group or as part of a genocidal strategy. While international humanitarian law does not provide specific protection for “minorities” as such, it does effectively protect minorities via the guiding principle of prohibition of adverse distinction, which applies in the treatment of civilians and in the distribution of humanitarian relief. International humanitarian law does not address the accountability of

humanitarian actors; humanitarian actors do nevertheless have a duty to deliver a principled impartial humanitarian action.

**Ms Christine Knudsen, The Sphere Project**, described how to use legal tenets and tools to bring practical solutions to communities in crisis, including minorities. She presented the work of her organization “Sphere” in this respect, which provides humanitarian practitioners with a manual that seeks to give concrete meaning to the “right to live with dignity” and “right to humanitarian assistance”, by spelling out its implications for humanitarian practice following a rights-based approach. She spoke of the undeniable role of civil society in responding to humanitarian crisis, as it is the combination of formal and voluntary action at the local, national, regional and international levels that provides the best chances for assistance to be provided effectively, efficiently, and delivered in timely manner that responds to the evolving needs on the ground. Sphere standards acknowledge the specific vulnerabilities that may accrue to religious or ethnic minority groups and the specific risks of gender-based violence, which women and girls belonging to minority groups may face. Sphere standards relating to shelter, health, food security and livelihoods all directly or indirectly require specific attention to minority groups. Ms Knudsen concluded by encouraging all to work for stronger application of legal and normative frameworks in practice and to improve the lives of minorities and of all persons most in need.

**Dr Felipe González, Professor of International law and former President of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights**, highlighted a number of Inter-American human rights instruments applying to minorities in situations of displacement, including the American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man, which enshrines the right to asylum, and the American Convention on Human Rights, which, inter alia, recognizes the freedom of movement and residency and expressly enshrines the principle of non-refoulement. He also drew attention to the Cartagena Declaration of the rights of refugees, which was endorsed by the OAS General Assembly and has extended the definition of the concept of refugee, going beyond the definition of the 1951 Convention on the status of Refugees. He highlighted a number of decisions and reports in which the Inter-American Court and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights had dealt with the topics of minorities, refugees, migrants and humanitarian crises. He touched on the issue of displacement related to climate change, acknowledged in the Brazil Declaration of 2014, and on the issue of statelessness caused by gaps in nationality legislation.

### ***Discussion***

The following issues were raised during the discussion under Item II:

- The need for criminalisation of hate speech to avoid escalation of tensions.
- The situation of religious minorities in the middle east, including Yazidis, Kurdish, Christians,
- The need to better recognize the vulnerability of minorities in situation of crisis

- The issue of discriminatory application of laws, and discriminatory practices of, for instance, land grabbing and environmental pollution affecting minorities leading to marginalisation and growth of ethnic tension ahead of crisis.

### **Item III. Preventing or mitigating the impact of humanitarian crises on minorities**

*This session discussed the key factors leading to disproportionate impact of humanitarian crises on minority groups. Participants examined how conflicts could be avoided through minority participation in public life, and how disproportionate impacts on minority communities could be avoided or mitigated through thorough and participative planning and contingency plans as well as trusted channels of communication with minority communities. The participants stressed the need to collect accurate information and data about minority groups to develop plans, including contingency plans. This session also reflected on the responsibility of all States with regard to reducing the phenomenon of statelessness, which often disproportionately affects minorities and increases their vulnerability during crises.*

**Dr Volker Türk, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR**, warned against racism and xenophobia and nationalism, arising in relation to new global migration patterns, and which could affect minority communities in serious ways. He stressed how attention to minority rights was critical to UNHCR's work with asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced and stateless persons and that UNHCR found concrete ways of promoting the principle of non-discrimination at the heart of minority rights. He drew the Forum's attention to the specific situation of stateless minorities, who in most cases have become stateless as a result of discrimination on grounds of race, ethnicity, religion or gender, and find themselves in humanitarian crisis. He reviewed the existing legal framework to prevent and reduce statelessness, including two UN conventions, and presented the UNHCR *#IBelong* Campaign launched in 2014 and aiming at resolving statelessness following a 10-point Global Action Plan. The focus of the campaign for the next 2 years will be on "Equal Nationality Rights", highlighting the benefits to communities and society as a whole associated with recognizing stateless minorities as citizens. Welcoming the Human Rights Council resolution on the right to nationality in June 2016, he also called all UN Special Procedures to draw more attention to the issue of discrimination in the right to nationality.

**Dr Ojot Miru Ojulu, Former OHCHR Minority Fellow, Advocacy officer at the Lutheran World Federation**, drew in his remarks from his personal experience as a minority in Ethiopia during the Gambella conflict. He first spoke to the importance of terminology, as the qualification of "humanitarian crises" can sometimes be discriminatory: he gave the example of "invisible crises", affecting minority communities in a remote region, but not being qualified as such by central authorities. As a result, the population in such situations may be deprived of adequate humanitarian aid. In order to prevent such crises, Dr. Ojulu stressed the importance of minorities' meaningful participation in all decision-making bodies and economic empowerment of minorities. While Ethiopia's federal constitution clearly acknowledges self-determination

and self-governance for ethnic groups and minorities, informal governance systems enabled the government to maintain control over minority regions. He also stressed the reality of development-induced conflict, raising tensions when governments seek to implement development programmes using resources in minority regions without participation or consent. He noted the mutual benefits incurred by agricultural extension programmes and small business schemes, which connect minority entrepreneurs to national and international market opportunities, and encourage peaceful existence among communities.

**Ms Sara Sekkenes, Conflict Prevention Advisor at the United Nations Programme for Development, UNDP,** remarked on the increasingly protracted nature of humanitarian crises, which entrench situations of vulnerability and can exacerbate situations of discrimination. She acknowledged that such complex challenges could only be addressed by strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus as well as human rights. She welcomed the Sustainable Development Goals, which affirm that no one must be left behind and recall the need to address development imperatives also in crises settings, including public services, schooling, health, employment and meaningful participation in community life. She highlighted that this work is key to further the promotion and protection of human rights of minorities. Though it does not have a normative or monitoring human rights mandate, UNDP believes that as development actors, its role is to address the root causes of conflict and these are often connected to the enjoyment of basic and fundamental human rights. UNDP developed together with the OHCHR and Minority Rights Group International a Resource Guide and Toolkit on Marginalized minorities for use in development programming.

**Ms Erlendy Cuero Bravo, Vice-President of the National Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians, AFRODES,** talked about the differential impact of the Colombian conflict on Afro-Colombians. She recounted her personal experience of the conflict as a child in rural Colombia, in which her father and several members of her family were killed and her family was subsequently displaced to urban areas. She highlighted that the statistical and cultural invisibility of minorities is an issue that needs to be addressed *before* humanitarian crises strike. Delayed inclusion of ethnic variables in the public census, racial discrimination entrenched in public institutions, and extraction of natural resources without regard to local communities, all had exacerbated the impact of the conflict on Afro-Colombians, deepening their situation of exclusion. Although laws and policies consistent with many international standards are in place in Colombia, financial and technical resources are lacking to ensure adequate implementation of these standards and the effective protection of minorities.

Protecting women in conflict, particularly from sexual violence, should she said be made a top priority by establishing care protocols that recognize the particularities of Afro Colombian and indigenous women. Prevention programmes to protect children from consumption of drugs and from being recruited into armed groups and criminal gangs are also important. The adoption of programmes for personal, family and community development is a priority. Strengthening government institutions and the autonomy of communities are crucial to the protection and restoration of rights of minorities affected by a humanitarian crisis.

## ***Discussion***

During the discussion under item III, the following issues were raised:

- the importance of setting up early warning systems, monitoring the human rights situation of minorities, in order to prevent escalation of conflicts.
- the situation of Muslim minority in Myanmar.
- the national efforts to guarantee peaceful coexistence of diverse components of societies.
- the absence of human rights, and denial of minorities linguistic and cultural rights, and lack of participation of minorities in decision making processes can eventually lead to a humanitarian crisis.
- the situation of Roma in conflict zone in Ukraine.

## **Item IV. Protecting minority rights during crises**

*This session identified some of the needs of minorities, including the specific needs of minority women and children, during humanitarian crises and assessed the risk they run of suffering disproportionately from the impact of such crises. Participants reflected on various factors that perpetuate the disproportionate impact of crises on minorities and discussed the need to develop more targeted strategies and to increase aid and security investments to better meet the specific needs of minorities. Participants exchanged about ways to ensure that minorities are not discriminated against in the process of delivering humanitarian assistance, and addressed the wide range of situations in which minorities can find themselves during a humanitarian crisis, including being forcefully displaced, trapped between conflict lines, dispersed or forced to flee to another state to seek international protection or to fulfil a life that is no longer sustainable in their fractured societies.*

**Ms Michele Klein-Solomon, Director of the Migrants in Crisis Initiative, International Migration Organization (IOM),** spoke of the State-led “Migrants in Countries in Crisis” Initiative, an initiative engaging international organizations, civil society organizations and private sector to look at the risks and vulnerabilities that migrants experience when crises occur, and look at what can be done to reduce vulnerability, enhance protection and promote solutions. The particularities of migrants throughout the three phases of a crisis is directly analogous to the situation of ethnic, national, religious and linguistic minorities going through crisis. Migrants, as well as other forms of minority populations are not accounted for in disaster response planning, and while nationals, as a majority population, will be affected by a crisis situation, minorities like migrants will experience additional barriers and vulnerabilities because of their unique characteristics. Such barriers include language barriers, cultural differences, lack of cultural connection with authorities, and unclear legal status, all of which thwart the possibility to come forward in a crisis situation and identify themselves for protection and assistance. Following consultations on good practices in six regions, a series of core principles emerged, providing targeted measures to overcome barriers, key principles as well as guidelines addressed to the pre-crisis preparedness phase, to the actual emergency



phase, and to the post crisis response and reconstruction phase. IOM also created a repository of more than 300 good practices garnered from States, civil society, international organizations and from the private sector with the idea that by learning from the ground up, it would be possible to share good responses and do a better job collectively at protection and assistance.

**Dr Chaloka Beyani, Professor of International Law at the London School of Economics and former UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of Internally displaced persons,** noted that most of the displaced populations in humanitarian situations in the world today are persons belonging to minorities. Vulnerability to displacement in the context of humanitarian crises may be heightened by discriminatory policies or practices affecting minority communities, as well as by other factors such as intercommunal disturbances, interfaith tensions and business activities and extractive industries displacing minority populations from their lands. The displacement of minorities in humanitarian crisis situations warrants greater research and data globally to reveal the full impact of displacement on such communities, as well as regional trends, patterns and dynamics of displacement involved. The collection of data disaggregated not only by sex and age, but also by ethnicity and religion, would help predict and prevent displacement targeted against certain communities and would contribute to much needed risk assessment and early warning mechanisms. Arbitrary displacement based for example on ethnic cleansing and racial discrimination is prohibited. As Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internationally displaced persons, he had noticed that persons belong to minorities he met in situation of displacement were often among the poorest, and may have experienced different forms of marginalization prior to displacement. Minority members often lacked the necessary documentation to obtain housing, or retain land and property, and women and children faced specific challenges due to intersecting forms of discrimination. He also commented on the lack of opportunity for minorities to participate in decisions affecting them, the complex issue of return for minorities who may face continuing harassment upon return, and the sensitive issue of local integration and settlement. In his view, the system of protection of IDPs in practice is oblivious to the importance of protecting the characteristics of minorities during displacement.

**Ms Laura Ronkainen, Joint Internally Displaced Persons Profiling Services (JIPS),** presented the work of JIPS, an interagency service that supports governments, humanitarian and development actors on profiling, collaborative data collection and analysis in displacement situations to inform evidence-based responses. She talked about the difficulty to obtain disaggregated data on minorities in the context of humanitarian crisis, because the need for such data might be overlooked by actors, but also because minorities may be a sensitive topic in some situations. She explained how collecting information about displaced persons' clan, religion or ethnicity could be perceived as aggravating existing tensions and could discourage certain stakeholders to take part in the process. Ms Ronkainen believed however that improving the practice of collecting and analyzing data in a way that captures minority populations is at the core of overcoming humanitarian challenges, finding durable solutions to displacement, and building and sustaining peace. She explained the technical tools and methodologies that characterize

the profiling process, building consensus around the results with all stakeholders and making sure sensitive issues are explicitly discussed from the start. Profiling aims to give a voice to various groups affected by a humanitarian crisis and aims at moving away from general assumptions about people's vulnerabilities, needs, strengths and priorities. She explained how profiling aims at establishing two-way communication with communities by presenting findings and conclusions to them, and receiving their feedback and suggestions. Profiling process should always have such an accountability mechanism, but this is unfortunately rarely prioritized.

Finally, while specific data and analysis on minorities in situations of crises is needed, consideration should be given to how it is collected and for what purpose. Data collection in humanitarian contexts should result in actionable information for improved protection and assistance for the populations concerned. People have a right to decide not to identify themselves as members of a minority group, and data collection systems must be implemented in a way that ensures people of different backgrounds have the opportunity to voice their concerns and access assistance on the basis of need, without discrimination.

**Dr Farah Mihlar, minority rights expert**, referred to her personal experience having worked in Sri Lanka in 2009, at the end of the country's three-decade armed conflict, and posed the question of protection measures for minorities in the event that a humanitarian crisis is caused by attacks against minority populations. She stated that the minority dimension in humanitarian crises is often ignored or denied, due to the nature of the crisis and the urgency for swift response by stakeholders. Dr. Mihlar urged Governments and international agencies to adopt a minority-rights approach to humanitarian crises, taking into account multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination to which minorities may be subjected. She presented a number of examples of multiple discrimination faced by Tamil women in the context of the Sri Lankan armed conflict, including violations of cultural and religious rights. She highlighted that the effects of a humanitarian crisis on minority populations do not cease once the crisis is over, as mental, emotional and physical trauma may remain; she recommended a holistic approach to address such effects.

### ***Discussion***

During the discussion under item IV, the following points were raised by the participants:

- the issue of forced displacement due to environmental crises caused by human activity, such as oil spills.
- some minority representatives regretted that in certain countries the government does not recognize a humanitarian crisis as such when it only affect minorities.

### **Item V. Recovering from crisis: ensuring durable solutions**

*This session examined challenges faced by minorities seeking to return to a situation of normality after a crisis has ended, for example when returning to their place of origin, when finding a new place to settle after displacement, when seeking to relaunch local economic development and social services after protracted isolation, when reclaiming properties and goods after a crisis or when reskilling and seeking a new occupation in a new environment. Participants stressed the importance of keeping minority communities actively engaged in consultations to determine their best possible options for return or to*

*identify priority areas for post-crisis assistance. Minority participation was recognized as key to preventing minorities, including women, children, older persons, youth, people with disabilities and LGBTI members of minorities, from being socially and economically left behind at the recovery stage of crises.*

**Mr Andrew Wyllie, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA),** emphasized that conflict and displacement can affect individuals in different ways depending on factors such as age, gender, and ethnic, linguistic, social, religious and other backgrounds. He stated that certain groups of persons, such as minorities, may face multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination and are more often marginalized within communities and less represented in formal decision-making structures, resulting in their specific concerns being overlooked in needs assessments and in aid programming and delivery. He referred to key areas of progress, including that humanitarian agencies have already developed policies, tools and approaches to address the special needs of minorities and to reduce discrimination through particular methods of data collection, assessment, communication and monitoring. In this regard, he recalled the IASC Principals' *Statement on the Centrality of Protection* (December 2013), which recognizes that identifying at the very outset of a crisis who is at risk, how the risk affects them and why, is essential. Mr. Wyllie also addressed a number of areas that yet require targeted efforts to combat discrimination and exclusion at all stages of the humanitarian programme cycle. He highlighted the need to engage minorities more often and more deeply in our assessments and monitoring; to collect data that is disaggregated by sex and age, and where possible by other factors such as ethnicity, language and religious affiliation; to include minorities in prevention, preparedness and disaster risk reduction efforts at the operational level; and to ensure that minorities are benefiting equally from assistance and receiving the resources they need to rebuild better after emergencies and to protect them from further marginalization.

**Ms Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights of internally displaced persons,** noted that many IDPs around the world belong to minorities and have fled their homes for a variety of causes. She focused her presentation on the topic of achieving durable solutions for minorities in the context of humanitarian crises. She stressed that due attention should be given to the specific reasons for the displacement of minorities, particularly in relation to discrimination on the grounds of their minority background. She referred to the criteria for the attainment of durable solutions contained in International Standards provided by the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions. She highlighted that States need to pay attention to the protection risks faced by minorities in the attainment of those criteria, simply because of the different needs and cultural sensitivities of minorities who suffer discrimination. She further noted that one of the reports she had co-authored as a government representative reflected on respecting diversity as a strength in addressing the protection risks of minority populations, rather than seeing diversity as a problem. She concluded by drawing attention to the participation of IDP minorities in the context of durable solutions, noting the need to enhance genuine and free political participation regardless of the fact of displacement, as well as the need to be included in the discussion and design of responses to displacement, so the minorities can return, locally integrate or settle elsewhere.

**Ms Erivan Mahdi, OHCHR Minority Fellow and Yazidi activist from Iraq**, testified to the situation of the Yazidis in Iraq, a religious community that has since 2014 been subjected, together with other religious minorities, to what she described as a genocidal campaign by ISIS, which had among other things involved killing, sexual enslavement and forced displacement of thousands of Yazidis, Christians, Turkmens, Shabek and Shiite families. For a community such as the Yazidis, it is difficult to envisage their returning to areas where most of their neighbours have become ISIS followers. She suggested options to create an enabling environment that could ultimately secure a safe return. She suggested the creation of two autonomous provinces to allow religious minorities to manage their own affairs with the support of international community. Second, she recommended obtaining international funds to finance the reconstruction of infrastructure in the districts that had been liberated. She also urged for international recognition of the genocide that took place against the Yazidis and for the UN Security Council to refer the case to the International Criminal Court. She also called the international community to urge the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan region to prohibit hate speech. She called for the international coalition and other troops participating in the liberation of areas under control of ISIS to conduct military operations to liberate the remaining 3669 Yazidis at the hands of ISIS. Finally, she thanked the government of Germany for taking on survivors and urged them to extend their programme to the 1600 remaining survivors living in dire conditions in refugee camps.

**H.E. Dieudonné Cardinal Nzapalainga, Archbishop of Bangui and President of Caritas Central African Republic**, spoke on behalf of the platform of interfaith religion in central Africa, bringing together the chairs of the evangelical alliance, of the Islamic community and of the catholic community, to bring about peace and social cohesion and defend threatened minorities in the war torn Central African Republic. Pursuing the African oral tradition, he explained how they carried out awareness raising campaigns reaching out to women and young people and children, to help find solutions to the issues in the Central African Republic. He asserted that freedom of religion would be an essential aspect for sustainable peace in his country, as the rights of Christian minorities in the North and of the Muslim minority in the South would need to be guaranteed. Places of worship should, he said, be rebuilt so that everyone can live freely. Another important aspect to build peace would be to guarantee safe access to schools and university for minorities, as at the moment, some Muslim minorities did not feel safe to go to University in their own country. In addition, schools could train young people to help their country whatever their religion. He called on the international community to give attention to the situation in CAR, to contribute to efforts to disarm militias, and to help the people of CAR to become a country which enjoys its right to peace, happiness and development.

### ***Discussion***

During the discussion under item V, the following points were raised by participants:

- A number of governments spoke of their efforts in assisting minorities in post crises context.

- Some minority representatives spoke of the situation of inequity in certain recovery processes linked to disaster.
- The notion of burden sharing and the need to develop more predictive systems to face movements of refugees and migrants were raised.
- Some religious minorities described the grave situation they face in Iraq and Syria.
- Representatives of civil society called on the UN to establish a complaints mechanism for minorities and to achieve greater inclusion of minorities in UNDP programmes.
- Some minorities raised the importance of ensuring to returning minorities that the place to which they return is safe and has the necessary infrastructure to allow them to settle again.

**Ms Rita Izsák-Ndiaye, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues,** concluded the session by thanking everyone for their active participation. She shared a few thoughts on the progress and challenges ahead regarding the Forum on minority issues. She recalled that the Minority Forum is a unique platform for disadvantaged, impoverished, and often neglected minority representatives from all over the world to come and have their voices heard, and to offer a reality check regarding whether and how legislation, policies, and international standards that are formulated for better protection of their human and minority rights are functioning in practice. Recognizing that the commentary of minority representatives is in many cases critical of governments and other relevant actors, and that representatives of States and other relevant actors could find this challenging, she urged all participants to uphold a respectful and constructive spirit and continue protecting this open space to freely exchange views even if they are debated.

The Special Rapporteur affirmed her view that the Forum's recommendations had over the years helped deepen international understanding on a number of important and topical areas and provided important contributions to the understanding of international standards and norms including the UN Declaration on Minorities.

She thanked the Governments of Austria and Hungary for their generous support since the very beginning to enable the functioning of the Forum and encouraged other States to provide funding and ensure the Forum's sustainability and progress. She also raised the challenge of ensuring that minorities have effective access to the Forum, and stated that it would be important in the future to give consideration of holding the Minority Forum in different regions so minorities and NGOs who could not afford to travel to Geneva might be able to contribute to the Forum's deliberations in their respective localities.

**Mr Mario Yutzis, Chairperson of the ninth session of the Forum on Minority Issues provided final concluding remarks,** giving thanks that he had had the opportunity to be the chair of the 9<sup>th</sup> session of the Forum. He reflected on the current context of globalization, which has a range of implications for everyone in the world, with the potential for very different impacts on different groups. He remarked on how the media allows people to know about issues in the world, even in places distant to them. He acknowledged that humanitarian crises, especially those related to minorities, cannot necessarily be resolved quickly and will require collective effort. In this process, every

stakeholder must look beyond their immediate situation, and to bring hope to their work. Unrealized potential is a tree that has not yet grown, and he urged all to allow this tree to grow and give its fruits. Recognizing the compelling witness accounts of grave situations that had been presented during the session, he thanked all participants for their trust in him to carry out this role of Chair for the session.