



**Dialogue on the role of the United Nations in preventing and addressing violence and atrocity crimes
against minorities**

24 November 2014, Room XXIII

Palais des Nations, 10:00 to 13.00

Note

The seventh session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues (25-26 November 2014) will address the topic: “Preventing and addressing violence and atrocity crimes targeted against minorities”. It offers an opportunity to examine protection of minority rights as a crucial factor in preventing conflict and in promoting sustainable peace when conflict has occurred. The dialogue organised on the eve of the Forum provides an opportunity for an in-depth discussion on how various UN bodies and initiatives are addressing this issue.

The causes of violence against minorities whether in time of peace, tension or conflict are usually connected to well-entrenched discrimination. Exclusion from participation in political, social, economic and cultural life as well as impunity are some of the factors which result in the vulnerability of minorities to violence. Women and girls belonging to minorities often face multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination emanating from their gender and minority status.

The 1992 Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities constitutes a central reference in protecting minority rights. It asserts in its preamble that “the promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities contribute to the political and social stability of States in which they live”.

OHCHR, through its activities at headquarters and in the field, supports respect for the provisions of the Declaration. In addition, several other UN entities are working to advance minority rights in line with Article 9 of the Declaration, which provides that the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system shall contribute to the full realization of the rights set forth in the Declaration. In order to further strengthen coordination and impact of the United Nations work to address racial discrimination and protection of minorities, the Secretary General established in 2012 the United Nations Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities and issued in 2013 the Guidance Note on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. The Guidance Note sets out guiding principles and framework for UN action with a view to ensuring a comprehensive and coherent approach from headquarters to regional and country presences, including on the theme of the Forum. The Guidance Note highlights that discrimination is often at the root of identity-related tensions that have a potential to develop into crises that could ultimately lead to conflict, forced displacement and, in the worst cases, to atrocity crimes, including genocide. It recalls the concept of responsibility to protect and highlights that Member States have the responsibility to address tensions and discriminatory practices that could eventually lead to the commission of atrocity crimes, and that the United Nations has the responsibility to assist Member States in this regard.

There are several UN mechanisms that pursue important work in this area. For example, early warning and urgent procedures of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination constitute an important tool to bring attention to existing situations requiring immediate attention in order to prevent them from escalating into conflicts with serious violations of international law as applicable to genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

With the Secretary General’s “Human Rights up Front” initiative, the United Nations works also to improve its organizational preparedness to respond through early action to prevent and address violence against civilians,

including minorities. Such violence at times include the killing of civilians, rape and other forms of sexual violence, destruction of homes, property and sites of cultural importance, displacement from lands and territories, and humanitarian crises that result in minorities being deprived of food, shelter, water and sanitation, healthcare and education. Minorities are frequently poorly equipped to defend themselves against violence and poorly protected by State authorities, including law enforcement officials.

The present dialogue offers the opportunity to share experiences as to how various United Nations initiatives have addressed violence and atrocity crimes against minorities and to learn from practices that work in strengthening prevention and protection capacities in various contexts (i) by addressing discrimination and securing effective participation of minorities in time of peace; (ii) preventing violence by facilitating national engagement including with human rights mechanisms when identity-related tensions exist; and (iii) responding to violence in situations of widespread and systematic attacks against minorities during conflict and post-conflict situations. The discussions will serve to identify approaches that work best by examining UN action ranging from human rights advocacy work at headquarters and in the field.

Opening remarks: Ms. Jane Connors, Director, Research and Right to Development Division, OHCHR

Chair: Mr. Antti Korkeakivi, Chief, Indigenous Peoples and Minorities Section, OHCHR

Panellists for session I – Preventing violence and atrocity crime against minorities – Global perspective and role of UN mechanisms

- **Mr. Mark Lattimer**
Executive Director of Minority Rights Group International
- **Ms. Naomi Kikoler**
Deputy Director, Center for the Prevention of Genocide, Director of Policy and Advocacy of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
- **Mr. Patrick Thornberry**
Professor, University of Keele
Former member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

Discussion

Panellists for session II – Preventing violence and atrocity crime against minorities at the country level: Role of the UN and lessons-learned

- **Mr. Neil Buhne**
Director of UN Development Programme Geneva Liaison Office
- **Mr. Kyfork Aghobijian (Participant in OHCHR Fellowship Programme)**
Chairperson of Armenian Church Youth Organization in Syria
- **Mr. Francesco Motta**
Chief, Human rights section of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
- **Ms. Nareen Shammo (Participant in OHCHR Fellowship Programme)**
Independent journalist, Iraq

Discussion

Closing remarks by the Chair

Languages

The side event will benefit from interpretation in English, Spanish, and French.