

**Statement by
H.E. Mr. Martin Ihoeghian Uhomoibhi,
President of the Human Rights Council
at the opening of the 1st session of the Forum on Minority
Issues**

It gives me great pleasure to open the inaugural session of the Human Rights Council Forum on Minority Issues.

At the outset, I would like to welcome the High Commissioner for Human Rights for joining us today, as well as representatives of Member States, national human rights commissions, representatives from the United Nations system, and non-governmental organizations. It is a special pleasure to welcome the many representatives of minority groups from all regions of the world. All of the participants bring a wealth of personal knowledge and experience to this meeting. We look forward to hearing your contributions in a constructive manner with respect to this year's theme, "Minorities and the Right to Education".

First, on behalf of all of us here, let me extend our gratitude to the Independent Expert, Ms. Gay McDougall, for her excellent guidance in the work of the Forum and preparation of this meeting together with OHCHR. Let me also extend my gratitude to Ms. Viktória Mohácsi who has accepted to chair the Forum following her appointment by the Council in May 2008. I am convinced that under her able leadership the Forum will benefit from a constructive dialogue and rich debate which will be reflected in the summary of the discussion, for which she has been made responsible by the members of the Council.

Our gathering today is an illustration of Human Rights Council willingness to provide a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities as an integral part of the development of society as a whole. This includes the sharing of best practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives for the promotion

of mutual understanding of minority issues. Education is an issue which engages us all as we strive to promote and protect the rights of children from all communities, especially the most disadvantaged.

Our gathering today is also recognition for the need to collectively reinforce our efforts to meet the goal of the full realization of the rights of persons belonging to national, or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

The Human Rights Council looks forward to study the thematic recommendations which will be submitted by the Independent Expert in her forthcoming Report to the next session of the Council in March 2009.

Let me conclude by wishing you every success in your deliberations and work and pledging the full support of the Human Rights Council to this endeavour.

Thank you.