

## Rita Iszak Video Message

Madam President, High Commissioner, Madam Chair, your excellences, ladies and gentlemen, It is my sincere pleasure to welcome you to the fourth annual Forum on Minority Issues. I am sorry that cannot be with you in person over the next two days, but I hope that you will understand that I have to fulfil another and probably the most beautiful task in this world – to give life to a new human being. My first child will be born in just a few weeks time. The forum was established by the Resolution of the Human Rights Council in 2007 to identify and analyse best practices, challenges, opportunities, and initiatives for the further implementation of the Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic minorities. Before I share some thoughts on the topics of this Forum guaranteed the rights of minority women, let me take this opportunity to thank and comment my predecessor, Miss Gay McDaugall for dedicated and successful work as the first holder of the mandate of Independent Expert on Minority Issues since 2005 until July this year. As part of her functions as an independent expert, Gay McDaugall expertly guided the sessions of the Minority Forum since its inauguration. Through her inspirational leadership it has been firmly established as a platform for dialogue, networking and exchange of practices and experiences on issues relating to minorities. It is my honour to take over the responsibility and to build on her work and continue guiding the Forum as the newly appointed Independent expert on Minority Issues. This Forum truly offers an essential opportunity to join together to address some of the key minority issues that continue to challenge states and minorities in all regions in a spirit of cooperation and constructive endeavour. This fourth session of the Forum will Focus on concrete measures and recommendations aimed at guaranteeing the rights of minority women. Building on the work carried out during the first three sessions of the Forum and recommendations emanating from that work , this session will focus on the rights and opportunities of minority women to have access to education, take part effectively in economic life, have access to labour markets and participate fully in social, cultural and political life. These are issues of great importance to minority women in every region of the world. I believe that the rights of minority women have not received the dedicated attention that they deserve. It is required to ensure that they fully enjoy all their rights. This landmark event will have to put the issues and concerns of minority women everywhere more clearly on the agenda of the United Nations. A a minority woman myself who aims to be successful both in her professional and private life and who has personally faced the challenges that will be discussed before this session, I particularly welcome the theme of the Forum this year, which will focus on minority women and their rights and opportunities in various fields of life. From my own experience I know that girls and women from disadvantaged minority face unique challenges from the very begging of their lives, that must be recognised and addressed. Not just by governments, NGOs and the decision-making bodies but also by minority communities themselves. Sadly, this century we continue to live in a world where girls from minority groups are less likely to go to school or stay in school than boys. Many girls will grow up with the expectation of early marriage, early childbirth, prescribed roles within their communities, and limited opportunities and prospects for finding fulfilling work outside of them. Poor life and the life of poverty and hardship is the reality of many women as they struggle to bring up their own children and families. Such minority girls and women are made uniquely vulnerable by the circumstances and may even fall pray to such violations of their rights as trafficking and sexual abuse. Minorities may also be deeply affected

by conflict and displacement adding yet other dimensions of vulnerability to the lives of minority girls and women. Yet let me say that despite the challenges facing minority women in all regions, I have frequently encountered women who are an inspiration to all and are working tirelessly for their rights, the rights of their communities, and for equality and non-discrimination in wider society. Some of those women are here, at this forum, to share their experiences and to allow us to learn from their examples. We must fully consider the many challenges facing minority women but we must also celebrate the endeavour of minority women. Their resilience, their innovation, and their achievements and the minority women who have become successful role models in the footsteps of others may follow. This forum provides participants with just such as an opportunity to highlight positive initiatives and good practices for the protection and promotion of the rights of minority girls and women. This Forum offers a unique venue for the representatives of governments, NGOs, expert bodies and minority communities come together to share their views and experiences. I believe that this forum offers many opportunities for all participants. If you represent the government, I encourage you to share any policies and activities that have proved effective for minority women and equally to learn from existing good practices of others that have been successful elsewhere and could be introduced in you country. This might include initiatives to gather data and learn more about the situation of minority women. They maybe initiatives such as a new text book on minorities for schools, the organisation of a public hearing on ensuring women and minority participation in decision-making processes or the establishment of the financial incentives to support enterprises on and led by minority women. If you are a representative of an NGO I encourage you to use this opportunity for a dialogue with your national governments and other experts. To share problems that minority women experience, but also to tell the Forum about the good practices you have experienced. I encourage you to establish networks and do not forget that you have an important role to play in shaping your countries and regions' strategies and policies. Minority experts and representatives of minority communities at the Forum should use this unique platform to make their voices heard and express their concerns and wishes about how to make their status and situation better. You also have the draft recommendations and this is your chance to influence and shape them, so that they can serve your community's best interests. Let me add that you are especially welcome if you are a minority man since you also have an important role to play in bringing home the experience and wishes of minority women and in helping minority men to understand and appreciate the views and recommendations of women. Other expert representatives are encouraged to share their perspectives and reach the Forum's discussions and help it to be as effective and successful as possible. I want to sincerely thank the chairperson of the Forum, Miss Graciela Dixon from Panama who is an attorney and chief justice of the Panama Supreme Court. She also a former participant of the Forum and I know that under her guidance we can be assured of a successful session. Let me inform you that in 2012 we will celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UNDM and several special events and regional commemorations are planned worldwide. I would like to encourage you to share all your ideas with me and the Secretariat of the OHCHR about how to celebrate the adoption of the particularly important document on minorities. I also encourage you to find me page on Facebook where you can easily share your thoughts. I would like to extend my thanks to you for participating in this session of the Forum. And once again, my regrets that I cannot be with you in person. I will be following the proceedings with great interest and I wish you a fruitful and interesting conference. I am looking forward to delivering the Human rights Council a set of

truly valuable recommendations to help to guarantee the rights of minority women. Thank you very much.