

Thank you madam president. In line with the call of the UN secretary general and other distinguished speakers at this forum, I would like to reaffirm my country's commitment to the protection of minority rights and to the principles of the UN Declaration on the rights of persons belonging to national, or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities which we have supported since its inception. We also support the draft recommendations of this Forum and are pleased to report that most recommendations addressed to governments are already carried out in Slovenia. Special measures are in place and funding is provided from the State for the exercise of constitutionally guaranteed rights of minorities. National minorities are directly represented in the local government and representatives of the Italian and Hungarian national community have seats in the national assembly where they have veto power over issues concerning their national communities. We have heard repeatedly the ability to use one's own language is particularly important for the preservation of a separate identity. We agree. That is why the Slovenian constitution stipulates that in municipalities where Italian and Hungarian national communities reside Italian and Hungarian should also be official languages beside Slovenian. The constitution also protects the rights of these two communities to education and schooling in their own languages and in some geographic areas bilingual schools are even compulsory irrespective of their own ethnicity. Regarding recommendation number 21 on the incorporation of minority rights standards and the provisions of the declaration into domestic law, we are pleased to report that Slovenian laws reflect such standards, furthermore at the regional level the declaration has inspired the Council of Europe's framework convention for the protection of national minorities which Slovenia ratified. As an international treaty to which we are a party the convention is directly applicable in domestic law. Madam president as Mr. Aide has done yesterday my delegation would also like to stress the paramount importance to education for promoting tolerance and mutual understanding amongst people of different ethnicity, culture, religion or other circumstances. It is only through raising awareness of the rights we must all respect and the appreciation of the fact that our differences though they are often small at the end of the day enrich our societies, that we might find a way to peaceful co-existence in a spirit of friendship. Minorities need to know how to claim their rights and majorities need to learn how to respect diversity. Translations of the declaration in minority languages may be helpful in this regard. To contribute to this awareness raising my delegation is presenting during this forum in cooperation with Austria an exhibition on cultural diversity in the eyes of the Roma, just outside this room. It is the product of joint work between Roma and non-Roma and we hope it will be a step towards the changing of the often distorted social image of the Roma and strengthening intercultural dialogue. Finally Madam president, Slovenia would like to call on all countries to fully respect their international commitments and obligations in regards to minority protection. I thank you.