

Dear participants of the 7th UN Forum on Minority Issues!

I am the human rights activist from Ukraine – the only place in Europe where the continued widespread violence and atrocity crimes targeted against minorities still prevail, and where the number of casualties of the last six months of civil war amounts to 20 000 people, according to various sources.

First of all, let me thank the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for the efforts to resolve the humanitarian crisis in the East of Ukraine. Unfortunately, the end of this crisis still seems a long way off. Therefore, we would like to call for enhancement of the activities undertaken and building up the international community to end the armed confrontation.

One of the factors that lead to the crisis in the East Ukraine was (is) past and present discrimination against the Russian minority in Ukraine. Public authorities of Ukraine systematically ignored the peculiarities of ethnic and linguistic differences in the country regions. Representatives of the international organisations refused to notice that either. Meanwhile, members of Ukraine's Russian-speaking minority were constantly facing violation of their rights due to discrimination on the basis of language.

Inequitable distribution of resources has formed the economic basis of the interethnic conflict; while a large part of the GDP was being produced in the Russian-speaking industrial regions of the South-eastern Ukraine, the standard of living of the residents of this region was lower than in many other parts of Ukraine.

Nevertheless, the issues of national and linguistic discrimination in Ukraine did not acutely float to the surface at the time. Sociologists reassuringly attributed them to the secondary issues of citizens' concern. The human rights activists saw this situation differently, having a clear understanding that the accumulated problems would lead inevitably to an outbreak sooner or later. The question was only when, and in what form?

After the change of powers in Kiev in February 2014, the hotheads began to claim that Ukraine was moving in the direction of building a mono-ethnic state. Despite the action taken by the public officials to mitigate such extremist statements, the mass demonstrations flooded the Southeast Ukraine, and most importantly, Donbas, the most passionate part of the country. The civil war unleashed.

Unfortunately, the new government has chosen a forceful resolution of the ethnic conflict by declaring the anti-terrorist operation against the Russian-speaking rebels in Donbass. It is only after concluding the Minsk agreements with the active involvement of the OSCE in September this year, did Kiev recognise that there was no military solution to this problem. There is still a lack of a clear programme to stop the violence and atrocity crimes.

We, human rights activists, believe that it is impossible to resolve the Ukraine's crisis without decentralisation of power and redistribution of resources, whatever form it may take: federalisation, autonomy, or other. This would allow the regions to use the actual economic output of their productivity. The right to use minority languages, including the Russian language, on a par with the state language should be guaranteed in all spheres of life in the regions inhabited by the minority language-speaking population.

We also rely on the aid from the UN agencies, especially the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, whose representatives are now working actively in Ukraine, in ending the war and the massive violations of human rights, including minority rights, which are very vulnerable in this armed conflict.