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Closing remarks by Rita Izsák
SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON MINORITY ISSUES

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Opening comments

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Mr Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was a great honour and pleasure to spend these two days with you listening to your statements. I have been deeply moved by the often very personal testimonies of the minority representatives. We heard much that can further strengthen and inspire our draft recommendations and I can not make an attempt to summarize them due to the richness of our discussion and our short time left. I thank you for coming, listening and actively participating.

The statements during this Forum show that there is a great diversity regarding the various challenges of minorities and the existing mechanisms and policies aimed to protect them and it is indeed very difficult to provide recommendations for each situation. But I am convinced that there are some underlying common challenges that all of us need to face and tackle. As it was highlighted during our discussions, the root problems are not police misconduct or inappropriate courtroom regulations per se – it is the prejudice and racism that lead to them. So our real challenge is to change the mind-set of those who carry out violations against minorities because of fear, ignorance, their very own feeling of insecurity or a simple envy of the other. Therefore, I believe that while we will continue working on improving police and judiciary code of conducts, adopt more rigorous policies on hate speech and hate crime, reach out to minorities with scholarships, projects and affirmative action programmes so they will become part of our administration and criminal justice system as law enforcement officers, mediators, translators, prosecutors, lawyers, judges, investigators, prison officers, ministers and presidents, while we make partnership agreement with independent institutions, NGOs and academia to study patterns of discrimination and collect disaggregated data to monitor both challenges and progress, while we continue working with media so they are ready to project objective portrayal of minorities, and while we in this room will get busy convincing our colleagues in our respective countries that all these recommendations make sense at the end of day - we need to do even more. We must look at our school textbooks and make sure what we teach to our children about the “others”, is in line with what the “others” would like to tell them about themselves. We must build a culture of listening and talking to each other by creating community places and spaces where people from various backgrounds can come together and discuss openly. We must develop proper channels of

communication where all of our voices can be heard. So we can realize that our problems, aspirations and hopes from life are the exact same regardless our identity. We want to live with human dignity and in peace. And we must re-built our trust and faith in each other and in our institutions.

I recognize that we live in an increasingly insecure world in which anyone can become a target without having any interest or direct involvement in politics, conflicts or war. Innocent people, mothers going to church, mosque, temple, funeral, wedding, concert, restaurant or for a walk can become a victim of violence, including sexual violence, and incomprehensive, senseless and ruthless attacks. But we should not let us being trapped in simplified narratives and generalizations and start to fear, question and eventually hate our very own neighbours who might look, speak or pray differently. Fear is often forcibly and manipulatively constructed by the media and we must resist that this often distorted picture of reality defines our thinking and our actions.

I hope that you leave this Forum with a positive spirit, feeling enriched and inspired to continue your important work on minority rights. There is a long way to go but I believe the recommendations of this Forum also show us some light and will help guiding us through to improve our justice systems so it becomes just, equal, fair and respectful to the human rights and human dignity of all of us. The Forum is indeed the only place in the UN where we can talk about minority issues so openly, candidly, where minority communities once a year can come for only 2 days to get their voices heard and I do hope that you value this as a special privilege we al have. I thank Member States for listening patiently and having replied in peaceful and constructive manners and also for civil society organizations for speaking in the cooperative and friendly spirit of the Forum.

Let me thank our Chair for his excellent leadership of this Forum, the Secretariat and my team in the background who have been working extremely hard for several months to make this Forum run smoothly and successfully and our interpreters for ensuring that we can indeed not only listened to but understand each other.

With this, I thank you once again for being here and I am looking forward to continuing working with each and all of you for the benefits of minorities worldwide.