

OHCHR Minorities Fellowship Programme (MFP)
Intervention, Agenda #5

Thank you Mr Chair.

I am speaking on behalf of the 12 minority fellows participating in the 2016 OHCHR Minorities Fellowship Programme. This Programme is currently underway and the fellows are present today at the Forum. The fellows represent 11 countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Moldova, Ukraine, Pakistan, Egypt, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iraq and India.

The Fellowship Programme is a comprehensive annual training programme for human rights defenders who belong to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. It is organised by the Indigenous Peoples and Minority Section of OHCHR, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The programme empowers minorities by strengthening the fellows' knowledge of existing human rights instruments and mechanisms. As a result of the programme, former fellows, and their communities and organisations can advocate more effectively at the national, regional and international level for minority rights.

As stated in the draft recommendations of this Forum, minorities should be fully involved in peace building and transitional justice processes aimed at creating stability and avoiding future crises. Former fellows can be actively involved in these processes through the knowledge and skills they have learnt in the Fellowship Programme. They can also be part of the consultation process following a crisis in relation to how minorities wish to re-establish their lives.

For example, a former OHCHR minority fellow is currently working with the Special Advisor for Human Rights in the UN country team in Sri Lanka on transitional justice processes. Another former fellow is assisting the OHCHR country office in Colombia to ensure that afro-descendants and indigenous peoples are included in the current peace process.

Since its inception in 2005, over 130 minority fellows from 53 countries have benefited from the programme.

Mr. Chair, we are very appreciative of the Member States who support the programme through financial contributions and who share good practices with the fellows on how Member States implement international standards on minority rights at the country level. In this respect, we thank Russia, Canada, Kenya, Thailand, Brazil and Austria for their generous support.

The Fellows would also like to thank the civil society organizations, the European Union, the Council of Europe and partner UN agencies that support the programme.

Mr Chair, I conclude by encouraging other Member States to support the programme so that its future is guaranteed. This programme is crucial to supporting the development of minority rights defenders.