



EUROPEAN UNION

Permanent Delegation to the United Nations Office
and other international organisations in Geneva

FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES

Minorities in situations of humanitarian crises

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Item 2 - Legal framework and key concepts

EU Intervention

Mr. President,

The EU is based on the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. Those principles are enshrined in the **Treaty on the European Union (Article 2)**, in the **Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (Article 19)**, as well as in the **Charter of Fundamental Rights (Article 21)** which prohibit any discrimination based on any ground, including race, colour, ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, and membership of a national minority. In recent years, the EU has been working hard to complete its internal legislative framework to fight discrimination, and to protect the variety of cultures and languages, which are enriching Europe.

The EU law on non-discrimination, based on two non-discrimination Directives and **Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia**, ensures that discrimination on grounds of racial or ethnic origin is prohibited in a number of specific fields, and that all EU Member States penalize hate speech and guarantee that a biased motivation of any other offence is taken into account in the severity of the penalties.

In implementing the EU legislation, the EU Member States can rely on support and expertise of the **EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)**, which for instance provides useful data on issues of racism and hate crime. FRA also created a

Fundamental Rights Platform and an interactive web-forum to facilitate the exchange of information between the agency and civil society.

Although legislation prohibiting discrimination against persons belonging to minorities is an absolute prerequisite, on its own it cannot achieve the goal of creating a society which is free from discrimination. Deep-rooted exclusion and marginalization often faced by persons because of their personal characteristics or because of their belonging to minorities may impede them from fully participating and contributing at all levels of society, which is why the EU seeks to improve knowledge about discrimination and to raise awareness among the population both of their rights and also of the benefits of diversity. By way of example, the EU supports an information campaign '**For diversity. Against discrimination**' across Europe to make more persons aware of their rights and responsibilities, featuring public events, awards for journalists and competitions for young people.

Protection of the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities is also integrated into the EU's external action through the **EU Human Rights Action plan 2015-2019**, which contributes to cultivating an environment of non-discrimination *inter alia* through supporting the UN, regional organizations, partner countries', and civil society's efforts aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of persons belonging to minorities. Activities of civil society working on the protection of rights of persons belonging to minorities are also financially supported by the **European Instrument for Human Rights and Democracy**. The EU also fully recognizes the **UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities** as a key reference text on this issue at the global level. We believe that the Declaration will be further developed by interpretation, practice and jurisprudence of domestic and international bodies.

In order to strengthen the overall impact we join forces with the United Nations and other international and multilateral organizations such as the OSCE and Council of Europe.

Mr. President,

We welcome the Forum's focus this year on minorities in situations of humanitarian crises, as it touches upon the very fundamental question of how to ensure protection of those who belong to the most vulnerable and marginalized, and who are in need of primary attention when a disaster strikes.

This principle guides the EU humanitarian aid, which is accorded to victims without discrimination on any grounds, including between or within affected populations, solely according to needs and paying particular attention to the most vulnerable, in accordance with the **EU Humanitarian Aid Regulation and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid**.

We are looking forward to exchanging, throughout the Forum debates, our experience and ideas on how best to ensure protection of persons belonging to minorities in situations of humanitarian crisis, and how best to prevent or mitigate the impact of such disasters on the most vulnerable.