

CLOSING STATEMENT
9th Forum on Minority Issues
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Dear Mr Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to thank all of you for your active participation during this 9th session of the Forum on Minority Issues. As I mentioned in my opening statement, this was a special occasion to me as my term as mandate holder will come to end next July and this is the last time I had the privilege to guide the work of the Minority Forum.

Next year will be the 25th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Minorities and the 10th Anniversary of the Minority Forum so there will be reasons to celebrate and reflect. Please allow me to share a few thoughts on the progress we made and the challenges remaining.

As you came into the room today, you could see some wonderful cartoons that were drawn specially for this Forum thanks to a joint project between OHCHR, the Canton of Geneva and the City of Geneva. They all reflect on equality, diversity and the power structures in our societies. One of them, a drawing from the artist Boligan, shows a simple man in a sombrero next to a podium trying to shout in front of an audience. However, no one pays attention to him as they are all waiting for some Big Man to enter the pulpit and take the microphone. During the discussion, the representative of Austria pointed out that this is what the Minority Forum was trying to change: to provide some staircases for the ordinary citizen to climb and have his or her voice heard. I was touched by his comment and I do believe that he made an important point. The Minority Forum is indeed a unique platform for the disadvantaged, impoverished, and often neglected minority representatives from all over the world to come and have their voices heard. Not only in this room but through our webcast, in front of the entire world too. These grassroots NGOs, activists and minority representatives offer us a reality check. They come with feedbacks on how the legislation, policies, and international standards that are formulated for better protection of their human and minority rights are in fact working for them and whether or not they can in reality change their lives for the better. And surely, the picture is often far from rosy. And they will not shy away from saying so. We must uphold a respectful and constructive spirit and continue protecting this open space to freely exchange views even if they are debated.

The Forum was called into existence to provide a place for dialogue and also to produce recommendations for the considerations of the Human Rights Council. The themes I selected for our annual sessions were perhaps not always classic minority rights areas in a traditional sense but have focused on areas that emerged as particularly concerning or problematic for minorities where they believed that minority rights should be better protected. This was the case for example with the last three forums, focusing on mass atrocities, criminal justice systems and humanitarian crisis. I do believe that through the Forum's recommendations, we have deepened international understanding on these important and topical areas and provided important contributions to the understanding of international standards and norms including the UN Declaration on Minorities.

It is essential to ensure the smooth running of the Forum on Minority Issues. I wish to thank the Governments of Austria and Hungary for their generous support since the very beginning

to enable the functioning of the Forum. I truly hope that there will be more States from all regions, attaching increased importance to this important gathering and demonstrating their commitments to minority rights also by contributing to funding so we can ensure the Forum's sustainability and see it progress. It will be important in the future to give considerations of bringing the Minority Forum into the various regions so those minorities and NGOs who can not afford to travel to Geneva (and we know that only very few actually can) will be able to contribute to the Forum's deliberations in their respective localities. It would also be desirable to extend the 2 days into a longer session so more people can take the floor and the discussions can go deeper and more into the heart of important minority issues and the recommendations that emanate from this Forum.

At the end, all I have left to say is to thank you for all your active participation and support, not only during this 9th session but during my tenure as mandate holder. I was truly privileged to serve in my capacity as Special Rapporteur to guide this Forum. I trust that you will grant my successor the same respect and spirit of cooperation that you so graciously extended to me.

Thank you.