

Madam President,
Honorable Delegates,
Most Esteemed Guests,

It is an honor to be with you in my home country as a representative of 28. Jun to provide you with our expert analysis on minority issues in the Western Balkans as experienced by an international humanitarian organization.

The region has endured multiple conflicts in recent memory which have resulted in forced population movements and left minorities vulnerable. Our inaugural task was to tackle the antecedent stigmatization of local populations by correcting common prejudices. A multistakeholder initiative is difficult to pilot if the population in distress has been widely portrayed as antagonistic—like the Serbs have been—for the past quarter century.

Ironically, today, ethnic Serbs are by far the most discriminated minority in the Western Balkans and face sustained and methodical campaigns which aim to eradicate their culture in Croatia and in the unrecognized state of Kosovo. Serbian minority populations face such extreme discrimination that even humanitarian aid—a universal human right—has been blocked at the border if the designated recipients were Serbian.

However, we remain confident and optimistic as our lobbying of international bodies, like this one, has in some cases forced domestic actors to allow us to do our work free of ethnic bias and religious discrimination. In order for the Western Balkans to move forward from post-conflict recovery the international community, along with NGOs such as ours, have to address the issues through the human rights approach.

We would now like to submit a petition to the Chair, signed by 250,000 people from around the world, which cautions against the legitimization and passive approval of cultural genocide in the Western Balkans as witnessed in Kosovo where 156 Serbian Orthodox Churches were completely destroyed. We implore bodies of the United Nations like UNESCO and the HRC to protect the cultural identity of minorities because it is the anchor of their security.

28. Jun will continue to fight for minority rights in the Western Balkans because in order for us to do our humanitarian work, people of all ethnicities need to be able to live freely and with dignity in a shared homeland.

Thank you.
I yield the floor to the President.