

**Statement by the President of the Human Rights Council to be delivered at
the 11th session of the Forum on Minority Issues on 29th November 2018**

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates and participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to open this eleventh session of the Forum on Minority Issues convened on the theme “Statelessness: A Minority issue”.

At the outset, I would like to warmly welcome and congratulate Ms. Rita Izsak-Ndiaye for her appointment as Chairperson of the Forum and thank her for kindly accepting the important task of chairing this session. She is well known to many of you for her expertise and dedication to the promotion of the rights of minorities. Ms. Izsák-Ndiaye is the former UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues. At the age of 30, she was the youngest expert to be appointed to special procedures. She is currently a member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). I am convinced that her wealth of experience and expertise will guide and inspire the work of this session of the Forum, as it intends to address, *inter alia*, the main challenges faced by persons belonging to minorities in the context of statelessness and to promote dialogue and cooperation in order to identify effective solutions.

I would like to also welcome Dr. Fernand de Varennes, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues who is mandated by the Human Rights Council to guide the work of this important Forum and to prepare its annual sessions. Furthermore, I would like to warmly thank all the representatives from Member States, United Nations specialized agencies, human rights mechanisms and bodies, international and regional organizations, national human rights institutions, as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations, academics and experts present at the Forum today.

The Forum on Minority Issues is a unique platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, and aims to provide thematic contributions and expertise to the work of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues.

The drive for forward thinking and new ideas, experiences and proposals to address gaps and challenges, will be reinforced by this year's theme of the Forum. According to UNHCR, three quarters of the world's stateless populations belong to minorities. The Forum shall analyse practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives in addressing statelessness as a human rights issue, in line with the principles and rights enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and other relevant international instruments. The Forum will do so by, *inter alia*, exploring the interconnections between prevention of statelessness through the promotion and protection of the human rights of persons belonging to minorities. The Forum will also address the main challenges and possible solutions of statelessness resulting from conflicts, forced migration affecting minorities, the challenges of ensuring the right to a nationality, as well as the vulnerable situation of minority women and children who become stateless.

The Forum invites us to constructively engage in the discussions that will take place in this room. The interactive, inclusive and universal character of this Forum is the foundation of its strength and importance. A potential that can be fully realized with the relentless commitment of all those actively engaged in the promotion and protection of the rights of minorities.

I would like to conclude by reiterating the Human Rights Council's deep appreciation for the tireless work of civil society organizations and human rights defenders around the world, often at risk of their own lives and their families. Additionally, I would like to reconfirm the Council's commitment to protect all those individuals who cooperate with the United Nations and its mechanisms against any act of intimidation, harassment or reprisal.

Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish you all a fruitful dialogue over the next two days and invite you to constructively share ideas and experiences with the view to effectively contributing to the formulation of concrete recommendations which will lead to the implementation of tangible legislative and policy initiatives.

Thank you.