

Geneva Institute for Coexistence

On the occasion of the 12th Session of the Forum on Minority Issues, I would like to quickly raise several essential points related to the right of linguistic minorities to education in the world.

“Education, language, and minority rights” are three inseparable and mutually complementary issues. We cannot speak about human rights without guaranteeing free access to education for everyone, regardless of race, language, religion, or any other distinction that would constitute a minority. And free access to education must be understood as access without restriction that respects the mother tongue of minorities.

It is a fact that often an ethnic or religious minority goes hand in hand with the existence of its own language that links all the members of the community. Thus, the rights of linguistic minorities are fundamental human rights that must be respected, particularly in relation to access to education. Because, in fact, education in minority languages is fundamental for the protection and the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity and of the fundamental rights of persons belong to minorities.

Yes, we observe today that this essential right is flouted nearly everywhere in the world. We must remember that in certain countries, the wish to have access to the system of education constitutes a serious criminal infraction that risks imminent imprisonment or worse.

Finally, although we hold in high regard the efforts of various United Nations bodies in promoting education and encouraging governments to respect minorities in their education policies, we would like to use this occasion to remind everyone that there is still work to be done, because education is life, and life is education.

Thank you.