

Thank you Madame, Co-Chair of the Forum.

Madame High Commissioner, Mister President of the Human Rights Council, Mister OSCE High Commissioner for Minorities, Excellencies and delegates of permanent missions, distinguished panelists and delegates, ladies and gentlemen, hello and welcome to the 12th Forum on Minority Issues.

This morning, I will alternate between the language of Moliere, French, and that of Shakespeare, therefore I will ask the participants to have their earphone in hand to listen to the interpretation if needed. We also have interpretation in sign language. This may be surprising, but those who use sign language can also constitute linguistic minorities as sign languages, it must be clear, are completely different languages, with their own cultures. Moreover, we are thrilled to have for the first time in the history of the Forum a member of this minority among the experts of the first panel this morning.

It is an honor and a pleasure for me to participate for a third time at the UN Forum on Minority Issues as the Special Rapporteur and to be able to meet and speak with a good number of you over the next two days.

[Merci Madame la co-présidente du Forum.

Madame la Haut Commissaire, M. le Président du Conseil des droits de l'homme, Monsieur le Haut Commissaire de l'OSCE sur les minorités, Excellences et délégués des missions permanentes, distingués panélistes et délégués, mesdames et messieurs, Bonjour et bienvenue au 12^e Forum sur les questions relatives aux minorités.

Je vais alterner ce matin entre la langue de Molière, le français, et celle de Shakespeare, donc je demanderais aux participants d'avoir en main l'écouteur pour l'interprétation au besoin. Nous avons également de l'interprétation dans une langue des signes. Cela peut surprendre, mais celles et ceux qui utilisent les langues des signes peuvent également constituer des minorités linguistiques là où ils se trouvent puisque les langues des signes, il faut être clair, sont des langues à part entière, avec leurs propres cultures. Nous sommes d'ailleurs ravi d'avoir pour la première fois dans l'histoire du forum une membre de cette minorité parmi les experts du premier panel de ce matin.

C'est un honneur et un plaisir pour moi de participer une troisième fois au Forum de l'ONU sur les questions relatives aux minorités en tant que Rapporteur spécial et de pouvoir rencontrer et discuter avec un bon nombre de vous dans les deux prochains jours.]

Language is everything – it is power, it is identity, it is opportunity. It is who we are in community with others.

And yet around the world minority languages, and particularly indigenous languages, are disappearing at an accelerated pace. It is often not because of natural factors, but because there have been over long periods of times measures, policies, practices and laws that have not allowed these languages to be used in education, and even directly and quite intentionally prohibited to be used in most areas of public life.

Those days should be gone, because minorities like everyone else have fundamental human rights, and as we'll be hearing these can have significant consequences in the area of the language used in education. While we can and should be critical when these are not fully recognised and applied, we should be looking more towards the future and be offering recommendations, and good practices in different countries, on how and also why language in a child's own language can in the end be beneficial for everyone – even society at large in terms of the economy, development, unity and stability.

Mister President, in terms of research in the field of learning, it is widely accepted that education in the language of the child is likely to lead to better school results, including in relation to learning the national language and other languages. The majority of children will remain longer in school, have more success in their classes, and, on average, feel more at ease, better understand and appreciate education carried out in their own language, and finally be better equipped to be able to learn other languages, including the official or majority language of their place of residence. To be clear, it is also probably the best way to ensure quality education for all.

[Monsieur le président, au niveau de la recherche dans le domaine de l'apprentissage, il est largement acquis que l'enseignement dans la langue d'un enfant est susceptible de mener aux meilleurs résultats scolaires, y compris pour ce qui est de l'apprentissage de la langue nationale et de d'autres langues. La plupart des enfants vont demeurer plus longtemps à l'école, mieux réussir leurs cours et en moyenne se sentir plus à l'aise, enfin mieux comprendre et apprécier l'enseignement qui se fait dans leur propre langue, et enfin être mieux équipé pour pouvoir apprendre d'autres langues – y compris la langue officielle ou celle de la majorité où ils vivent.

C'est aussi, pour être clair, probablement la meilleure façon d'assurer un enseignement de qualité égal pour tous.]

If we really want quality education for everyone, if we truly believe no one should be left behind, then as much as possible education should be in the language of children in order to be truly inclusive, and give them the skills in their own language but also the majority language as we'll be hearing. Even the World Bank acknowledges this, indicating in one of its reports: "The largest single predictor of exclusion from education is when instruction is not in the language of children"

If we truly believe that we not only tolerate other languages, but respect, embrace and be inclusive, then minority and other languages must be use in education, but also in other areas of public life and for effective access to services and other areas. It is also a human rights issue, which the 2017 practical guide of the United Nations on the Language rights of linguistic minorities also makes clear I believe. For those who may not be aware of this document, it is available in the 6 languages of the United Nations on the website of the mandate of Special Rapporteur. In terms of the implementation of human rights standards, it makes the following general conclusion:

Where there is a sufficiently high numerical demand, public education services must be provided in a minority language to the appropriate degree, broadly following a proportional approach. This includes all levels of public education from kindergarten to university. If demand, the concentration of speakers or other factors make this not feasible, state authorities should as far as practicable at least ensure availability of minority language teaching. In addition, all children must have an opportunity to learn the official language(s).

The 4 panels of the Forum will explore some of the most significant areas of concern in relation to the place of minority languages in education. Each of these will be further explored after this session, but I would like to repeat that respectfully accommodating linguistic diversity is a hallmark of an inclusive society, and one of the keys to countering intolerance and racism. Inclusive education is also intimately connected to human rights obligations in that it involves equal learning opportunities for all, including speakers of minority languages, without any discrimination.

Please keep in mind that we are here to enter into a dialogue between all participants, state representatives, international organisations, and others to not only identify the problems and their consequences, but to try to suggest ways and make recommendations on the importance to recognise and accommodate minority languages in education as far as is practical, identify how this has been addressed effectively in practice in a number of situations. There are many cases around the world where minority languages are not only taught but also used as the main language of instruction in education, even including tertiary level education where this is reasonable and feasible. Instead of being a factor of division or exclusion, it can in fact be clear acceptance that linguistic minorities are full fledged members of society and encourage their participation since their languages and cultures are also accommodated as part of the reality of social life, and be conducive to harmony and stability.

I would invite you also to take into account the recommendations which we have already received from three regional forums which have been organised thanks to the assistance of the Tom Lantos Institute and many other organisations and networks too numerous to name in Asia, Africa, the Middle east and Europe which are accessible right now on the website of the forum and a searchable online tool for minority rights protection and documentation called **Minority Forum Info**.

I hope, I am convinced, that this Forum will generate better understanding and perhaps approaches and opportunities in these trying times for many minorities around the world. Many of you, governments, committed individuals working with international human rights or organisations are committed to the universality of human rights – including the promotion and the protection of the human rights of minorities. Help us, work with us during this forum's discussions with ideas and suggestions that could be used in finalising this forum's recommendations on how to make the world a better place for many of its most vulnerable and marginalised.

I look forward to your insights and suggestions, and wish you fruitful – and I am sure very animated – discussions and exchanges.

But before I do that, in the last minutes of my time in this session, I wanted to share with you another aspect of why what you will be doing here is important. Languages are fundamental to what makes us human. Minority languages, all languages are part of the beautiful tapestry that is the reality of our human diversity. They are the holders of history and culture, memory and identity, the cement that binds individuals and community.

This is something that must not only be tolerated, but accepted, embraced and celebrated. So let us celebrate the beauty of our linguistic diversity with a song in a language most of you have never heard before. It is a song in a Romani language. Roma's are one of Europe's largest minority, but they are also in other parts of the world including in North and South America. Do not worry, I will not be doing the singing.

Mister President, with your permission, I will ask Mrs. Aline Miklos, who is a member of the Roma minority in Brazil to take the microphone to sing us a song in her beautiful language before giving you the floor.

I wish you fruitful discussions.

[Monsieur le président, avec votre permission, je demanderais à Mme Aline Miklos, qui est membre de la minorité Roma au Brésil de prendre le micro pour chanter à ma place une chanson pour nous rassembler, une chanson dans sa belle langue avant de vous céder la parole.

Bonnes délibérations.]