

14th Forum on Minority Issues

Conflict prevention and the protection of the human rights of minorities *Towards a lasting peace; positive initiatives to better protect the rights of minorities to prevent conflicts*

Statement by the
Republic of Croatia
2 - 3 December 2021

Madam Chair, Special Rapporteur de Varennes, Excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

We welcome the organization of four regional forums on the topic, as according to **our experience, regional organizations have the greatest potential to bring stability** in their respective regions.

Since its independence, **Croatia has been continuously strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights of its 22 national minorities**; the largest number of constitutionally recognized national minorities in Europe. **Croatian Government is proud to enjoy the support of national minorities which are a coalition partner** forming the current Government. For example, our Deputy Prime Minister in charge of human rights and rights of national minorities is a representative of Serbian national minority.

We have come a long way from the early 90's when the war raged on our territory leaving dire consequences on human lives and livelihoods, but also fostering an analysis of its various aspects, including early post-conflict division of society based on ethnic and religious grounds.

Since the beginning of the war, Croatia began developing an institutionalized response to the increasing number of casualties and missing persons in the country. One of the most important lessons is that casualty recording is not just about documenting victims but rather about acknowledging each person's identity and fate, regardless of their status, including ethnicity. This in turn can contribute to reconciliation and the peaceful coexistence of people.

While thousands of cases have been resolved, **Croatia is still searching for 1853 missing citizens, which remains a priority for my Government.** In order to relieve families of the torture of not knowing their fate, **sharing of information, including from State archives, is of the utmost importance.**

Ensuring accountability for all crimes, accepting the facts established by international human rights mechanisms and tribunals and refraining from glorification of war criminals aids in prevention of conflicts. Responsible political leadership and non-discriminatory legislation related to benefits and reparations is yet another good example.

Madam Chair,

Bearing in mind that ethnic diversity and mutual respect among national minorities are of the highest importance for a democratic society, including for the peace and stability in the region, Croatia has been continuously working to ensure the highest standards in this field. We have successfully created a **society in which minorities have the right to eight representatives in the parliament and are entitled to be a part of representative and executive bodies of local and regional self-government units.**

Our legal framework ensures the exercise of a broad range of national minority rights, including the use of minority languages and scripts, including the opportunity to be educated in one's language. Use of minority emblems and symbols, respect for the freedom of association and religion, free expression of ethnicity and allocation of funds to national minority associations for their census campaigns during the state wide census, the most recent in 2021, are some of the examples.

In Croatia, minorities have **a strong voice in the political and public life, while enjoying cultural autonomy carried out by civil society organisations, financially supported by the State.** Full implementation of all rights and freedoms, including **equal treatment of national minority members,** ensured they know they are an equal and valuable part of Croatian society that in turn is the best conflict deterrent.

Thank you.