

Oral Statement

Forum on Minority Issues- “Conflict Prevention and the Protection of the Human Rights of Minorities”

2nd – 3rd December

To begin with, SHRG among many other civil societies have noticed how each forum will emphasise the role and responsibilities of civil societies to protect Human Rights. We agree. We also commend that the Forum on Minorities makes an effort to hear minorities across the world through regional conferences. However, we do believe that the UN in general also needs to create a more constructive and interactive engagement with civil societies from various backgrounds and regions. For instances in this conference, we are talking about the need to protect the human rights of minorities, so we need ensure that we hear from these civil societies who are representing minorities over all areas and in all conferences and take their recommendations further and working with them more effectively. This is something we have also brought up at Human Rights Council and will continue to do so.

We at SHRG, along with over 50 other NGOs and activists globally, suggest that a significant step towards lasting peace would be the adoption of a Declaration on Diversity. We recognise the disparities between diversity and minority issues and how the definitions differ. However, where we believe this declaration will overarchingly address these different issues in combination and fundamentally play a role in Conflict Prevention and the Protection of the Human Rights of Minorities is by challenging the universalistic narrative we are all subjected to, and rather start to look at things with a more pluralistic mindset.

Minority issues/ inequalities exist in some states, but not all, because of the hegemony by one civilisation or society who hold the idea that there is one society that is superior and above all others. This is evident within the UN’s universalistic approach in its legalistic choice of words and in its approaches to find peace. We continue to seek peace while looking at the world through the gaze of one civilisation and therefore are enforcing this mindset that minority people should be asking for rights. This is the default approach, reiterating this idea that one community is above another and has the gift or power to grant recognition or respect to the minority

This Declaration on Diversity will challenge how the UN and societies work and view diversity and consequently people who are minorities with respect rather than forced into seeking rights and respect. It will use pluralistic language to ensure it is talking from a more inclusive perspective rather than through the gaze of one society. If we do not challenge the language we use and address how it is universalistic then conflicts will still occur. Minorities within the state will continue to be targeted, marginalised and fall victim to the heinous crimes as they are in many countries, both democratic and non-democratic, particularly in populist politics. Even

at the highest level at the UN, we unwittingly continue to strengthen hegemony and marginalisation through ne universalistic approach.

The most prominent conflicts that exist today are internal or transnational by communities rather than between nation states. This is because certain communities feel marginalised and are not treated equally- we acknowledge there are a number of UN conventions that exist to make states give rights to minorities and while we acknowledge the progress that has been made, the fact is that tensions still exist, and conflicts still exist between minority communities and larger majorities. So, we need to complement the existing declarations and conventions with other approaches, non-threatening, more encouraging and inclusive approach which will come from the adoption of a Declaration on Diversity.

The Declaration will do what all the speakers are saying needs to happen to prevent conflict and protect the Human Rights of Minorities. The Declaration will persuade states and society to embrace diversity and push for people to co-exist with one another rather than just tolerate.

As the Special Rapporteur said in the Asia- pacific Regional Forum in September, we are creating a world that is viewing equality as trying to treat everyone as identical rather than recognising people's differences and ensures that their cultures and worldviews are accepted, accommodated for and protected. This is pluralism. We do not see enough of it in the UN, in States and other international institutions. This declaration will encourage States to bring attention at the UN to the programmes they have adopted to pro-actively and positively make its population comfortable with minorities and diversity. The world community can work together to further take forward the work of its many agencies in the field of inclusion.

The only way to truly address gaps in human rights mechanisms to protect minorities and prevent conflicts is by introducing a declaration that recognises all minorities and marginalised groups, a declaration that will encourage states and societies to proactively celebrate diversity amongst humankind and encourage people to live in coexistence rather than merely tolerate, or worse let them suffer and be targeted in times of conflict and civil unrest. If there is acceptance of minorities for what they are, it will reduce tensions and conflicts.