



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities

Opening Address

by

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During the

UN FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES
ON CONFLICT PREVENTION
AND THE PROTECTION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS
OF MINORITIES

[Check against delivery]

Video message – 2 December 2021

Dear Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues,
Distinguished Madame President,
Dear members of the Human Rights Council,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and honour to address you during the 14th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues, which is dedicated to a topic that lies at the heart of my mandate - Conflict Prevention and the Protection of the Human Rights of Minorities. I would like to thank a dear friend and partner of my Institution, the UN Special Rapporteur Dr. Fernand de Varennes, for the invitation. Only this year, we already joined forces to organize a couple of events that highlighted the most important aspects of conflict prevention and minority protection, including the effective inclusion of minorities and the critical role of their socio-economic participation.

Today, let me share with you some ideas on what I consider is essential to **build strong, cohesive and prosperous societies** that can contribute to maintaining sustainable security and peace in the OSCE region and beyond. I believe we can all agree that prevention is better than cure, and that taking proactive measures to prevent conflicts is more effective in the long run than implementing measures to counter the consequences of a conflict that has already taken place. Thus, preventing conflict is an integral part of the security dimension of the OSCE, and the cornerstone of my mandate. As stipulated in the *Copenhagen Document* of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE/OSCE): “full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the development of societies based on pluralistic democracy and the rule of law are prerequisites for progress in setting up the lasting order of peace, security, justice and co-operation (...) in Europe.”

I would like to emphasize that in my mandate, the **human rights-oriented approach to minority protection has been set into a security context** for a very important reason. From my mandate’s perspective, an inclusive, cohesive and peaceful society cannot operate without having an adequate system in place to protect minorities – one in which minorities feel they are equal, and fully respected members of society. This system requires the existence of interrelated building blocks consisting of, among others, the right of minorities to their own identity, to have their languages, religions and cultures respected, to have integration without

forced assimilation, and to enjoy the principle of substantive equality, including participatory rights. My **approach and the experiences of successive High Commissioners on National Minorities have been systematically documented** and published in nine sets of thematic guidelines and recommendations which are available on our website. They reflect policy areas that States should have at heart when constructing a comprehensive framework for minority protection – linguistic rights, education, access to justice, policing in multi-ethnic societies, effective participation in public and political life, and more.

Today's forum provides not only a platform to discuss the human rights of minorities in conflict prevention contexts, but also constitutes a **unique opportunity for member States to share their own positive experiences and initiatives** – which can, in turn, serve as good practices for others. I am especially pleased to learn that a **gender perspective** will be integrated in our discussion, taking into account the particular vulnerability and marginalization of minority women in conflict and post-conflict contexts.

Once again, I would like to emphasize that **inclusion and ensuring the participation of minorities in public, economic and social life is key to conflict prevention**: when minorities and their rights are visible in national legislation, education, socio-economic and regional development, this lays a solid foundation for building peaceful, prosperous and resilient societies.

This Forum, together with the four regional forums conducted earlier this year, offers us an **exceptional opportunity to reinforce our understanding of the importance of human rights obligations** in the peacebuilding and peacekeeping process. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to call upon the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, the UN Human Rights Council members, and the international community at large, to continue our joint efforts and work to create a better and more peaceful tomorrow for everyone, including minorities.