

Thank you madam chair and thank you to the organisers and Special Rapporteur Fernandes de Verness for the invitation.

My presentation today is based on research, policy and activism I have undertaken in my home country Sri Lanka, which militarily ended a 30 year conflict in 2009. Sri Lanka has no war, nor peace. Conflict fault lines have changed from ethnicity to religion, the causes of conflict remain unaddressed, victims have been denied truth, justice and accountability and there has been minimal reconciliation.

So how then can a lasting peace be ensured through minority protection in conflict prevention.

For as long as minorities remain in the margins of state-nation building; excluded, neglected, framed as 'outsiders' 'the other' - grievances will develop or fester. Rather than be seen as integral to the nation state and to peace building if they are problematized, seen as the enemy, discriminated and oppressed conflict will be unavoidable.

Minority groups, in many states are increasingly being 'otherised,' 'discriminated,' 'denied,' 'weaponised,' 'securitised,' and 'dehumanised.' This framing is rarely because segments of these group pose a real threat but more often due to identity politics, majoritarian nationalism, competition for resources etc.

Indeed state decline, democratic deficits, break down of rule of law, structural inequalities are among the contributing factors of conflict, but when they take on an identity dimension and they specifically and differently target minority groups, then this specificity needs to be identified and dealt with.

However, both at the national and international level we see a hesitance to fully recognise this and my focus today will be at the international level.

The international human rights framework is limited in, identifying and holding states accountable when minorities are the targets of human rights violations that lead to conflict. I am not referring here to minority rights violations, but for instance when minorities are targeted for extra judicial killings, torture, rape, sexual violence in a systematic way, it can build grievances and lead to conflicts.

This is not to say that relevant treaty bodies and Special Procedure mandate holders don't raise these violations with states, but early identification, monitoring and reporting of the **specific minority dimension** and linking it to conflict prevention needs strengthening.

Secondly, apart from the work of a few INGOs, there is no systematic monitoring and analysis at the international level of trends and patterns of violations that contribute to conflict and mass atrocities.

More effort within the UN Human rights system is needed in connecting the dots between the different types of violations, for example between Article 18 and 27 of ICCPR; in identifying patterns between previous trends in minority violations and the current ones and in considering how these violations contribute to conflict.

In leu of time let me conclude with my recommendations

Together with the strengthening of the legal and normative framework for the protection of minority rights, international human rights mechanisms and bodies pay greater attention to the minority dimension of human rights violations.

I call on the Special Rapporteur (SR) on Minority Issue and other relevant mandate holder to work together with the UN Office on Prevention of Genocide to develop a tool to monitor the specific targeting of minorities, violations of minority rights and identify trends and patterns that could lead to conflict. This could be based on the current UN Framework for Analysis of Atrocity Crimes, but more specifically designed towards minority protection in conflict prevention.

This framework must act as an early warning mechanism and based on the threat level specify a tiered international response system that ensures effective action.

This system must be developed together with minority civil society representatives and their capacity strengthened to monitor and report on human rights violations of minorities. There is no doubt that community representatives are best placed to monitor and report; but as we all know they work in extremely dangerous and threatening contexts with little support. I am not advocating for a top down internationally driven process that trains minority activists to execute a one-size fits all model developed in secure western capitals. Rather a collaboratively built one where community activists can report with secure guarantees and weigh in on decisions on international action.

My final recommendation is that the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues conducts a joint study with the Special Rapporteur on Counter Terrorism and Human Rights on the targeting of minorities as part of counter terrorism measures and how this contributes to conflicts.

Such a study could challenge the continuing framing of minorities as the problem and instead recognise them as part of the solution to building a lasting peace.

I will end here – thank you