

Fifteenth session of the Forum on Minority

Review. Rethink. Reform. 30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Minority Rights

Item 1. Review: Normative frameworks and the mainstreaming of the Declaration at the UN

Dear Panellists, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to celebrate the Declaration, which guides us in protecting minority rights.

Lithuania remains fully committed to the Declaration's principles and objectives. Our Constitution and laws prohibit direct or indirect discrimination on any ground and guarantee equal opportunities of participation to members of all minorities in cultural, social and economic life, as well as in public affairs.

While Lithuania constantly addresses and improves the situation of minorities – ensures quality education in national minority schools, increases their funding, and adopts new law allowing names of Lithuanian citizens belonging to national minorities to be written in their original form, countries like Belarus and Russia continue discriminatory and aggressive national policies. Belarusian authorities recently eliminated minority language and literature classes from the school curriculums as mandatory subjects. Local schools of Lithuanian national minority, funded by the respective Government, were prevented from operating or forced to change the language of instruction to Belarusian or Russian.

Moreover, on 15 September 2022, the Belarusian side unilaterally denounced the agreement between our Ministries of Education in disregard for the termination procedures.

We urge the Belarusian authorities to respect the UN Declaration on Minority Rights and allow all persons belonging to minorities to enjoy their own culture and to use their own language.

Furthermore, the Declaration is based on the premise that the promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities contribute to the political and social stability of States in which they live. However, some States, including Russia, ignore international rules-based order and misuse the protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities to destabilize other sovereign countries. For example, Russia justifies its war of aggression against Ukraine with false accusations, spreads disinformation about situation of national minorities in Lithuania, and other neighbouring countries.

Dear colleagues,

It is our collective responsibility to be vigilant in order to identify, reject and condemn false narratives and accusations at the UN fora. Now is the time to review our policies and to ensure that every right of every person belonging to a minority is protected.

Thank you.