



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

Opening Address

by

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During the

15th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues

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

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Excellencies,
Distinguished members of the United Nations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be with you today to address the 15th session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues, which is dedicated this year to marking the 30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. Since its adoption in 1992, this important document is the only global instrument designated for, and dedicated to, the protection of minority rights, building upon and reinforcing the rights enshrined in the UN human rights framework to protect and promote the existence, equality, identity and effective participation of national or ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities.

Coincidentally, my mandate was also established 30 years ago by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, which is now the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe; the OSCE. My Institution provides early warning and early action to prevent conflict resulting from *tensions involving national minority issues*. I engage in quiet diplomacy and provide tailored expertise to the 57 OSCE participating States to support the integration of their diverse societies.

Drawing on years of experience in the field, six successive High Commissioners have identified recurrent issues that either cause, or are linked to, tensions involving national minorities. These are policy areas that, if addressed accurately, could mitigate the risk of conflicts and serve as an effective conflict prevention strategy and are captured in the nine sets of thematic Recommendations and Guidelines issued by my office since 1996.

The HCNM Recommendations and Guidelines are complementary to the provisions of the UN Minorities Declaration. This gives us a basis to build on each other's expertise to promote diversity and encourage States to create the right conditions for everyone to feel included and empowered. I firmly believe that international norms are the most significant tool to guide States.

Although my mandate does not include either advocating for, or protecting, human rights, it is important to recognize that **human rights are an essential tool in conflict prevention**.

Protecting and promoting human rights and averting conflict are two sides of the same coin. **There cannot be any meaningful and sustainable conflict prevention or resolution without upholding minority rights within a robust, democratically legitimate, non-discriminatory, and human rights-compliant, rule of law system.** This is a precondition for a just, equal and cohesive society that can withstand tensions and avoid conflict at the earliest stage.

This year in September, in Slovenia, my institution commemorated the 10th Anniversary of *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*. The key takeaway from this event came back to one single point: **that society as a whole, not just one specific group, benefits from diversity and sound integration policies.** Integration-based policies not only strengthen States from within but it also contribute to improving inter-State relations. This, in turn, makes States more resilient to conflicts within and between their borders. As responsible members of the international community, we **can and should** consistently promote this approach, as well as identify and address any relevant issues along the way.

Currently, my office is working on the tenth set of HCNM recommendations, which focus on the socio-economic participation and inclusion of national minorities and conflict prevention, with a special emphasis on youth and women.

Dear guests,

Concluding my remarks, I would like thank the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the Special Rapporteur on minority issues Dr. Fernand de Varennes, for their excellent co-operation with my Institution and for the invitation to address this forum.

My Institution remains committed to its role in tackling the challenges ahead and it gives me **great comfort that so many of us**, as representatives of the International community, **have demonstrated our willingness to not only recognize, but also share responsibility to promote and protect rights of all people**, including national minorities, in order to ensure lasting peace and stability in the world.

Thank you for your kind attention.