



UN
Forum

Fifteenth session of the Forum on Minority Issues

01 - 02 December 2022

ROOM XX, PALAIS DES NATIONS IN GENEVA

**REVIEW. RETHINK. REFORM. 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UN
DECLARATION ON MINORITY RIGHTS**

**Rethink: Minority rights defenders and their role in promoting principles of the
Declaration**

Thank you,

Mr./Ms. Moderator,

I am Kerem Aptourachim Oglou and I am representing Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association as a member of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece.

Dear participants,

In today's meaningful and crucial discussion regarding the role of human rights defenders in the promotion of UN DM, I'll present questions that human rights defenders for the Turkish minority in Western Thrace have been asking for decades, as well as the treatment they have received for merely raising the issue of their minority and human right.

Accordingly, Articles 2 and 4 of the Declaration grant minorities the right to maintain their own language and culture, to practice and profess their own religion, and to establish their own associations. Let me present what we say in every opportunity as human rights defenders to give a voice to Turkish minority.

The Turkish minority in Western Thrace is unable to get a bilingual education in Turkish and Greek at the kindergarten level, which is a crucial age for minority students to acquire their mother language and culture.

Similar to this, over years the quality of education and Turkish language instruction in minority elementary schools has been weakened by arbitrary interventions by the state.

The structural issues at the Minority High School in Xanthi, which offers instruction in inhuman conditions inside a former tobacco warehouse, represent an additional dimension of Greece's minority policy.

Additionally, since the Turkish community of Rhodes and Cos Islands is not even acknowledged by the Greek government as a minority, they are not able to take advantage of any minority rights, including access to minority schools and education in their mother tongue Turkish, as well as religious rights.

On the other hand, not recognizing minority religious leaders, appointing muftis, amending laws regulating mufti offices against the minority's will, and referring to elected muftis of the Turkish minority as "pseudomuftis" all contradict the UN Declaration's understanding of religious freedom.

We as the human rights defenders when speak out for abovementioned human and minority rights abuses in the region we became target of some local Greek media organs and subject of criminal or financial investigations in tolerance of state.



The most recent instance in this regard is the targeting of me and another colleague by a local media outlet after we attended an OSCE conference in Warsaw a few weeks ago and raised awareness of related issues we face.

The voice of minority rights defenders is the voice of suffering people who face various forms of intolerance, rights abuses and pressure in their daily lives. What is attempted to be silenced in Western Thrace is the voice of suffered people.

Therefore, we recommend that the UN urge Greece to take action to protect minority rights defenders who have recently been subjected to pressure and stigma in Western Thrace.

Thank you



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**REVIEW. RETHINK. REFORM. 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UN
DECLARATION ON MINORITY RIGHTS**

Reform: Filling the gaps in the implementation of the Declaration

Thank you,

Mr./Ms. Moderator,

I am Kerem Aptourachim Oglou and I am representing Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association as a member of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece.

Dear participants,

Minorities could only be protected to the extent that states accept and respect the international norms that guarantee their protection, like as the UN DM and Lausanne Treaty in the case of Western Thrace Turkish minority.

I would say that the fundamental, religious, and educational rights of minorities are covered by both UN DM Articles 2 and 4 and Articles 38 to 40 of the Lausanne Treaty which is also based on values of League of Nations.

However, today,

While the Turkish minority in Western Thrace is deprived of the right to bilingual education in Turkish and Greek at the kindergarten level, minority students are directed to Greek public schools as a result of policies that reduce the quality of education in minority schools.

Additionally, over the years, the autonomy and power of minority school boards have decreased, leading to financial inability and unworkable structural conditions in minority schools.

On the other side, by referring to their religious leaders as pseudomouftis, the Turkish minority's religious values and honor are daily humiliated.

Greece appoints Mouftis and passes laws on the Turkish minority's religious issues arbitrarily and against the minority's wishes.

Dear participants,

It can be said that all of the aforementioned problems are locked up on a recognition question. Recognition of human and minority rights, recognition of the identity and existence of the Turkish minority, recognition of universal values of the UN and civilized world. Also it is the question of recognition of international law by a country like Greece, which constantly and paradoxically refers to international law while it does not respect it. Today Greece denies existence of a Turkish minority in Western Thrace, denies existence of a minority at all in Rhodes and Kos Islands by depriving them even from religious rights and education in their mother tongue Turkish.

As a result as Secretary General said “We are not dealing with gaps – we are dealing with outright inaction and negligence in the protection of minority rights.



If Greece had implemented what Lausanne Treaty provisioned a century ago and embraced fundamental rights for minorities provisioned by DM and universal values of UN today, we would focus on gaps. Today, however, we need to persuade countries to comply with international agreements in order to alleviate the suffering and rights violations of people whose rights are already protected.