

December 2, 2022

## UN Forum on Minority Issues

### **Reform: Filling the gaps in the implementation of the human rights of minorities**

#### **Introduction**

We are here today under the theme of reform. Reform, above all requires **innovation** so rather than sitting here, and making a list of recommendations on how to fill in the gaps. I decided to innovate, by **instead**, telling you the stories of people who have been left behind **because** of those gaps. As I tell these stories, I will ask for your participation.

#### **Story 1**

**Has your identity has ever been an immanent barrier to your safety, I invite you to stand up**

Thank you, you may now be seated

Julian, Viola, Kristina and at least 100 000 ppl like them have been faced with this barrier every day since March 2022. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, over 2 million people have fled to seek protection. Within that number, not all have been able to reach safety, not only due to the violence, but also because they were not deemed worthy of it. People like Julian, Viola and Kristina are refused access to humanitarian aid, to food, to transport they are refused housing, they are placed in segregated tents in refugee centers in Hungary, in Czech Republic, and Poland ,they are left behind even during war due to the deeply rooted racism they continuously face.

In just a few days after the war, civil society organisations across the world filled the gap. More than 30 organizations, organized transports, collected humanitarian aid, raised money, sent interpreters at the border of every country neighbouring Ukraine to ensure the equal protection of Ukrainian Roma refugees.

#### **Story 2**

*Arakhav tume ande voja e lasi.* In a past not so distant from today, speaking these words meant running the risk of being killed.

**Have you ever had to worry about your safety, simply for speaking your language, practising your religion, being born who you are, or loving who you love? If so, I invite to stand up.**

Thank you, you may now be seated

Ruza did, but despite it being legally forbidden, despite the slavery, the persecution, the Holocaust, the ongoing segregation, the forced sterilization experienced by her ancestors, her family, her friends, her neighbours, and those like her who spoke it, she has found ways to transmit it through generations and has contributed to its survival.

While we tend to focus primarily on situations of conflict or crisis when speaking of these issues, I want to reinforce the importance of equity not only in war, but also during peaceful times because as we know, without justice there is no peace. The fact Joyce Eshaquan, une femme Atikamek qui est morte dans un hôpital car des infirmières ont refusé de traiter ses douleurs, is a disruption of peace,

### Story 3

**Have you or any members of your family ever had to change their name, to access a passport, or an identification document? If so, I invite to stand up**

Thank you, you may now be seated

Istvan Sajó did. He did so because he was not considered worthy of the right to identity, the right to nationality. A right which is essential to the ability to live in dignity. As attested by the situation of Rohingya, Roma, **Karana** of Madagascar, Makonde of Kenya, the denial of identity documents leaves millions of people trapped in a vicious cycle of exclusion in every aspect of life, limiting access to work, to housing, to healthcare and furthering poverty. There are 4,2 million stateless people today. **more than 75% of the world's known stateless populations belong to minority groups.**

That is why nearly half a century ago, Istvan changed his last name to Savic and this how I am able to stand before you today.

### Conclusion

- 1) **In asking you to stand with me today, I noticed 3 things.** The people in this room who stood up, come from different countries, belong to diverse minorities, but all share a common experience, an experience rooted in perceived otherness.

**This leads me to my first recommendation;** For no one to be left behind, we have to stand together not only in this forum, but outside of it. To members of civil society, your struggles are common and the solutions to address them are more common than we think. We need to shift from competition to solidarity.

How? By creating an online global platform that would allow civil society organizations to connect, to be informed about existing initiatives, and ultimately to create opportunities to build solidarity so that we can avoid working in silos.

- 2) Reform requires Innovation. Julian, Viola, Cristina, Istvan all had to be innovative to fill in the gaps that left them behind.

**This leads me to my second recommendation: Innovate**

As we heard yesterday, because of the barriers that exist, not everyone has the opportunity to enter this room and engage with the different UN mechanisms as they are not always accessible. Many people here today had to resort to innovation to be in this room, but it is not up to them to do so. It is up to us collectively.

How? To member states, by contributing to the voluntary fund on minorities which would give an opportunity to organizations and individuals with limited means to attend the forum and it allow for initiatives such as the minority fellowship programme and the regional forums to continue, to flourish and to expand.

How? To the UN By creating a dialogue series which would take place online 4 times a year and would bring government officials, donors, civil society organizations and business leaders together to discuss issues, commit to implementing solutions and monitor progress.

- 3) It took a lot of courage for the people here today to stand up, to testify and share their lived and personal experiences. It required courage and vulnerability. I want to challenge our colleagues from the private sector to have the same courage to come to this room to see the people standing up, to listen to the stories being told and contribute to changing their ending.

How? By bringing the Business and Human rights Forum and the minority forums together for a joint discussion.

**In other words,**

Build solidarity rather than competition  
Innovative rather than repeat  
Chose courage over comfort