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Proposed contribution, UN Forum on Minority Issues 1-2 December 2021

*Item 1. Review: Normative frameworks and the mainstreaming of the Declaration at the UN
(second choice section)

Item 2. Rethink: Minority rights defenders and their role in promoting principles of the Declaration

**Item 3. Reform: Filling the gaps in the implementation of the Declaration (preferred session)

Item 4. Open dialogue: urgent situations of minorities

I would like to support the call made by others to the UN Secretary General to commission a high-level panel to review the limitations of the current minority rights framework and make recommendations for reform, including with reference to the limitations of the legally binding treaty that does exist, the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

In my work as a researcher on minority rights in post-conflict and deeply divided societies, I have found that minority rights are often neglected in peace agreements, with only passing references to relevant instruments, such as the UN Declaration. In Northern Ireland, my home country, progress on a range of minority rights issues has been very slow and there continue to be significant challenges almost 25 years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. The trend towards the exclusion of minorities from relevant peace processes, as we saw also in SE Europe, needs to be challenged.

International bodies have for too long glossed over the issues and the challenges facing minority groups and individuals in war, conflict, and post-conflict situations, as we see not just in relation to Ukraine but also in neighbouring countries and indeed across Europe. Minority rights need to be at the forefront of discussions on the way forward and should be considered not just with a conflict prevention lens, but also from an empowerment perspective. To do this in the context of Ukraine we need accurate and authoritative analysis on minority situations, regionally appropriate identification of best practice and significant minority participation.