

Closing Statement of Special Rapporteur

Merci Monsieur le président.

Excellences, distingués délégués et experts, chers participants, Mesdames et Messieurs.

As indicated yesterday when I opened this forum, this is a unique opportunity and platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to minorities.

It is obviously not easy, but we must not kid ourselves - it never has been. Before the pandemic, we had forums which were, to be very diplomatic about it, even more challenging.

But the route to peace and justice, still, let me point out how successful the mandate on minority issues has been in reaching out to try to give a voice to so many of you: Only this year almost 1,000 individuals, state representatives and organisations have registered in this Forum and the four regional forums, and we've already

received from you almost 200 recommendations which are posted up.

Nevertheless, it's clear that much more needs to be done, and that there are improvements that must be done when you have 100 people who want to intervene and contribute after a session – even if they only get 2 minutes – and there is not sufficient time to accommodate them. There have, obviously been much frustration at not being able to take the floor, and perhaps the registration process for speakers could have been made clearer to all participants. It's not obvious in some situations, and we've seen yesterday, how we can have a constructive dialogue. Let me say that to work for the human rights of minorities you need to be an eternal optimist, though admittedly some days are easier than others.

If I can paraphrase Martin Luther King " Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope can be found".

And the stone of hope are you, the 1,000 from governments and civil society, north and south, who have participated in this forum and the four regional ones despite everything, despite the obstacles even threats and pressures, willing to move on despite the costs and obstacles, sometimes at great personal sacrifice, to try to send a clear message that we must do more and we must do better if truly the international community, national governments, the United Nations are committed to what is proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. What we have heard yesterday and today is that unfortunately, for many minorities, this is not what happens, even if it is what must happen because there cannot be true peace, stability and prosperity without the presence of justice.

30 years after the adoption of the UN Declaration on the rights of minorities, we must do much more. And as

Mahatma Gandhi has said, “The future depends on what we do today.”

Mesdames et messieurs, ladies and gentlemen, Senoras y caballeros, meine damen und Herren.

I will not try to summarise all of the recommendations and invaluable insights and expertise that have come out from the expert panelists and your interventions.

I did however want to quickly mention a few of the main points which permeates much of the contributions of experts, minority and civil society organisations, human rights defenders, state representatives and other stakeholders:

- First, not enough is being done at the international level: minorities are the last major group at the United Nations with no specific mechanism or initiative to strengthen the discussion and protection of their human rights such as a permanent forum or a

voluntary fund. Many recommendations clearly show this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The only new development has been the organisation of the regional forums, and that was done under my mandate as an independent expert and there is no guarantee these will continue after my mandate comes at an end next year despite its increasing the accessibility and visibility for so many of you around the world.

- The most emphatic recommendation not only coming out of this forum but from all regional forums was about the need for a legally binding treaty on minority rights with an associated oversight mechanism which would guide both states and non-state actors. It was widely regarded as the best possible way forward for all major stakeholders since it would provide the opportunity to channel minority activism, diplomacy and expertise into a systematic, long-term conversation about ways to respond to the

world's many changes and challenges, including the impact of social media and the rise of hate speech and incitement to violence. For minorities, such an instrument elaborated with their equal participation would give a chance to engage with the UN and states not only as victims of human rights violations but as responsible agents in the making of norms that govern their lives. The UN Secretary General should commission a high-level panel to assess the inadequacies of the current normative regime and suggest concrete ways forward on a minority rights treaty.

- To have a dialogue and to have constructive conditions and requires more than less than a two day forum, it needs a permanent forum alternating between New York and Geneva so that there is time opportunity to truly engage with all interested parties, not be forced into an extraordinarily tight 2 minute race to express all your hopes and grievances,

- regional forums and financial support to ensure greater accessibility for minorities in all parts of the world.
- We must clarify the scope of international minority protection, focusing on the inclusion of caste- and descent affected groups, and especially refer to minorities with a particularly grave history of exclusion like the Dalits, Roma, and immigrant minorities. Intersectionality needs to be recognised by taking into account a wide range of protected grounds.
 - In terms of substantive rights, the gaps to be addressed include: citizenship rights without discrimination, economic rights, including land, with a focus on sustainable and inclusive development of minority regions while protecting the natural environment; the right to participation in decision-making which needs to reflect existing state practice

- with regard to norms of autonomy; and, last, but not least, gaps related to the rights of religious minorities.
- Another issue that came up is the urgent need to mainstream in the United Nations activities and structures the human rights dimension, specifically those of marginalised minorities and the sections within these minorities which are particularly vulnerable to abuse such as the intersection of the rights of women and disabled within these minority communities.

Time does not allow to mention the many other very significant matters you've raised yesterday and today, but may I remind you that your recommendations and those of the regional forums are part of a process with many steps, that the recommendations will be collated and published in the United Nations system under the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, and referred to in the report of the President of the Forum and my own report which will be presented to the UN Human

Rights Council in March of next year. Please make sure the Secretariat received your statements and recommendations.

Mesdames et messieurs.

Avant de clore le 15e Forum des Nations Unies, permettez que je signale et reconnaisse la situation très inhabituelle et difficile que nous avons eu à faire face : à la dernière minute plusieurs personnes n'ont pas pu se rendre à Genève pour participer au Forum en raison des contrôles et autres mesures imposées en raison non seulement de la pandémie mais d'un monde qui n'est pas retourné à la normale pour ceux qui ne sont pas du monde occidental.

Néanmoins, et dans des conditions très difficiles, vous-mêmes Monsieur le Président et tout le personnel du Haut-Commissariat des droits de l'homme à Genève ont fait de votre mieux afin d'assurer autant que possible le bon déroulement des échanges et contributions.

Ladies and gentlemen.

The Forum would not be possible except for the help of many, many volunteers. There are UN staff members, minority fellows and others who are freely contributing to help on all of the essential work of these last two days. I cannot name all of them, but I do wish to at least acknowledge the hard work and devotion of the head of section Karim Ghezraoui and the many OHCHR who have contributed to the déroulement of this event, and Forum consultants Marina Shupac, Kristina ARAKELOVA, Omer Al-Shareqi and for all of those who have helped to ensure the forum can proceed as smoothly as possible despite the difficult conditions.

I wish to thank all states whose support is essential to enable the functioning of the Forum, and hope that more states from all regions will join them and demonstrate their commitments to the human rights of minorities rights and its future improvements and evolution.

Permettez moi encore une fois de remercier le Président du Forum, le Professeur Daniel Abwa, d'avoir accepté et

mené à bien le défi, et c'était tout un défi dans des conditions, disons plutôt intéressantes, de présider ce forum.

Thanks also to the expert panelists from all regions of world for the contribution of their experience and expertise and recommendations to the Forum. Your expertise has truly enriched the understanding of many of the complex issues involved, and I hope there will be further opportunities to work closely with you in the future. Thank you and bravo!

My deep felt gratitude to those of you in Geneva who also may have faced obstacles coming here, including perhaps frustrations due to so little available time or a format which is not, to put it lightly, always very conducive to constructive dialogue.

The expert minds and voices of the interpreters under difficult conditions are absolutely indispensable to make the forum as accessible for as many of you as possible, so

to you I say merci. Thank you, shokran, Spasiba Bolshoi, Xie xie, Muchas gracias.

Finally, thanks to all of you who as participants and delegations who are at the centre of the Forum, and with whom I hope we can work together to make a better world but also a better forum – and a better world. We need to rediscover this inspiration and commitment of justice for all and no one left behind by advancing the protection of the rights of minorities.

Someone once said that it is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light. What you have done yesterday and today is provide some the light that is much needed if we are to truly have universal human rights, because on this 30th anniversary of the Declaration on the rights of minorities, you have tried to rethink, review and reform what is needed to make the world a better place, a place for peace and justice for all.

Je vous cède la parole, monsieur le président.