

Speaker: Thank you excellencies, dear friends of colleagues. Let me start by reaffirming Slovenia's long standing commitment to the advancement of the rights of minorities nationally and in international fora. We remain committed to the promotion and implementation of the UN declaration of the rights of minorities whose anniversary we are discussing today. We are contributing to its goals [inaudible] through membership to its core group of minorities in the Human Rights Council. On regional level we have hosted the OEC anniversary conference on Ljubljana guidelines of integration of diverse societies last September. Slovenia's strong constitutional and normative framework for the protection of the rights of minorities is integrating minorities fully into the national, political, cultural and social life, while allowing for the preservation of the minority characteristics. In Slovenia, autonomous minorities enjoy a significant amount of autonomy and political representation. Beside the local level they are represented on the national level by parliamentarians, elected by minority voters. In addition they have a right to primary and secondary education in their own language and the right to use the minority language in administrative and judicial proceedings. They are entitled to bilingual personal identity documents. Slovenia will continue to protect and promote the rights of Slovenian national minorities in dialog with our neighboring countries and their Slovenian national minorities. To conclude - Mr. Chairman, the protection of persons belonging to minorities is an indicator of the openness and inclusiveness of any society. Curtailment of minority rights should ring alarm for preventative action before the situation might dissolve into violence and conflict. I thank you.