

FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES

FIFTEENTH SESSION

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

1 AND 2 DECEMBER 2022
PALAIS DES NATIONS, GENEVA and VIRTUALLY

SUMMARY BY THE CHAIR OF THE FORUM

Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 19/23 of 23 March 2012, the Forum on Minority Issues provides a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, as well as thematic contributions and expertise to the work of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, **Mr. Fernand de Varennes**. The Forum identifies and analyses best practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives for the further implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

The Forum meets annually for two days, on a different theme each year. The Special Rapporteur on minority issues is responsible for guiding the work of the Forum, preparing its annual meetings and reporting on its thematic recommendations to the Human Rights Council. The fifteenth session of the Forum took place on 1 and 2 December 2022. Due to the COVID-19 situation, the Forum was held in a hybrid format, in person and virtually, having the plenary sessions webcasted from the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. **Prof. Abwa Daniel** was appointed as Chair of the session, which focused on the theme: **"Review. Rethink. Reform. 30th Anniversary of the UN Declaration on Minority Rights"**.

About 580 participants from some 79 countries registered for the session, including representatives of Member States, United Nations mechanisms, bodies and specialized agencies, other intergovernmental organizations, regional organizations and mechanism in the field of human rights, national human rights institutions and other relevant national bodies, academics and experts on minority issues, representatives of minorities and minority and non- governmental organizations, in addition to 9 side-events with different thematic organized by various stakeholders¹. Interpretation in six official UN languages as well as international sign language was provided during the Forum. Captioning in English, French and Spanish was also provided. The Concept Note, the Agenda of the Forum and the Programme of Work were made available to all Forum participants in advance of the Forum on the webpage of the Fifteenth session of the Forum², and formed the basis for the discussions.

¹ See the Programme of the side events: [15th Session Side Event Timetable.docx \(live.com\)](#)

² [Fifteenth session of the Forum on Minority Issues | OHCHR](#).

Format of the Forum

The Forum followed the procedure developed over its previous sessions. To help focus the discussions and ensure that they would be interactive, each agenda item was introduced by several invited panellists, followed by interventions from other participants.

Outcome documents

The present document is prepared in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 19/23, which requests the Chair to prepare "a summary of the discussion of the Forum, to be made available to all participants of the Forum". This summary is to be complemented by the outcome document containing the recommendations of the Forum presented by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues to the Human Rights Council at its 52nd session in March 2023³.

This summary does not provide the full details of all presentations that were made during the Forum's proceedings. The list of speakers and the statements submitted to the Secretariat of the Forum on Minority Issues can be accessed at the Forum webpage⁴. The list of recommendations of the Forum will be published in a separate report⁵.

Item I. Opening of the Forum

Following the opening marked with a live performance by a group of minority artists from the Spotlight Team International Artists, the Forum started by reviewing the scope of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the groups that it covered, and those that it left behind, and ways in which the scope of the normative framework could be made more relevant and effective. The Declaration, adopted in 1992, remains the only global instrument for the protection of minority rights. It reinforces and builds on the rights enshrined in the United Nations human rights framework and is centred on protecting and promoting the existence, equality, identity and effective participation of national or ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities in all areas covered by the Declaration.

Participants considered the degree to which the Declaration has enabled progress to be achieved in protecting minority rights globally and were encouraged to take a fresh look at mainstreaming the Declaration and the human rights of minorities within the United Nations system while considering the findings of the Special Rapporteur set out in his report to the General Assembly and sharing their views on the evolution and positioning of the Declaration in the institutions, structures and initiatives of the United Nations.

³³ A/HRC/52/71.

⁴ [Fifteenth session of the Forum on Minority Issues | OHCHR](#)

⁵ A/HRC/52/71. This report will be presented at the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council in March 2023.

The opening remarks relied on the following panelists: H.E. Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, the President of the UN General Assembly, (*pre-recorded video*), H.E. Mr. Federico Villegas, the President of the Human Rights Council, Mr. Volker Türk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, H.E. Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov, the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities, (*pre-recorded video*), Mr. Fernand de Varennes, the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, and Prof. Abwa Daniel, the Chair of the Forum⁶.

The **President of the UN General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Csaba Kőrösi**, encouraged Member States to recommit to the protection of minorities in the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Declaration. He stressed that there were broad concerns around the idea that minority issues are usually at the heart of conflicts, since the underlying causes of clashes have almost always to do with the violation of their rights. He recalled that the respect and implementation of minority rights require a genuine, honest conversation, and involvement of government institutions, all relevant stakeholders, including the United Nations. He also expressed his concern on the social media platforms, which are idea breeding ground for hate speech targeting minorities, exacerbating their vulnerability and leading to hate crime. He emphasized that 75% of the world's stateless belong to minorities and that minorities are under-represented in positions of power and in decision making. He called Member states to commit and pledge to protect the rights of minorities, first and foremost in their countries by nurturing diversity and inclusion through education, ensuring effective participation of minorities in decision making, implementing new national plans against discrimination, supporting the preservation of minority languages. Actively promoting respectful cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of all persons.

The **President of the Human Rights Council, H.E. Mr. Federico Villegas**, presented his welcoming words and commends the Forum as a unique venue to reflect on issues pertaining to the enjoyment of all human rights by minorities through dialogue and cooperation between all stakeholders. He also emphasized that it is time to examine the diverse ways in which the Declaration has been used and implemented in practice, not only the achievements but also the gaps in the minority rights protection. By quoting the UN Secretary-General, he stressed that we are dealing with outright inaction and negligence in the protection of minority rights. He recalled that the Council has taken significant action to ensure that human rights on minority issues remain firmly in the Council's agenda, all of which can enrich the discussions occurring today, including ensuring the continuation of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues and established a decision to ensure a special fund to support the participation of civil society in the Forum.

He also highlighted that the Forum, established by the Council in 2007, has played an essential role in advancing the rights of minorities all over the world. He recalled the opportunity over the Forum to actively contribute to the set of recommendations and build on the recommendations. Finally, he expressed his concern on any act of intimidation or reprisal against individuals or groups that participate in any of the meetings in relation to the cooperation with any of the

⁶ The integral version of the statements can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

mechanisms of the Council and asked cooperation from all stakeholders to have a very smooth and constructive discussions for the benefit all stakeholders of the Human Rights Council.

The **United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Volker Türk**, stressed the importance of the diversity in enriching societies and the individual by bringing together different experiences and providing new perspectives. He highlighted that thirty years ago, in a context of ethnic tensions and nationalistic tendencies of an extremist nature, Member States adopted the Declaration and committed to implementing measures for the effective protection of the human rights of persons that belong to national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities. He expressed concern on how minority protection issues can be instrumentalized not for purposes of minority protection but to wage conflict or war.

He also highlighted a couple of concerns. Firstly, the significant rise in hate speech that is directed at minorities in the social media, particularly against human rights defenders and women who are subjected to online and offline harassment and intimidation. Secondly, serious violations of minority rights continue to be at the heart of many violent conflicts and the increase in tensions around the world with ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic differences being used for political gain. Thirdly, the concerns around statelessness and nationality issues and the interconnection with minority rights issues and how discrimination based on minority status is often a leading cause of statelessness, knowing that more than 75% of the world's known stateless populations are members of minority groups. Finally, he stressed that the 30th Anniversary of the Declaration provides an important opportunity to recall the fundamentals of precisely these issues and to build new momentum while considering that human rights provide not only a guide, but also an important blueprint for everyone.

The **OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities, H.E. Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov**, stressed the importance of the Declaration as the only global instrument designated for and dedicated to the protection of minority rights, building upon and reinforcing the rights enshrined in the United Nations human rights framework to protect and promote the existence, equality, identity and effective participation of national or ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities. He highlighted that, as the Declaration, his mandate was also established thirty years ago to provide early warning and early option to prevent conflicts resulting from tensions involving national minority issues. Throughout the years, six high commissioners identified recurrent issues that either cause or are linked to tensions involving National Minorities. He emphasized that if policy areas were addressed accurately, they could mitigate the risk of conflicts and serve as an effective conflict prevention strategy and in the mindsets of thematic recommendations and guidelines issued by OSCE since 1996, which are complimentary to the provisions of the UN minority declaration and encourage States to create the right conditions for everyone to feel included and empowered. He also mentioned that in September this year, in Slovenia, OSCE commemorated the 10th anniversary of the guidelines on integration of diverse societies and the key takeaway from this event was that the whole society benefits from integration-based policies.

The **Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Mr. Fernand de Varennes**, recalled the purposed of the Forum which marks the 30th Anniversary of the Declaration and the reflections on how the overall situation of minorities has evolved globally and on the future of what needs to be done to improve and strengthen the recognition and protection of minorities. He presented the purposes of the first session entitled as "Normative frameworks and the mainstreaming of the declaration at the UN". He also reminded the role of social media and online forums in relation to incitement of hatred towards minorities as an example of what was not foreseen thirty years ago in the context of the adoption of the Declaration. He also recalled the statement of the UN Secretary-General at the high-level meeting to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the Declaration in September at the UN General Assembly, in which he mentioned the outright inaction and negligence in the protection of minority rights.

He added that the following panels of the Forum would be discussing the precarious situations of human and minority rights defenders and their essential role in defending and promoting the principles in the Declaration, while threats and reprisals against minorities and their defenders have been increasing in efforts to silence them. He stressed that protecting and accommodating minorities and their identities is a hallmark of an inclusive society, while intolerance and xenophobia, the fear of others can lead to increased tensions, violence and more. He highlighted that better protection of the human rights of minorities including in the areas of political, economic and social participation should not be a factor of division or exclusion, but rather an acceptance that minorities are full-fledged members of society. Finally, he recalled that minorities are those who most need protection and they are amongst the most vulnerable and that we must be sensitive to acknowledge and be willing to defend.

The **Chair of the Forum, Prof. Abwa Daniel**, stressed that the period of thirty years was considerable and good time to take stock of what has already been done. He continued by explaining the rules of proceedings to take the floor and modalities of participation to contribute constructively to the discussions in line with the themes addressed in the agenda. He also encouraged participants to provide concrete recommendations on how to tackle the issues under the agenda item and to direct specific questions to the panelists in order to stimulate dynamic and interactive discussions.

Item II. Review: Normative framework and the mainstreaming of the Declaration at the UN

Participants were invited to review the scope of the Declaration as well as the groups that it covers, those that it left behind, and ways in which the scope of the normative framework can be made more relevant and effective. They were invited to consider the degree to which the Declaration has enabled progress to be achieved in protecting minority rights globally and to identify best practices and developments from international and regional bodies that present useful models for securing a more effective normative framework. Participants were encouraged to take a fresh look at mainstreaming the Declaration and the human rights of minorities within the United Nations system and to consider the findings of the

Special Rapporteur set out in his report to the General Assembly⁷ as well as to share their views on the evolution and positioning of the Declaration in the institutions, structures and initiatives of the United Nations.

Presentations on the topic under discussion were made by the following panelists: Mr. Mohammad Shahabudin, Chair in International Law and Human Rights, Birmingham Law School, University of Birmingham; Ms. Anna-Maria Biró, Director of the Rom Lantos Institute; Mr. Ojot Ojulu, East Africa Regional representative for the Danish Institute for Human Rights and Mr. Pere Aragonès i Garcia, President of the Regional Government of Catalonia.

Mr. Mohammad Shahabudin focuses on the socioeconomic rights of minorities in relation to economic progress and development. He pointed out the article 4, clause 5 of the Declaration by which States should consider appropriate measures so that minorities may participate fully in economic progress and development in their country. Finally, he called for a minority rights treaty to ensure new ways to ensure accountability in benefit of minorities and for devising mandatory protection norms and the implementation with intersectional approaches, such as for women issues⁸.

Ms. Anna-Maria Biró recalled that within the remits of the United Nations, there is the generalized protection of minorities across several treaties; therefore the elaboration of the UN Declaration, designated specifically to minorities, was a significant achievement. However, she stressed that the process of elaboration of the Declaration lacked effective participation from minority groups themselves. She pointed out a significant protection gap for minorities that needs to be addressed in the context of normative instruments in the UN and stressed the need for a legally binding treaty on minority rights. She recommended the expansion of the scope of international minority protection to include caste-affected groups and she indicated gaps to be addressed such as rights against hate crimes, land rights, freedom of religion and right to participation in decision-making⁹.

Mr. Ojot Ojulu raised the issue of minority rights in conflict situation, where minorities most often are scapegoated, blackmailed and persecuted and left out during and after conflicts. He also highlighted issues of minority rights in digital space, which are entrenching racial inequality, discrimination and intolerance; and the situation of minorities who are internally displaced, migrants and refugees facing discrimination. He also called UN agencies to develop and enforce specific guidelines for identifying and supporting minorities in IDPs and refugee situations. Mr. Ojulu shared his concerns about minorities who are persecuted and condemned due to their sexual orientation and gender identity. He called to intersectional protection mechanisms for minorities while ensuring that minority rights are mainstreamed within the entire UN system¹⁰.

⁷ A/77/246.

⁸ The integral version of the statement can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

⁹ The integral version of the statement can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

¹⁰ The integral version of the statement can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

Mr. Pere Aragonès i Garcia stressed the need to preserve all languages in a globalized world as a way to protect both equality rights for everyone. He highlighted the challenges of multilingualism and that language should be aligned with recognition, learning and use of other languages. Mr. Aragonès i Garcia evoked the rights of minorities to use their language in public administration and private services. He stated that the defense of the linguistic rights of minorities' language has made significant progress in many parts of the world and despite instruments, such as the Declaration, have undoubtedly contributed to this progress, it would be appropriate to expand and develop other similar instruments¹¹.

Interactive Dialogue¹²

Participants presented initiatives, such as the establishment of a legally binding treaty and more effective monitoring and coordination mechanisms and the establishment of an UN Decade on Minorities.

Item III: Rethinking: Minority Rights defenders and their role in promoting principles of the Declaration

Participants were invited to identify challenges faced by minority rights defenders, in particular women minority rights defenders, best practices and ways to advance defenders' work in promoting the realization of the Declaration and bringing the principles of the Declaration into practice while considering multidimensional challenges faced by human rights defenders belonging to minority groups with a view to elaborating sustainable solutions.

Participants were invited to comment on the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights, in which he offered a blueprint for all Governments to address long-standing issues of discrimination; to take stock of the situation of the civic space for minority groups; and to discuss on means to protect and enlarge civic space for minority groups and to enhance civic participation among minorities. They were also invited to provide recommendations on how addressing, preventing and reporting cases of reprisals against minority representatives who are cooperating with the United Nations to advance the implementation of the Declaration.

Presentations on the topic under discussion were made by the following panelists: Ms. Zubayra Shamseden, Vice President of the World Uyghur Congress, Ms. Poonam Mohtey, Coprincipal Investigator of the Samata Foundation, and Ms. Diane Alai, Representative of the Bahai International Community to the UN.

Ms. Zubayra Shamseden expressed her concerns on the situation of the Uyghurs in China. She also informed about a human rights project in which a research-based advocacy organization documents human rights violations against Uyghurs. Ms. Shamseden evoked the report issued by the Office of the High

¹¹ The integral version of the statement can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

¹² Interventions on this item can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

Commissioner for human rights in August 2022 “OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China” and called for empowerment and more access of Uyghur minorities into the UN human rights system¹³.

Ms. Poonam Mohtey drew the attention to issues related to caste system which may lead to serious human rights violations, including right to life. She also emphasized the significance of empowering minority women. She called for donors and supporters to invest in young women education, which will effectively protect and address rights of future generations¹⁴.

Ms. Diane Alai reflected on the importance of the minority rights defenders and evoked examples as good practices involving solidarity by the fellows, co-workers, neighbors or other members of a minority group to support their rights. Using the example of Bahais in Iran, Ms. Alai recalled that they have been engaged actors and have been contributing to the society they live in, for example, by helping Afghani schoolchildren with schoolwork. She stressed that within the UN framework, more interactions should be taken with the government and in different modalities. She also emphasized that good practices should not be only about how to grant minorities’ rights, but also to how states ensure diversity allowing people to live together¹⁵.

Interactive Dialogue¹⁶

Participants raised issues and presented initiatives, such as social media has become platform for the spread of hate speech and incitement of violence against minorities; more cooperation by international organizations and NGOs to identify hate speech and reduce the influence of the hate speech on ethnic minorities; the need to end reprisals against minorities around the world and the need to encourage of youth activists to be involved in the decision-making processes; the deprivation of citizenship to minorities; the need to consider the right to self-determination in a legally binding treaty on minorities; the need to establish permanent spaces of participation and dialogue between minorities and States; and the need to follow-up recommendations of the Forum.

Item IV: Reform: Filling the gaps in the implementation of the human rights of minorities

Participants were invited to consider ways to eliminate the persisting gaps in the implementation of the Declaration and means to achieve tangible progress and

¹³ The integral version of the statement can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

¹⁴ The integral version of the statement can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

¹⁵ The integral version of the statement can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

¹⁶ Interventions on this item can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

how preexisting obstacles, which were expanded by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, have made the implementation gaps even wider, in particular for women belonging to minority groups. They were also invited to take into consideration the conclusions of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues about world's stateless, minorities as targets of hate speech and hate crimes, and even prohibition from, being educated in their own languages and that, in most violent conflicts in recent decades, minorities have faced the exclusion or denial of their rights.

In addition, participants were invited to consider the Special Rapporteur's recent report, in which he urged the Human Rights Council to initiate a study on how to strengthen the protection of minority rights, including through a new United Nations treaty, and how to operationalize the Secretary-General's call, in 2013, to mainstream and integrate minority rights across all pillars and activities of the United Nations. Participants were invited to consider whether additional instruments at the international or regional levels are needed, whether existing norms should be strengthened through better implementation, oversight and enforcement, whether businesses or other international economic institutions, including development aid, should be better included in the efforts to protect the rights of minorities, the role of the media in the protection and promotion of minority rights, and in addressing the gaps in the minority protection regime identified during the two days of discussions of the Forum, and how the Declaration can be used to respond to the new challenges that have appeared since its adoption.

Presentations on the topic under discussion were made by the following panelists: Ms. Dafina Savic, Founder of non-profit organization Romanipe and co-founder of Uena; Mr. Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua, Associate Professor of School of Law, University of Ghana; Ms. Farah Mihlar, Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Emergency and Development at Oxford Brookes; and Mr. Lorant Vincze, Member of the European Parliament.

Ms. Dafina Savic stated that reform requires innovation. She provided examples of people who were left behind due to gaps in the protection of minorities with focus on persecution, segregation and discrimination. She called upon OHCHR to establish an online global platform which would allow civil society organizations to connect, to be informed about existing initiatives and ultimately to create opportunities to build solidarity. She also proposed to put together the forum on business and human rights forum and the minority forums for a joint discussion on the rights of minorities¹⁷.

Mr. Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua called for the need of a legally binding instrument. He stressed that the framework should be founded on the pluralization of human rights approach to promote equality between minorities and mainstream society. He added that any legally binding instrument on minorities should include the right to self-identification and the right to self-governance and should be a duty of States¹⁸.

Ms. Farah Mihlar stressed that three decades after the adoption of the Declaration, minorities continue to face violations, such as torture, persecution, hatred, discrimination, and displacement violations. She evoked the need to put in place a

¹⁷ The integral version of the statements can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Events/Pages/15th_session.aspx)

¹⁸ The integral version of the statements can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Events/Pages/15th_session.aspx)

legally binding treaty and a monitoring body to ensure the protection of the rights of all minorities. She mentioned that this legally binding instrument should also have a clear legal protection for minorities and include protection in situations of armed conflict while giving emphasis on minorities' social, economic and culture rights¹⁹.

Mr. Lorant Vincze stated that the international concern with respect to minority communities has been constantly declining. He stressed that the European Commission needs to be conscious that taking action especially in favor of national and linguistic minorities could benefit Member States and minorities.

Interactive Dialogue²⁰

Participants presented initiatives to involve civil society organizations around the world on minorities' situation; the need to protect minorities' rights by adopting policies and legislation; the establishment of a Working Group to examine gaps; and the inclusion of minorities in peace processes and conflict prevention.

Item V- Open dialogue urgent situations faced by minorities

Considering that since its establishment 15 years ago, the Forum on Minority Issues has been a unique platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues affecting persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minority groups, under this item, the Forum welcomed constructive exchanges and the sharing of information on issues of urgent concern. Presentations on the topic under discussion were made by the following panelists: Ms. Sitarah Mohammadi, Spokesperson of World Hazara Council; Ms. Lecia Brooks, Chief of staff and culture of Southern Poverty Law Center; Mr. Igor Pimenov, President of Association for Support of Schoolswith Russian Language of Instruction in Latvia²¹.

Ms. Sitarah Mohammadi stressed that Hazara people have endured systematic discrimination, persecution since the late 19th century and they have been collectively subjected to various forms of discrimination including forced evictions.

Ms. Lecia Brooks expressed her concerns about the rise of the hatred which has been taking various forms, such as disinformation, scapegoating and blaming of minorities, barriers to voting and political participation, and violence through messages. Ms. Brooks mentioned attacks against transgender individuals and LGBTQ community and the targeting of migrants from Caribbean and South America, who have been victims of racism and extremist nationalist views. She called for the urgent

¹⁹ The integral version of the statements can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

²⁰ Interventions on this item can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

²¹ The integral version of the statements can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

need for states to work together with civil society and international organisations to protect minority groups²².

Mr. Igor Pimenov expressed his concerns on the linguistic minorities in Latvia. He mentioned that, by a government's decision, the teaching in minority languages in kindergartens will be replaced by Latvian language and this decision was taken without consulting the concerned communities or the parents. He also raised his concerns on attacks on education rights of Russian speakers in Latvia about their right to education which limit their rights to preserve their identity, while leading to a forced assimilation²³.

Interactive Dialogue²⁴

Participants presented various initiatives, such as the establishment of a body responsible for monitoring signals of crises while protecting minority activists at risk; the establishment of legal controls and procedures for anyone who violates the rights of minorities; the promotion of a more active role of the media in spreading discourse of coexistence among the various components of society; and the need to prevent marginalization of minorities in the States and the consequence successive genocides.

Item VI- Conclusions remarks

The Special Rapporteur on minority issues stated that thousand or so of civil society, from national governments from north and south who participated in the Forum as well as in the four regional forums helped to send a message on how to move forward, to do more or better. He stressed that thirty years after the adoption of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of minorities, we must do much more and "the future depend on what we do today" by paraphrasing Mahatma Gandhi. He mentioned few of main points raised during the forum: first, that not enough is being done at the international level, minorities are the last major group at the United Nations with no specific mechanism or protection for their Human Rights such as a permanent Forum or Voluntary Fund to provide financial backing as many recommendations clearly show this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. This said, he emphasized that the only new development has been the offerings the regional Forums to increase accessibility and visibility for many minorities, which was done under his mandate and there is no guarantee that they will be continuing after his tenure comes to an end later next year.

He also highlighted that the most emphatic recommendation seems to be the need for a legally binding treaty on minority rights with an associated oversight mechanism which would guide both states and non-state actors. He stressed that this treaty was widely regarded as the best possible way forward for all major stakeholders since it would provide the opportunity to channel minority activism, assist diplomacy and also provide expertise into a systematic long-term conversation about ways to

²² The integral version of the statements can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

²³ The integral version of the statements can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

²⁴ Interventions on this item can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet: [Pages - 15th session \(ohchr.org\)](#)

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. He continued affirming that for minorities, such an instrument elaborated with their equal participation would give a chance to engage with the United Nations and States, not only as victims of Human Rights violations but as responsible agents in the making of norms that govern their lives. He called the United Nations Secretary-General who should commit a High-Level Panel to assess the inadequacies and suggest concrete ways forward on minority rights treaty.

The Special Rapporteur followed emphasizing that to have a dialogue and to have constructive conditions requires a permanent forum rather than only a two-day Forum, which would alternate between New York and Geneva, together regional forums. He recalled the need of the financial support to assure greater accessibility for minorities from all parts of the world, not mainly from the western part of the world which probably face less obstacles. He stressed that in terms of substantive rights, the gaps that need to be addressed in the future include citizenship rights without discrimination; economic rights including land; and a focus on sustainable and inclusive development of minority regions while protecting the natural environment. He recalled that the right to participation in policymaking and in decision-making need to reflect the existing state practice with regard to norms of autonomy as well as the rights of religious minorities needs to be addressed and recognized for the future. He reminded another issue that came up during the forum was the urgent need to mainstream in the United Nations, the structures and activities specifically to those of marginalized minorities and the section within these minorities which are particularly vulnerable to abuse such as in the case of the intersection of the rights of women and disabled within those minority communities. He also indicated that there should be a U.N. international year or decade for minorities and a need to have a year or decade to mark minority issues. The Special Rapporteur highlighted that the recommendations made during the forum will be published in the webpage of his mandate and summarized in the report of the Chairperson and his own recommendations will be presented to the U.N. Human Rights Council in March of next year. He recalled at the last minute numerous individuals were not able to come to Geneva to participate in the Forum because of measures or checks imposed by the pandemic. He also paid tribute to the minority human rights defenders who continue to struggle for the respect and protection of minority rights despite the many challenges they face acting as bridges between communities and trying to foster dialogue and build trust. He emphasized that dialogue is needed more than ever in today's world and in the U.N.'s spaces, such as the one of the Forum, which provides a key opportunity for dialogue and exchange, including of different perspectives and voices.

The Special Rapporteur concluded by thanking volunteers, U.N. staff members, minority Fellows and others, all states who supported, the Chairman, the interpreters as well as all contributions of experience, expertise and recommendations to the Forum. He called for political leadership and resolute action from every Member State and for concrete steps to protect minorities and their identity. He stated that in every action and decision minorities themselves must be meaning fully included as active and equal participants. He reminded that someone once said that it is during our darkest moments that we have to focus on see the light and during the Forum, participants provided some light that is much needed to try to rethink, review and reform the UN Declaration on minorities and what is needed to make the world a better place, a place where there is peace and justice for all.

The Chair of the Forum thanked the panelists and all participants for their exchanges and sharing point of views on minorities' rights. He thanked everyone's efforts to make this event successful.