

Madam President,
Mr. Special Rapporteur,
Your Excellencies and all attendees,

My name is Nuha Grine and I am a previous fellow at the Minority Fellowship Programme and head of the Unity Society, or as we call it in our Amazighi language, Tamont.

The Amazigh are the original inhabitants of North Africa and are among the linguistic and religious minorities. In my country Tunis, the Amazigh are considered a minority with a distinct culture and this classification makes them one of the most socially and economically marginalised groups.

On the national level, the Amazigh suffer from the issue of recognising their language and therefore participating in public life because language is a bridge to enjoying all the rights listed in international instruments since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We cannot talk about exercising freedoms or social integration without at least recognising language as a conduit of social, political or cultural relations, and based upon which every individual or group is treated equally.

Their status may be similar to that of most other minorities in the world because international law does not have a clear and agreed-upon definition of the term minority. This does not motivate countries to recognise their minorities. Also, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not refer to the term minority explicitly, but its articles include many provisions directly related to minority rights, especially religious freedom and equality.

Although the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the only global instrument that exclusively deals with minority rights, emphasizes the rights stipulated in the United Nations human rights framework, builds on them and focuses on protecting and promoting the existence, equality, identity and the effective participation of minorities in all areas covered by the Declaration, its contribution to achieving progress in protecting minority rights at the global level has remained modest, as was acknowledged by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the anniversary of the Declaration.

Accordingly, special attention should be given to how to integrate equal respect for the human rights of minorities into all areas of the United Nations' work. However, we find that there is a large gap in the protection of minorities, which needs to be addressed in the context of parallel normative changes in the United Nations if minorities themselves participate as active and equal elements in its development.

In contrast, indigenous peoples were a key element in the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples and the new Permanent Forum is expected to allow people of African descent to directly participate in the development of a new declaration dedicated to people of African descent.

If we look at the work of the United Nations system regarding minorities, it includes but is not limited to:

1. The forum on minority issues, which is held annually and is limited to one topic, and lasts only two days, is not sufficient to implement the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic Minorities, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. Although it has provided an open space for all minorities in the world to participate, the participation of minorities in it remains difficult due to the lack of a funding that supports or facilitates participation, especially for minorities from Africa and the Middle East. Perhaps the regional forums that have been held have tried to involve the largest possible number of minorities and bring the forum closer to them.

2- The OHCHR Minority Fellowship Programme, launched in 2005, is the only opportunity for human rights activists working to protect and promote minority rights. It trains thirty minority rights defenders from all over the world who are not involved in the work of regional offices on minorities, even in an advisory capacity.

3. The international debate on Sustainable Development Goals has contributed to the emergence of several concepts that require reconsideration, as they did not specifically mention minorities, but it explicitly guarantees their protection in the pledge to “leave no one behind”. The pledges of the 2030 Agenda confirm taking more concrete steps to support people living in vulnerable situations, including minorities who face ongoing challenges, mainly discrimination and inequality.

Therefore, I make the following recommendations:

1. The need to recognise the Amazigh language and identity in Tunisia.
2. The need for a legally binding treaty on minority rights with an associated monitoring mechanism that would enable the systematic development of guidelines for both states and non-governmental actors.
3. Establish a fund to support minorities to enable minority representatives to participate in and use the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations.
4. Establish a permanent forum concerned with minority issues related to economic development, culture, environment, education, health and human rights.
5. Develop a fellowship programme for minorities by investing in a group of experts to work the United Nations offices on the promotion and protection of minority rights.
6. Continue regional forums and integrate them into the work of the United Nations regional offices in cooperation with colleagues from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.