

Sixteenth Session on Minority Issues
“Minorities and Cohesive Societies: Equality, Social Inclusion, and
Socio-economic Participation”

H.E. Václav Bálek

30 November 2023 10h00-10h06

Co-Chairs,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates and participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to open this sixteenth session of the Forum on Minority Issues on the theme of *“Minorities and Cohesive Societies: Equality, Social Inclusion, and Socio-economic Participation”*.

I welcome everyone who is participating in this Forum in person here in Geneva as well as those who will intervene through pre-recorded video messages. I look forward to your rich interactions.

Allow me to congratulate Ms. Elena Lazar and Ms. Petra Roter, who have kindly accepted the important task of co-chairing the Forum. Ms. Lazar and Ms. Roter bring with them a wealth of academic and practitioner experience in the field of minority issues and will undoubtedly lead this Forum with excellence.

I also wish to welcome Mr. Nicolas Levrat, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and congratulate him for his new appointment.

Excellencies,
Colleagues,

This Forum provides a unique venue where all stakeholders can engage in dialogue and cooperation and reflect on issues pertaining to the enjoyment of all human rights by minorities. And the theme of this year’s Forum could not be more relevant as it encourages us to look at

the challenges and opportunities governing minorities in various spheres of their daily lives, such as education, employment, and healthcare. At the same time, the Forum provides an important opportunity to recognize the integrative role played by those genuinely cohesive and inclusive societies.

As President of the Human Rights Council, I would like to take a moment to highlight that the Council has taken significant action to ensure that minority issues remain firmly on the Council's agenda.

For example, in April of this year, the Council once again decided to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, who is tasked with promoting the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and examining ways to overcome existing obstacles to the full and effective realization of those rights. The Council's establishment of this Forum in 2007 is another case in point. Every year, this Forum produces valuable guidance to human rights actors at the international, regional, and national levels. The outcomes of the discussions of each Forum are then presented to the Council by the Special Rapporteur through a set of recommendations.

To ensure inclusive participation in this Forum, in 2013 the Council established a Special Fund for the Participation of Civil Society in three of its Forums, including the Forum on Minority Issues. The aim of this Special Fund is to facilitate the broadest possible participation of civil society representatives and other relevant stakeholders and to give priority to the participation of local or national level non-governmental organizations active in the relevant fields.

Over the next two days, you have the opportunity to actively contribute to the outcomes and recommendations of this Forum and to continue building on the important work that has been carried out by the Forum at its previous sessions. I encourage you all to seize this opportunity to contribute to the promotion and protection of the human rights of minorities around the world.

I wish you all fruitful and constructive discussions and a successful Forum on Minority Issues.

I Thank you.