



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

High Commissioner on National Minorities

Opening Address

by

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During the

16th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues

**"Minorities and Cohesive Societies:
Equality, Social Inclusion, and Socio-economic Participation"**

Geneva – 30 November 2023

Excellencies,

Distinguished representatives of Member States and civil society,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address the 16th session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues, which this year is dedicated to the subject that is of utmost priority to my mandate: Minorities and Cohesive Societies, including Equality, Social Inclusion, and Socio-economic Participation.

First, I would like to congratulate the newly appointed Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Nicolas Levrat and wish him much success in implementing the important mandate entrusted to him by the United Nations community. My collaboration with the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues in the past has yielded tangible and meaningful results which are of particular significance to the theme of this year's forum.

For the past three years, my office has researched the importance of increasing the participation of national minorities in social and economic life as a means to build social cohesion. We benefitted greatly in our work from the excellent co-operation and support of the former Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Dr. Fernand de Varennes, as well as other experts and scholars who are well versed on national minority issues. As a result, last month on October 24th, my office presented its 10th set of guidelines and recommendations: the *HCNM Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Social and Economic Life*. This document distils the knowledge and experience that my institution has gathered during the past 30 years on the subject of creating opportunities for national minorities and increasing their participation in public life. These recommendations aim to provide guidelines to the OSCE participating States and beyond on how to ensure that everyone in society is included in all aspects of social and economic life, so that no one is left behind. I hope that this document will aide you in devising inclusive policies: policies that take everyone's interests into account, thereby ensuring that everyone participates fully in your respective societies. This will safeguard and strengthen social cohesion. I note that the document makes a reference to the recommendations issued by this Forum in several sessions throughout the past years. I want to emphasize that the Recommendations and Guidelines of my office are complementary to the provisions of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and other relevant international instruments.

Respecting and promoting human rights is essential for my conflict prevention mandate, as well as for peacebuilding and achieving the SDGs. I will therefore continue to work with all international actors to seek synergies and explore the complementarity in our work. To this end, I wish to mention that my office, together with the UNOG Director General Madame Tatiana Valovaya, organized an event on November 15th this year in Geneva on Conflict Prevention through the Socio-economic Inclusion of Minorities.

Distinguished participants of the Forum,

Sustainable peace and conflict resolution can only be achieved when human rights are respected and when equal opportunities – whether social, economic or otherwise – are made available to everyone, including national minorities. I therefore wish to commend and thank the organizers of this Forum for dedicating a special session to highlight positive examples, exchange good practices, and discuss different approaches to creating inclusive policies that strengthen social cohesion. Creating an open space for dialogue and sharing good practices are essential for inclusive policies to take hold in order to finally build stronger and resilient societies.

I would like thank, taking this opportunity, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues for their excellent co-operation with my office of the HCNM as well as with other OSCE institutions and for the invitation to address this forum.

My institution remains committed to its conflict prevention role, and to promoting inclusive policies that champion integration with respect for all people, including national minorities.

Thank you for your attention.