

16th session on the UN Forum on Minority Issues

Concluding Remarks by Ms Petra Roter, Co-Chair of the Forum

In addition to all these important substantive issues, which will be reflected in our final report of the co-chairs, I would now like to reflect also on minority issues in general, and on the forum as a platform for dialogue on minority issues.

What we have been reminded of over the past two days is

- the notable presence of socio-economic and other forms of inequalities,
- the still too frequent perception of minorities as a problem rather than an integral and valued part of our diverse societies, providing the basis for exclusive policies, often securitizing minorities and minority issues;
- misunderstanding of the substance of minority rights that go - and need to go - beyond prevention of discrimination (as the Special Rapporteur explained in detail in his opening speech yesterday).

Exclusion, inequality, abuse, violence against persons belonging to different minorities – all cause frustration, detachment, and lead to disintegration rather than cohesion of societies. Importantly, cohesion will not be achieved by imposing one language and one culture upon everyone living in a state. It is a problem that we still witness such identity politics and policies, which are reflected also in the socio-economic field and in particular in access (or lack thereof) to effective participation regarding socio economic issues.

What we have also been reminded of by so many speakers is a general absence of the formal permanent space for advocacy for minority rights within the UN. This is truly a pity – as this absence leaves a lot of space for marginalizing not just minorities and persons belonging to them, but also marginalizing minority rights as human rights. The issue of “The Fate of Minorities” or the promise of the UN back in 1948 not to remain indifferent to the fate of minorities, thus has many dimensions and many forms. Not only do we need to understand them, but we need to understand diversity within minorities – hence different needs, interests and concerns. We have heard many calls for understanding intersectional issues persons belonging to minorities face.

And finally, I/we hope that states will be able to understand that the ‘fate of minorities’ is about the fate of their people at home - whose potential is not recognised or realised. Actions against persons belonging to minorities or against minorities, or prevention of such actions by other individuals – in person or online, through actions or hate speech – all this is neither rational nor reasonable. And above all – it is not about dignity for all, but only for some.

As a human being and an independent expert on minority issues, I am hoping that this forum and the 75th anniversary of both resolutions – on the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the one titled The Fate of Minorities, will give us all enough courage to understand what is really at stake – on the ground, right now.

I thank you all for co-operation during these two days.