

Karolina Derepa

Distinguished delegates, I speak today as a representative of the people of my ancestral homeland, the Carpathian Rusyns. Like many members of minorities, I grew up far from home and far from the culture that shaped generations before me. [Inaudible] families, out of necessity build their lives elsewhere and gradually integrated into new cultures. My family carried our language, our traditions, and our identity with them after leaving the region. Growing up away from my homeland once felt like a disadvantage, over time I realized it became a source of strength. Living outside of the political tensions of the region allowed my family to preserve our native language, the language of the people who much of the world does not even know exist. Our language is officially recognized in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and several other countries. Yet, in Ukraine, it remains classified solely as a dialect of Ukrainian. Unlike in the places where I grew up, online, I witnessed how our language and identity can be stigmatized and marginalized. Speaking publicly in our mother tongue has shifted, from strength to clear risk. What began as online harassment has escalated into real-life threats. People in our community who simply speak in their language are accused of betraying the very country they consider their home. I stand before you with a simple request, that the international community acknowledges our existence, our heritage, and our right to preserve our identity. Thank you.