

Ukrainian Gagauz Union

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates, my name is [inaudible] a fellow of the Minorities Fellowship Program, and I am honored to speak for the first time in history on behalf of the Gagauz people of Ukraine. We are a 32,000-strong Turkic community in Budjak, Southern Ukraine. Despite our historical connection to Budjak, the Gagauz are recognized only as a national minority, while the Law on Indigenous People, which we fully meet the criteria for, would provide a representative body and stronger cultural and linguistic protections. Our exclusion limits participation and undermines cohesion. Historical injustices also remain unaddressed. The forced resettlements and famine that our community experienced during the USSR period were never officially recognized. When past harm is ignored, it is harder for a community to feel equal today. Despite this history, the Gagauz show strong loyalty to Ukraine. Around 1,000 serve in the armed forces. Yet stereotypes persist. We are still labeled foreign, not Ukrainian enough, or pro-Russian. These narratives lead to discrimination and under-representation, including double under-representation for Gagauz women. Language laws further harm cohesion. With no textbooks, trained teachers, or academic programs, the number of native speakers has fallen by nearly 50% in the last 25 years. Without a language, a community loses both identity and its sense of belonging. To strengthen cohesion, we ask the UN to support a review of indigenous recognition criteria, documentation of historical abuses, protection of minority languages through the UPR, and stronger inclusion of minorities, including women, in peace-building. Cohesion is built when every community is seen, valued, and included. Thank you.