

Sikh Human Rights Group

Thank you. May I first congratulate the Forum, the Secretariat, and the Special Rapporteur for pushing the minority agenda across the UN system. Nationalism, xenophobia and populism are some of the pernicious barriers to peaceful coexistence of minorities within a country where the majority is trying to define the nation, or seize the state as an extension of its culture. It is important that, beyond legal safeguards for minorities, steps are also taken to make the majority comfortable with minorities. The richness of diversity and its value have to be promoted. We think states should try to adopt policies that encourage coexistence through cultural exchanges, joint activities, and influencers, as well as ensuring talented people from minorities are able to occupy high offices as well as public roles. There is a lot states can learn from each other. Coexistence does not mean an end to the national character of a country. Coexistence starts with respecting and accepting others as equal partners in a state, making room for their beliefs and culture, and embracing the richness of different cuisines, languages, outlooks, and even world views. Human beings have a tremendous capacity for going beyond tolerance to acceptance of diversity and coexistence of different minorities. The onus of course is also on minorities to develop attitudes and skills of coexistence. When minorities demand too much, there is resentment. When a majority insists on assimilation, there is resistance. Coexistence is a fine balance that has to be nurtured by the state and delivered by influential bodies and leaders in a state.