

FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES Minority youth: towards diverse and inclusive societies

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Introductory comments

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.

My name is Muhamet Arifi, and I am the Executive Director of NGO Balkan Sunflowers Kosova.

I belong to the Ashkali ethnic minority from Kosovo and I am privileged to be part of 2017 **OHCHR** minority fellowship program and to have the opportunity to participate in this very important Forum.

You are probably wondering who are the Ashkalis.

Mr. Chair, there are more than 17 000 Ashkali living in Kosovo and fortunately we and all other minority groups are recognized by the Kosovo constitution as such.

More than 100 000 Ashkali live in the Balkan, Europe, and many other states of the world as well. Majority of our population is youth and they are in risk of being socially excluded and totally assimilated all over the Europe.

Unfortunately, many are not aware about the Ashkali, and many other minority groups because we have been referred or subsumed in the bigger term 'Roma'. For instance, the EU existing human rights mechanisms define or use the term Roma and I quote:

*“Roma” **includes** not only Roma but also Sinti, Kali, Ashkali, “Egyptians”, Manouche and kindred population groups in Europe, together with Travellers, so as to embrace the great diversity of the groups concerned”*

Based on this definition, Ashkali and many other minorities in Europe are grouped - **“EMBRACED”** as “Roma”. Grouping different minorities under “Roma” is extremely damaging to those groups who are already struggling to realise their rights in particular countries.

Furthermore, maintaining this definition places many question marks over existing international mechanisms and policy documents.

* Kosovo under UNSR 1244

We are not a “Roma”. We are not supposed to, and we don’t like to be called “Roma”, or worst, “others”, “subgroups”, etc. People from different minority groups are here and I am sure they would like their identity to be recognized and respected. **As a proud Ashkali, we would like to be known as as such and not as “others.”.**

During the Minority Fellowship Program I learned about the different UN instruments and mechanisms that aims to promote and protect minorities rights and most importantly, their identity.

As such Mr. Chair, allow me to put forward the following recommendations:

- **The** European instruments and mechanisms must take all necessary measures to change their definition and stop the usage of the “Roma” terminology by grouping all minority groups in one.
- The European institution must equally recognize, promote and protect the identity of all minorities and provide them a fora to express and profess their identities as such, targeting minority youth.
- Thank you Mr. Chair.