

UN Forum on Minority Issues

Conflict Prevention and the Protection of the Human Rights of Minorities

Concept Note

The [fourteenth session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues](#) will be convened on **2 and 3 December 2021** in Palais des Nations in Geneva and online pursuant to Human Rights Council [resolution 6/15 of 28 September 2007](#) and [resolution 19/23 of 23 March 2012](#). This year, the theme of the UN Forum is "Conflict Prevention and the Protection of the Human Rights of Minorities".

1. Background

Upholding [the human rights of minorities] is not only the right thing to do – it is a powerful way to defuse tensions, prevent conflict and facilitate broad-based economic prosperity... No society will ever find sustainable harmony and peace without justice; and development will always be impeded when members of society are held back. Minorities – and minority youth – are not a threat; they are under threat.

Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, UN Forum on Minority Issues, 13 December 2017.

Most conflicts are characterized by the insufficient inclusion of minorities often coupled with disregard of their identities and grievances as well as denial of their human rights.

The [Rabat Plan of Action](#) notes that many of the conflicts worldwide in past decades have also – to varying degrees – contained a component of incitement to national, racial or religious hatred.

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For the purposes of this UN Forum, the term “conflict” will refer specifically to violent conflict and may be broadened to include violence targeting minorities and civilians such as genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Several concerns exist over insufficient focus of international and regional institutions on the links between minority issues and conflict prevention.

In his landmark report to the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations in 2000, the Secretary-General stated that in many countries at war, the condition of poverty was coupled with sharp ethnic or religious cleavages, and that almost invariably, the rights of subordinate groups were insufficiently respected, the institutions of government were insufficiently inclusive and the allocation of society’s resources favoured the dominant faction over others. He concluded that the solution was clear: to promote human rights, to protect minority rights and to institute political arrangements in which all groups were represented, and that every group needed to become convinced that the State belonged to all people (A/54/2000, paras. 202-203).

The report on minority rights and conflict prevention (A/HRC/16/45) presented by the first Independent Expert on minority issues Ms. Gay McDougall in 2010 highlights the need to strengthen a focus on minority rights within the United Nations system of early warning mechanisms. She particularly pointed out that, as a measure to increase stability and improve inclusive governance, States should implement fully the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, through a process of consultation and cooperation with minority groups.

10 years since the reports by the Secretary-General and the first Independent Expert on Minority Issues were presented, wide concerns persist that States and international organizations remain reluctant to act until violence has started, and this is leading to more unstable, violence prone societies.

According to some reports, since 2010 the number of major violent conflicts has tripled globally and most of them involve minorities. It is also

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clear that in recent decades, most of the conflicts tend to be internal, usually with the ethnic, linguistic or religious dimension.

Wide-reaching, inclusive and action oriented discussions with the participation of minorities are needed on the ways forward and means to advance the protection of the human rights of minorities and the prevention of conflicts involving them. Participation of minority women and minority youth should be particularly encouraged as, according to the tenth session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues they should be seen as an essential part of preventing conflicts and building peaceful communities (see A/HRC/37/73).

As prevention is usually discussed in a post-conflict context, and given that stopping violence once a conflict has erupted is far more difficult (and costly) than preventing one, the UN Forum will aim to shift the focus towards prevention and inspire for action.

2. General Objectives

The UN Forum on Minority Issues aims to provide a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, as well as thematic contributions and expertise to the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues.

The UN Forum shall analyse practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives in addressing conflict prevention through the protection of the human rights of minorities, in line with human rights law, paying attention to the principles and rights enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and other relevant international instruments. The UN Forum shall, *inter alia*, examine effective state legislation, policies and programmes as well as initiatives of other relevant stakeholders, including international and regional organizations, national human rights institutions and civil society.

3. Participants

The UN Forum shall be open to the participation of States, United Nations mechanisms, bodies and specialized agencies, funds and programmes, intergovernmental organizations, regional organizations and mechanisms in the field of human rights, national human rights institutions and other relevant national bodies, academics and experts on minority issues, representatives of minorities, minority and non-governmental organizations.

4. Areas of Discussion

Considering the main objectives of the forum the discussions will address the following overarching themes that reflect the main challenges and issues in the field of conflict prevention through the protection of the human rights of minorities:

- **Root causes of contemporary conflicts involving minorities**
International legal and institutional framework
- **Legal and institutional framework: the human rights of minorities and conflict prevention**
- **Focusing on the rights of minorities and effective early prevention of conflicts**
- **Towards a lasting peace: positive initiatives to better protect the rights of minorities to prevent conflicts**

A gender perspective will be applied to all areas of discussion to address particular vulnerability and marginalization of minority women in conflict and post-conflict situations

5. Inputs and outcome

The UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues encourages wide participation from States, national human rights institutions, civil society representatives, as well as regional and international organizations and minorities. Recommendations emanating from [four regional forums](#)

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(Americas, Africa and the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia) held in 2021 under the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues will also be considered, in order to include greater regional input and views on the issues to be discussed at the fourteenth session of the UN Forum.

All participants are encouraged to contribute to the discussion and dialogue by sharing experiences and views about the main areas of discussion of the UN Forum. Based on the dialogue and contributions of the participants a summary of the discussion of the UN Forum will be prepared by the Chairperson of the UN Forum, and the Special Rapporteur on minority issues will prepare a report on the recommendations of the UN Forum.