

## **Twelfth Session of the Forum on Minority Issues**

### ***Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities***

#### **Concept Note**

The Twelfth Session of the Forum on Minority Issues is convened on **28 and 29 November 2019** in Palais des Nations in Geneva 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 Forum is "Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities". A preparatory meeting for all participants will be organised on **27 November 2019**.

#### **1. Background**

The rights of linguistic minorities are human rights that must be respected, including in relation to the appropriate degree of use of minority languages. Minorities in all regions of the world often face significant challenges in using and maintaining their language, as well as in accessing quality education and in particular education that contributes to the preservation of their language, culture and identity. Education deals with what is perhaps the central linguistic right of minorities, and is also fundamental to the maintenance of linguistic diversity. A language that is not taught is a language that will ultimately vanish. The benefits of education in the mother language are now fairly well established scientifically through studies of minority children in different parts of the world.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the protection of minority languages, as well as the recognition, respect and promotion of the educational needs of minorities, is a crucial component of the protection and preservation of the culture of minorities, and the promotion of society's diversity, and thus an important factor in reducing inter-ethnic tensions and preventing conflicts.

The 2017 publication by the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues entitled "Language Rights of Linguistic Minorities: a practical guide for implementation" highlights the importance of designing and implementing educational programmes in minority languages along with the teaching of the official language(s), and advocates for the preservation of minority languages, because as stated "a language that is not taught is a language that will ultimately vanish".

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<sup>1</sup> *Language Rights of Linguistic Minorities: A Practical Guide for Implementation*, UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Geneva, March 2017.

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The issue of education as a human right and its impact for minorities constitutes one of the thematic priorities of the Special Rapporteur, and in line with the enhanced regional focus of his mandate, the Special Rapporteur undertook to organize three regional forums on "Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities" in Europe, Asia-Pacific, as well as Africa and the Middle East. Discussions at the regional forums aim at providing regional insights on legislative, institutional and policy initiatives for protection and promotion of minority language education, and the adoption of inclusive pedagogical and educational approaches, with the view to ensuring equal access to education for persons belonging to minorities. The 12th Session of the Forum on Minority Issues will further build on these regional discussions, reflect on the global experiences in this particular area, and culminate with the elaboration of specific recommendations addressed to all relevant stakeholders.

### **2. General Objectives**

The 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 Special Rapporteur on minority issues.

The Forum shall analyse practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives in addressing education in, and teaching of, minority languages as a human rights issue, in line with 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 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. Other objectives include:

- Raising awareness of the ways in which the education in and the teaching of minority languages is anchored in international human rights obligations;
- Providing a platform for dialogue and exchange on practical challenges of minority language education among various stakeholders;
- Identifying and discussing the central issues of concern related to education and minority languages;
- Amplifying the voices of minority communities in assessing and improving minority language education policies.

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The Twelfth session of the Forum on Minority Issues aims to promote dialogue and cooperation in order to identify effective solutions, as well as to highlight the critical role of international and regional organizations and international, regional and bilateral cooperation in reaching the above-mentioned objectives:

### **3. Participants**

The 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**

In light of 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 minority language education and the human rights of persons belonging to minorities:

- ***Human rights and minority language education.***
- ***Public policy objectives for education in, and the teaching of, minority languages.***
- ***Effective practices for education in, and the teaching of, minority languages.***
- ***Language, education and the empowerment of minority women and girls.***

### **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 other stakeholders.

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