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Madame Chairperson, distinguished delegations and participants,

I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to share with the Forum my experience gained in the field of minority rights and protection of human rights as a whole, especially in the last six years spent working for the Ombudsperson Institution in Kosovo, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

Protecting minority rights throughout history and even today is important, considering that there are a great number of countries and societies with mixed populations, having different ethnic, racial, religious or linguistic affiliations. Harmonious relations between minority groups themselves and between minority and majority communities, as well as respect for the identity of each group, present the picture of a wealthy multiethnic and multicultural global society. By acknowledging the aspirations of national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups and ensuring the individual rights of the persons belonging to minorities, the dignity and equality of all individuals is reaffirmed. This then leads to participation in the development of the society and contributes to the relaxation of tensions among groups and individuals. In such societies, the protection of minority communities represents an important test for the development of democracy.

Kosovo society, however, belongs to those societies which encounter major problems in the protection of minority rights; even though there are a great number of legal instruments aimed at minority protection, in reality the results are very low. Consequently, the obstacles encountered by minority communities in Kosovo are quite high. The armed conflict that occurred in Kosovo in 1999 has stigmatized minority culture, breached their rights and increased interethnic intolerance. Kosovo therefore belongs to those societies which still have to reconstruct the culture and respect of minority rights, interethnic tolerance, and multiculturalism in a modern European sense.

In my presentation, I will try to give you the overall situation regarding minority communities and their prospects in economic life in Kosovo.

When talking about the ethnic make-up, nowadays there live in Kosovo 88% Albanians, 7% Serbs and 5% other ethnic minorities (Bosniaks, Turks, Croats, Goranis and Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians (RAE)). Those figures date from 2005, and since the overall registration of Kosovo's population will not be conducted before 2011, we cannot rely 100% on this figures. With regard to these figures, it should be emphasized that this data does not include refugees and IDPs. Next to common concerns for the return of refugees and of IDPs mostly from Serbia and Montenegro

to Kosovo, each minority community is facing similar problems, such as security in certain parts of Kosovo, discrimination and integration into the society. Most importantly, economic prospects as a condition for sustainable return are very low, which makes a return very uncertain in most cases. It is important to say that the vast majority of Kosovo Serbs, RAE, Bosniaks and other minority communities who fled Kosovo in 1999 and later, especially during the violent events against Serbs and RAE in March 2004, have not returned yet. According to the UNHCR and their statistical overview, over the past 10 years, only 10% of more than 200 000 people who fled Kosovo have returned. The main reason of concern for them is mostly the fact that their property remains occupied, a lack of employment opportunities, as well as the lack of freedom of movement in some areas of Kosovo. After the armed conflict in 1999, most of the minority population remains in rural and semi-rural areas. The returnees also return to those areas and engage in basic agricultural activities if their land is not illegally occupied by members of the Albanian community. It should be emphasized here that a great number of commercial private property and agricultural land that belongs to members of minority groups is still illegally occupied by Kosovo Albanians. Due to technical problems, the Kosovo Property Agency has only managed to resolve one quarter of the submitted request for repossession of property by its owners, statistically this means that of the over 40 000 cases of property claims, submitted by members of minority communities, only 10 000 claims have been resolved.

Those members of minority groups who found jobs are mostly employed in the public sector, such as in local medical stations, local schools financed by the Republic of Serbia, then the Kosovo Police Service, local and international NGOs, local small businesses, or they find employment through income generating projects supported by the international community. Members of minority communities who have worked in public enterprises before 1999 have not yet managed to return to their previous jobs.

According to the UNDP, high unemployment and poverty remain two of the most critical problems facing Kosovo today. Unemployment affects up to 45% of the overall population, and between 70% and 80% of the people in minority communities. Within the RAE community, unemployment reaches 95% of their population. Poor infrastructure, and political and legal uncertainty have resulted in limited foreign investments Kosovo, making the economy dependent on the service sector and international financial aid. Bearing in mind that Kosovo's economic growth still remains at the lowest level in the western Balkans, this situation also has an impact on the development of the private sector as well. The increasing unemployment in the majority population leads to a decreasing number of work places for minority communities.

In predominantly Serbian inhabited areas, so-called "parallel structures" continue to play a great role and have a substantial impact on the economic situation, since they provide most of the work places and economic start-up aid for small businesses through the Ministry of Kosovo and Metohija of the Republic of Serbia. The Republic of Serbia is also providing work places and salaries for those who work in the local primary and secondary schools and at the University in Mitrovica north, health care centers, and different public institutions functioning in these areas in Kosovo, as well as for employees in "parallel municipal structures". With regard to this issue, I have to be honest and say that in some regions, such as in western Kosovo, and where the

Serbian returnees live, those institutions of the Republic of Serbia are the only ones who provide employment for Serbian, Gorani and Roma inhabitants.

When we talk about Kosovo's institutions, positive examples in economic development for minorities in Kosovo occurred from the beginning of 2010, when new municipalities were formed, in accordance with the plan for the decentralization of Kosovo. In accordance with this plan, five new municipalities were formed in Kosovo, one with a predominantly Turkish population and four with a predominantly Serbian population. With the creation of these municipalities, minorities that live in those areas are now given the opportunity to govern the areas where they live. New working positions were opened, thus the effective return of refugees and IDPs could be organized in a better manner in these areas. Previously, even though work places had been reserved for members of minority communities at the central and local level, as well as in the public sector, this multi-ethnic pluralism was not reflected in the situation on the ground. But now, finally, with decentralization some small positive steps and achievements have been made. Next to the opening of new work places, these municipalities have funds to help small businesses and also to use different subventions in order to develop the economy in minority populated regions, as well as to provide social welfare for those who depend on this sort of assistance.

Let us hope that this trend of better perspectives for the minority communities in these regions, involving better representation and better organization for these people, is just the beginning of a better economic perspective for not only minorities, but for Kosovo society as a whole.

Due to the situation in Kosovo that I just presented, I can only share the view of the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Mrs. McDougal, when she said that the recommendations made can only improve the situation on the ground all around the globe and in the areas where minorities are facing different ways of exclusion due to their ethnic, racial, religious or linguistic affiliation, which is different from the majority population. Concerning Kosovo's diversity, the recommendations that are in front of us, can only be an encouragement and challenge for the next new government to prove that Kosovo can be a multicultural and multiethnic society, of course if there will be a political will for this. The inclusion of the minority population in the economic life in Kosovo and better perspectives of living for minority communities would not only benefit these communities, but would also benefit the whole society in Kosovo.

Thank you for your attention.