

FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES

SIXTEENTH SESSION

“MINORITIES AND COHESIVE SOCIETIES: EQUALITY, SOCIAL INCLUSION, AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION”

30 NOVEMBER AND 1 DECEMBER 2023
PALAIS DES NATIONS, GENEVA

SUMMARY BY THE CHAIRS OF THE FORUM

Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 19/23 of 23 March 2012, the Forum on Minority Issues provides a platform for promoting dialogue and co-operation on issues pertaining to persons belonging 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, **Prof. Nicolas Levrat**. The Forum identifies and analyses best practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives for the further implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

The Forum meets annually for two days, on a different theme each year. The Special Rapporteur on minority issues is responsible for guiding the work of the Forum, preparing its annual meetings and reporting on its thematic recommendations to the Human Rights Council. The sixteenth session of the Forum took place on 30 November and 1 December 2023 as an in-person event at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. **Assoc. Prof. Elena Lazăr and Prof. Petra Roter** were appointed as Co-Chairs of the session, which focused on the theme: “Minorities and Cohesive Societies: Equality, Social Inclusion, and Socio-economic Participation”.

About 570 participants from some 74 countries registered for the Forum, including representatives of Member States, United Nations mechanisms, bodies and specialized agencies, other intergovernmental organizations, regional organizations and mechanism in the field of human rights, national human rights institutions and other relevant national bodies, academics and experts on minority issues, representatives of minorities and minority and non-governmental organizations. In addition to the Forum, 11 side-events addressing different issues were organized by various stakeholders.¹ Interpretation in six official UN languages and in international sign language was provided during the Forum, as well as captioning in English, French and Spanish. The Concept Note, the Agenda of the Forum and the Programme of Work were made available to all Forum participants in advance of the Forum on the webpage of the Sixteenth session of the Forum.² All these formed the basis for the discussions.

Format of the Forum

The Forum followed the procedure developed over its previous sessions. To help focus the discussions and ensure that they would be interactive, each agenda item was introduced by several invited panellists, followed by interventions from the participants.

¹ See the programme of the side events [here](#).

² [Sixteenth session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues](#).

Outcome documents

The present document has been prepared in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 19/23, which requests the Chair to prepare “a summary of the discussion of the Forum, to be made available to all participants of the Forum”. This summary is to be complemented by the outcome document containing the recommendations of the Forum presented by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues to the Human Rights Council at its 55th session in March 2024.³

This summary does not provide the full details of all presentations that were made during the Forum’s proceedings. The list of speakers and the integral version of the statements submitted to the Secretariat of the Forum on Minority Issues can be accessed at the Forum webpage.⁴ The list of recommendations of the Forum will be published in a separate report.⁵

Opening of the Forum

The opening remarks relied on the following panelists: H.E. Mr. Václav Bálek, the President of the Human Rights Council, the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris (*pre-recorded video*), the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, H.E. Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov (*pre-recorded video*), the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Prof. Nicolas Levrat, and the Co-Chair of the sixteenth session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues, Prof. Petra Roter.⁶

The **President of the Human Rights Council H.E. Mr. Václav Bálek** presented his welcoming words and commended the Forum as a unique venue to reflect on issues pertaining to the enjoyment of all human rights by persons belonging to minorities through dialogue and co-operation between all stakeholders. He pointed out that this year’s event encouraged participants to look at the challenges to and opportunities for minorities in various spheres of their daily lives, such as education, employment and healthcare, and emphasized that the Forum provides an important opportunity to recognize the integrative role played by those genuinely cohesive and inclusive societies. He recalled that the Council has taken significant action to ensure that minority issues and minority rights remain firmly on the Council’s agenda, including the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, the establishment of this Forum and the decision to ensure a special fund to support the participation of civil society representatives at the Forum.

The **Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris** noted that the cohesion of our societies depends on the recognition of the richness of their diversity - and the valued contribution of diversity starts with inclusion and effective participation. Realizing minority rights fundamentally requires equal opportunities and effective anti-discrimination measures. She pointed out that her findings indicate that about two-thirds of countries globally lack comprehensive anti-discrimination laws, contradicting the equality promised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She emphasized that her office focuses on combating inequality by advocating for human rights-centred economic policies, aiming to reduce economic and social disparities, and emphasizing the importance of fighting discrimination and increasing funding for essential services. The Assistant Secretary-General noted that the efforts of her office include promoting the participation and rights of persons belonging to communities that are marginalized groups, particularly minorities, to address and lessen inequalities. She quoted the Secretary-General’s report, “Our Common Agenda,” which

³ A/HRC/55/70.

⁴ [Sixteenth session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues.](#)

⁵ A/HRC/55/70. This report will be presented at the 55th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2024.

⁶ The integral version of the statements can be consulted on the Human Rights Council Extranet [here](#).

highlights the need to overcome destabilizing inequalities for a greener, better, safer future. The Assistant Secretary-General added that this includes aligning our economies with human rights, especially for groups in a vulnerable situation like minorities.

In addition, she emphasized that it is time to ground economic choices in human rights principles, norms and obligations and work together towards human rights economies, as a human rights-centred economy focuses on people and the planet, promoting social cohesion by economically including persons belonging to minorities and respecting their rights. She noted that by ensuring that persons belonging to minorities are economically included, and their rights are respected, we can create more stable and harmonious societies where grievances are addressed through peaceful means and she added that we must overcome any “invisibility” of minorities and move towards genuine “indivisibility” of all human rights for everyone, including minority rights for persons belonging to minorities. She concluded by saying that this approach is vital for sustainable development, peace and stability, addressing issues like poverty, inequality and discrimination, and that inclusive and transparent decision-making in economic policies is crucial for the effective implementation of these ideals.

The **OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities H.E. Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov** referred to his Office’s most recent Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Social and Economic Life, a set of guidelines and recommendations distilling the knowledge and experience that his institution has gathered during the past 30 years about creating opportunities for national minorities and persons belonging to them and increasing their participation in public life. He noted that these recommendations aim to provide guidelines to the OSCE participating States and beyond on how to ensure that everyone in society is included in all aspects of social and economic life, so that no one is left behind. The High Commissioner on National Minorities emphasized the importance of this document in aiding to devise inclusive policies that take everyone’s interests into account, thereby ensuring that everyone participates fully in the respective societies and as such safeguarding and strengthening social cohesion. He equally noted that the document makes a reference to the recommendations issued by this Forum in several sessions throughout the past years.

The High Commissioner on National Minorities pointed out that respecting and promoting human rights is essential for his Office’s conflict prevention mandate, as well as for peacebuilding and achieving the SDGs and that he will continue to work with all international actors to seek synergies and explore the complementarity in this field. As an example, he referred to the recent joint event of the OSCE HCNM and UNOG in Geneva on Promoting Conflict Prevention through the Socio-Economic Inclusion of Minorities. The High Commissioner reiterated that sustainable peace and conflict resolution can only be achieved when human rights are respected and when equal opportunities – whether social, economic, or otherwise – are made available to everyone, including persons belonging to national minorities. In this respect, he emphasized the importance of creating an open space for dialogue and sharing good practices are essential for inclusive policies to take hold in order to finally build stronger and resilient societies.

The **Special Rapporteur on minority issues Prof. Nicolas Levrat** noted that, during his mandate, he intends to show and highlight, regarding minorities and cohesive societies, how guaranteeing and promoting minority specific position in national societies will contribute to enhancing the richness and cohesion of national societies. He pointed out that considering the contribution of persons belonging to minorities in cohesive societies, robust social fabric and resilient social systems will in turn benefit the individual situations of persons belonging to minorities. Regarding equality, he also emphasized that non-discrimination not only consists of avoiding treating differently persons in the same situation, but also avoiding treating equally persons in different situations. He emphasized therefore that equality means that persons belonging to a minority should be treated both equally and differently than persons belonging to the majority or the dominant part of society. As for the social inclusion and the socio-economic participation of persons belonging to minorities, while the Special Rapporteur noted

the absence of specific provisions on socio-economic rights of persons belonging to minorities, he highlighted that minority issues are as important as the enjoyment of civil and political rights, more particularly, in the spirit of the 1993 Vienna Declaration on Human Rights that stated that “all human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated”, and that the “international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis”. Prof. Levrat also noted that discriminations against persons belonging to minorities in the socio-economic sphere can be the result of private actors’ behaviour as well, which would require other types of action and should show the broader perspectives of efficiently promoting and preserving minority rights. The Special Rapporteur concluded by emphasizing the importance of the Forum for dialogue among all relevant stakeholders on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities as an integral part of the development of society as a whole, including the sharing of best practices such as for the promotion of mutual understanding of minority issues, managing diversity by recognizing plural identities, and promoting inclusive and stable societies as well as social cohesion.

The **Co-Chair of the sixteenth session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues Prof. Petra Roter** pointed out that this year we are marking not only the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also another resolution of the General Assembly, also adopted on 10 December 1948, titled The Fate of Minorities, in which the United Nations recognized that it “cannot remain indifferent to the fate of minorities”. The Co-Chair noted that minorities are still too frequently referred to and viewed as a problem, including as a security threat, rather than being accepted by everyone as part and parcel of our diverse societies, despite the adoption in 1992 of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities that committed to protect minority rights at the global level. The Co-Chair stressed the fact that violations of human and minority rights, and failure to prevent such violations, can and does lead to frustration, disintegration, also to conflicts and instability. Prof. Roter wondered when states will understand that human rights, including minority rights, are meant to ensure dignity of every human being, and when they will accept that to enable the conditions for effective equality, equity, including in the socio-economic field, is the only rational and reasonable policy. The Co-Chair noted that it makes sense to effectively address exclusion, inequalities, unequal opportunities persons belonging to minorities too frequently face and she added that action for inclusion and equity is thus also action for societal cohesion and integration, stability and peace. It benefits entire societies. She concluded by stating that 75 years is a long period and a good opportunity to rethink again about the ‘fate of minorities’ and persons belonging to them, about their human rights, including minority rights.

Item I: Challenges to inclusion and equality: barriers to the social and economic participation of persons belonging to minority groups

Participants were invited to address the systemic and structural challenges and discrimination that minority groups may face, including the unique obstacles for women and girls belonging to minorities, look at factors placing them at a disadvantage, such as language or other requirements or lack of educational opportunities or resources in regions where minorities are concentrated, and explore policies and practices that result in or exacerbate minority exclusion or place persons belonging to minorities at a disadvantage.

Presentations on the topic under discussion were made by the following panellists: Mr. Farkhat Ibragimov, Member of the Public Uyghur Association ITTIPAK of the Kyrgyz Republic; Mr. Mehmet Polatel, Co-ordinator, Minority Rights Academia, Hrant Dink Foundation; and Ms. Laxme Das, Advocacy Officer, International Dalit Solidarity Network.

Mr. Farkhat Ibragimov expressed his concerns about the situation of the Uyghurs in China, more specifically related to employment discrimination, discrimination against Uyghur women, religious discrimination, forced marriages, sexual abuses, enforced disappearances and language discrimination against the the Uyghurs. Mr. Ibragimov recommended various measures to be taken and implemented by the government of China and UN organizations to improve the protection of persons belonging to the Uyghur community in China.⁷

Mr. Mehmet Polatel focused on the socio-economic participation related to problems encountered by Armenians in Turkey. In this respect, he referred to existent barriers for persons belonging to non-Muslim minorities related to public employment, such as appointments to administrative offices, the judicial system and security forces. He also pointed out the limitations related to the right to education of Armenians in Turkey in that minority schools receive no public funds and depend solely on donations. Mr. Polatel concluded with pointing to the numerous property disputes as well involving Armenian communal organizations resulting in the confiscation and seizure of their properties. He presented relevant recommendations to the government to address the detailed problems and emphasized the importance of the adoption of an international treaty on minority rights.⁸

Ms. Laxme Das raised the issue of discrimination faced by Dalit women and girls in Bangladesh. She pointed to the various discriminatory practices related to the “untouchability” of the Dalits, including their exclusion from education, which results in illiteracy of most Dalit women. Dalit women, due to their position in the caste system, are often victims of regular abuse, sexual harassment, rape, gang rape, forced conversion, forced marriage, as well as bonded labour or slavery like conditions. Ms. Das equally noted that women in Dalit communities have limited access to local services like maternal health, family planning or other health services. Pregnant mothers and children suffer from malnutrition due to lack of information, which are the main causes of maternal death. Ms. Das concluded by submitting several recommendations to the government of Bangladesh to bring about the urgently needed change to the life of Dalit women and girls in Bangladesh.⁹

Interactive Dialogue¹⁰

In the interactive dialogue part, participants raised numerous concerns related to minority issues and presented various initiatives.

The concerns raised included references to the torture, persecution, detainment and forced displacement of persons belonging to minorities; the fact that persons belonging to minorities, including women, suffer from discriminatory laws and lack of access to education; that minority languages are marginalized and that the policy of cultural and linguistic assimilation is often applied; the growing hate speech and systematic and structural discriminatory policies against persons belonging to minorities; the fact that minority religious sacred sites and properties are purposefully destroyed.

As for the initiatives presented, among others, participants noted the importance of the inclusion of persons belonging to minorities and addressing their concerns with an intersectional approach; the relevance of providing access to quality education, economic opportunities and work for women belonging to minorities; the need for addressing challenging ingrained stereotypes against minorities and persons belonging to them; the importance of supporting access to security welfare for persons with disabilities belonging to minorities through enforceable labour legislation; the value of a strengthened role given to independent

⁷ The integral version of the statement of Mr. Farkhat Ibragimov can be consulted [here](#).

⁸ The integral version of the statement of Mr. Mehmet Polatel can be consulted [here](#).

⁹ The integral version of the statement of Ms. Laxme Das can be consulted [here](#).

¹⁰ Interventions in the interactive dialogue part of item 1 on “Challenges to inclusion and equality: barriers to the social and economic participation of persons belonging to minority groups” can be consulted on the UN WebTV [here](#).

national human rights institutions; the importance of national legislation to protect minorities and the significance of the adoption of a legally binding instrument to protect the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

Finally, good examples were also provided by some States who suggested addressing barriers to the social and economic participation of persons belonging to minorities, including measures related to economic development in regions with minorities, providing access to education, employment, social care, health and housing of persons belonging to minorities, and on the fight against discrimination affecting persons belonging to minorities.

Item II: Socio-economic empowerment

Participants were invited to share ways to amplify the economic participation of persons belonging to minority groups and emphasize equal opportunities in society, employment, and entrepreneurship, with special attention given to the economic support of migrants and refugees belonging to minority groups. Participants were equally requested to identify strategies to engage and empower minority young people by tapping into educational and employment prospects. Finally, in this thematic panel, participants were also encouraged to share examples of inclusive policies, including in the use of minority languages, in terms of promoting access to services and increased employment opportunities.

Presentations on the topic under discussion were made by the following panelists: Ms. Claire Thomas, Co-Executive Director, Minority Rights Group; Dr. Melakou Tegegn, Director, Fanos Ethiopia; and Dr. Jennifer Jackson-Preece, Associate Professor, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Ms. Claire Thomas provided examples of existing challenges to the socio-economic participation of persons belonging to minorities from all around the world and reflected on the ways in which they could be addressed. More particularly, she recommended to the relevant stakeholders supporting para legal networks, the establishment of shadow anti-discrimination monitoring bodies, participatory local budget monitoring, working to change hearts and minds, supporting carefully designed and effectively communicated positive measures including minority tailored support, assessing whether minorities and persons belonging to them are benefiting from policies and projects, collecting and publishing disaggregated data, supporting fellowships for minority youth to allow them to gain experience and break through barriers. Ms. Thomas emphasized the need for political will to set aside short-term expediencies, to challenge unfair privileges and to prioritize building cohesive, equitable and inclusive societies where all can blossom and where we all ultimately benefit from peace, stability and sustainable development.¹¹

With regard to the socio-economic empowerment of persons belonging to minorities, **Dr. Melakou Tegegn** pointed out that it requires first of all adhering to the principles of respect for fundamental freedoms as explicitly affirmed by international laws, including the affirmation of the right to self-determination for minorities to choose their modalities of life and the freedom of minority communities to adhere to their traditional way or social organization through their own independent community institutions. Dr. Tegegn emphasized that what is actually crucial in amplifying economic participation of persons belonging to minorities and emphasizing equal opportunities in society, employment and entrepreneurship, is adopting a minority-friendly policy that begins with recognition of minority and indigenous livelihood systems as viable as any other traditional social system and adopting supporting policies that correspond with UN conventions and declarations on minority and indigenous communities and persons belonging to them. He added that minority communities also need development, to which education of minority and indigenous communities is essential, so is gender equality, the empowerment of

¹¹ The integral version of the statement of Ms. Claire Thomas can be consulted [here](#).

the youth and children and the preservation of minority languages, cultures and traditions. Dr. Tegegn concluded by stating that as economic, social and political factors are no longer local issues but global ones, calls for those endeavours devised to advance the empowerment of minorities and persons belonging to them should by necessity be global as well.¹²

Dr. Jennifer Jackson-Preece recalled that minority rights facilitate economic empowerment by ensuring that persons belonging to minorities are protected from discrimination, exploitation and exclusion, and that they can participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives. An intersectional approach to empowerment is necessary in this context because persons belonging to minorities often face multiple forms of discrimination, exclusion and vulnerability – for example based on gender, age or migrant/refugee status – that produce additional barriers to their social and economic participation. She noted that the socio-economic empowerment of persons belonging to minorities requires equal treatment and equal opportunities and for that comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and very special measures to ensure proper implementation of such legislation need to be instated. Regarding the challenges of minority youth, Dr. Jackson-Preece stressed the lack of access to quality education and skills training, the high unemployment and underemployment, the lack of access to mentorship and role models and the lack of social capital and civic engagement. She emphasized the importance of targeted scholarships, training programmes, internships, teacher incentives or community-specific programmes, as well as multilingual education. As for the obstacles faced by minority migrants and refugees, she noted the lack of identification or proof of residence, financial barriers, the lack of information about the availability of services or benefits in their host countries, and the inability to speak or understand the language of their host countries and suggested, as special empowering measures, taking all available steps to end statelessness, ensuring information about how to access essential services in a language understood by minority migrants and refugees, recognizing skills and qualifications and offering subsidized or free access to language and skills training in the official language of the host state.¹³

Interactive Dialogue¹⁴

In the interactive dialogue part, participants raised numerous concerns related to minority issues and presented various initiatives.

The issues raised included that in many parts of the world, persons belonging to minorities experience killings, torture, direct attacks against persons and property, persecution, (intersectional) discrimination, segregation, racial stereotypes, hate speech, displacement and lack of access to resources, livelihood and education. Persons belonging to religious minorities are forced to convert to other religions. Migrants and refugees belonging to minorities have no access to decent work. The laws and the policies at national level do not protect sufficiently minorities and persons belonging to them or they are not enforced. The Sustainable Development Goals do not mention minorities.

As for the initiatives presented, among others, participants noted that addressing minority issues is crucial in preventing conflicts. They highlighted the importance of adopting enforceable laws and policies needed to protect minorities and persons belonging to them; the relevance of empowering women, the youth and migrants belonging to minorities; the value of forging partnerships of and mutual understanding between minorities; the importance of preserving minority languages and promoting cultural identities, providing access to education for persons belonging to minorities, as well as educating the broader society about minorities; the need for taking into account social characteristics; the necessity of protecting

¹² The integral version of the statement of Dr. Melakou Tegegn can be consulted [here](#).

¹³ The integral version of the statement of Dr. Jennifer Jackson-Preece can be consulted [here](#).

¹⁴ Interventions in the interactive dialogue part of item 2 on “Socio-Economic Empowerment” can be consulted on the UN WebTV [here](#).

all minority rights and securing effective access to minority rights; the value of involving persons belonging to minorities, including women, in peace processes.

Finally, good examples of socio-economic empowerment were also introduced, among which the support of States provided to entrepreneurs from minorities in the form of specific programmes, contracts and job opportunities; active promotion of persons belonging to minorities in the labour market; financial projects supporting persons belonging to minorities in learning and findings jobs; multilingual support to and in schools and universities.

Item III: Legal and structural approaches to more inclusive societies

Participants were invited to explore legislation, policies and the provision of public goods and services that respect the rights of persons belonging to minorities to equality without discrimination. They were equally invited to address access to health care, including through proportionate investment in infrastructure or development, educational and economic inequalities, to examine how legislation can increase opportunities that honour and represent minority identities and to discuss the importance of ensuring equal access without discrimination to technology and fostering digital literacy within minorities.

Presentations on this topic were made by the following panellists: Dr. Corinne Lennox, Senior Lecturer in Human Rights, School of Advanced Study, University of London; Mr. Farooq Aftab, Legal Adviser, Human Rights Committee; and Mr. Slava (Veaceslav) Balan, PhD Candidate and Part-time Professor at the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Law.

Dr. Corinne Lennox focused her intervention on global governance and the role of the UN in providing legal and structural approaches to more inclusive societies. She noted that UN's legal mechanisms for minorities are very limited, and minorities are one of the few groups without being addressed by a specific treaty. She added that there is also a fundamental structural problem at the UN regarding spaces for minority participation in that the UN's only dedicated space for national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, and groups affected by work and descent-based discrimination, including caste-based discrimination, is the two days annual UN Forum on Minority Issues. Dr. Lennox noted that this lack of a UN space for minorities also impacts policy development in that while the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development mentions indigenous peoples six times, it does not mention minorities even once, and indigenous peoples constitute one of the so-called major groups with a structural platform to engage with the High-Level Political Forum on the SDGs, whereas minorities do not constitute such a group. She emphasized that given that the UN is using the major groups as platforms for civil society input, without a major group structure, minorities risk to be left out from the UN's 'Summit for the Future' and its planned outcome document 'Pact for the Future' and for the same reason from the Secretary General's Roadmap for Digital Co-operation. In her concluding remarks, Dr. Lennox recommended the Forum to be strengthened and reformed, to create a major group for minorities and that national and policy developments incorporate also measures on cultural rights and the rights of persons belonging to minorities to participate in policy development.¹⁵

Mr. Farooq Aftab invited the participants of the Forum to cast an eye over the situation of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Pakistan that can be. Due to the Second Amendment to the Pakistani Constitution and Ordinance XX, persons belonging to this community can be subject to persecution and the abuse of their minority rights. Mr. Aftab pointed out that the Ahmadiyya Muslims have been attacked, sentenced to death, stripped of their right to vote, they have faced ominous cyber and anti-terror legislation, as well as criminalization of their deeply held religious practices, and their places of worship are desecrated. He emphasized the importance of legislation to address disparities and to recognize and celebrate the unique contributions of minority communities to the collective tapestry. He noted that the laws must

¹⁵ The integral version of the statement of Dr. Corinne Lennox can be consulted [here](#).

go beyond shielding against discrimination; they should act as catalysts for preserving and cherishing minority cultures. Mr. Aftab noted the importance of a free and independent judiciary system, as well as the equal access to technology and fostering digital literacy within minority communities. He pointed to the practical power of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Rabat Plan of Action and Faith for Rights, as well as of independent and functioning legal structures that are paramount for safeguarding the rights of all.¹⁶

Mr. Slava (Veaceslav) Balan noted that minority issues tend to be overwhelmingly dealt with through specialised institutions, which are important as a first stage to raise awareness about most outstanding minority issues, but the next step – i.e. mainstreaming of minority issues – is urgently needed. He suggested that a minority dimension should be added to all national policy documents, most notably in national human rights action plans and national (sustainable) development strategies. He also noted that the minority dimension should find its place in more dynamic and well-resourced streams and agendas, such as gender equality, children rights, rights of persons with disabilities and so forth. He also recommended to include in minority work new actors, such as cities, regional authorities, national human rights institutions and professional organizations. Empowerment and inclusion of persons belonging to minorities within the structures of the decision- and change-making are the main drivers, enablers and amplifiers for the promotion of minority rights. Mr. Balan concluded by supporting the proposal of a new international convention on minority rights, calling important actors – such as cities, regions, businesses – into its ambit and by recommending the UN/OHCHR to introduce and promote within the UN Country Teams a new function – that of a “Minorities Advisor” – to support the work of Human Rights Advisors and Gender Advisors and to other international inter-governmental organizations (such as the CoE, OSCE, OECD, etc.) to also consider introducing Minorities Advisors into their central and field structures.¹⁷

Interactive Dialogue¹⁸

In the interactive dialogue part, examples of legal and structural approaches to more inclusive societies encompassed national policies to promote inclusion and prohibit discrimination and to ensure equal opportunities in the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, such as the adoption of an adaptive curricula and the support for multilingualism; participation of minority communities and persons belonging to them and the close consultation of minorities regarding legislative changes and their implementation; legislation to protect persons belonging to minorities against discrimination; the inclusion of minority languages in the public education.

Item IV: Protection and promotion of the rights of persons belonging to minority groups towards cohesive societies

Under this item, the Forum welcomed constructive exchanges and the sharing of additional information on positive examples, good practices and legal and institutional frameworks and policies that effectively safeguard minority rights and promote the inclusion of persons belonging to minorities in society, as well factors contributing to and those inhibiting societal cohesion

¹⁶ The integral version of the statement of Mr. Farooq Aftab can be consulted [here](#).

¹⁷ The integral version of the statement of Mr. Slava (Veaceslav) Balan can be consulted [here](#).

¹⁸ Interventions in the interactive dialogue part of item 3 on “Legal and Structural Approaches to More Inclusive Societies” can be consulted on the UN WebTV [here](#).

Presentations on the topic under discussion were made by the following panellists: Ms. Nouha Grine, Secretary of Tamount Association for Amazigh Rights; Ms. Lecia Brooks, Southern Poverty Law Center, Senior Advisor to the President; and Mr. Hani Anouti, Affiliated Professor in Middle Eastern Politics at Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals.

Ms. Nouha Grine addressed the situation of the Amazighs in Tunisia and noted that they are one of the most socially and economically marginalized groups whose language has not been recognized by the government, without which it is not possible to talk about the exercise of freedoms or social inclusion. Ms. Grine, while noting that there is no clear and agreed-upon definition in international law of the term 'minority', praised the added value of Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the annual UN Forum on Minority Issues, and the Minority Fellowship Programme of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. At the same time, she pointed out that the participation of minorities at the Forum remains difficult due to the lack of funds to this effect. Ms. Grine recommended the recognition of the Amazigh language and identity in Tunisia, the need for a legally binding treaty on minority rights with an associated monitoring mechanism, the establishment of a fund to enable minority representatives to participate in and to use the human rights mechanisms of the UN system, the establishment of a permanent forum concerned with minority issues related to economic development, environment, education, health and human rights. She also recommended the development of a fellowship programme for minorities by investing a group of experts in the work of the UN offices regarding the promotion and protection of minority rights and the continuation of regional forums and their integration into the work of the UN regional offices in co-operation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.¹⁹

Ms. Lecia Brooks presented the mission of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) to be a catalyst for racial justice in the South and beyond, working in partnership with communities to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements, and advance the human rights of all people. With respect to the topic of this thematic panel, she focused on positive examples, good practices and approaches the SPLC and its partners are utilizing to reduce the impact of hate and extremism on U.S. democracy. Ms. Brooks noted that political violence has had a long history in the United States and today targets minorities, abortion providers, and federal agents. She introduced a new SPLC initiative, called "Exposing Extremism in Elections", that provides information about extremist-tied candidates, new or incumbent, running for public office at local, state and federal levels, as well as detailed information about the candidate, their election status and any apparent ties they have to extremist groups and/or ideologies, which is then further analyzed by SPLC's Intelligence Project to describe the quality of the candidate's association with extremism. Ms. Brook emphasized the importance of prevention and pre-radicalization, with which SPLC can spot warning signs and intervene earlier by supporting grassroots partners with tools and resources to empower Black and Brown people and make communities more resilient. She concluded by saying that good data and a powerful narrative for systemic change will empower a multi-racial movement to push for systemic remedies through policy change, legislation and structural reforms.²⁰

Mr. Hani Anouti presented the case study of Lebanon as a model for minority protection, inclusion, utmost freedom, fair, equal and proportional representations based on a power sharing agreement on one hand and the historical coexistence among these groups on the other. More specifically, he pointed to the composition at the political level, where the political system guarantees the equal and proportional representations of sects based on equal division between Muslims and Christians (power sharing), the economic level where there is no discrimination against any sect, all sects have their own businesses at national

¹⁹ The integral version of the statement of Ms. Nouha Grine can be consulted [here](#).

²⁰ The integral version of the statement of Ms. Lecia Brooks can be consulted [here](#).

level and operate freely (without advantage given to one sect over another in laws, practices, or traditions) and the religious and cultural levels, where all sects can freely practice their faith and build their religious sites and all religious holidays are celebrated in the country. Mr. Anouti recommended the power sharing model and the quota system to be adjusted and localized at state level for the protection, representation and inclusion of minorities in other countries as well as in the region. He also recommended support provided to governments with the necessary expertise to ensure the proper implementation of human rights mechanisms and treaties on minorities, the endorsement of regional forums on minorities, as well as the revision of the governing system of this Forum as member states enjoy privileges in comparison to other actors and representatives of minorities which hinder the freedom of expression as an essential rights and space for persons belonging to minorities to freely express themselves.²¹

Interactive Dialogue²²

In the interactive dialogue part of this thematic item, participants shared some positive examples, good practices and approaches to designing legal and institutional frameworks and policies that effectively safeguard minority rights and promote the inclusion of persons belonging to minorities in society, including measures taken by governments, such as promoting diversity, inclusion and societal integration, equal development and protection for all citizens without discrimination; adopting anti-discrimination laws, specialized education and training programmes, multilingual programmes and public services in various languages provided for persons belonging to minorities; developing the economy in minority regions; fostering government-NGO partnerships and community engagement.

Participants also noted some additional issues of importance and challenges faced in relation to effective inclusion of persons belonging to minorities in societies and thus to societal cohesion itself, such as the importance of recognizing the right to internal self-determination of minorities, as well as the rule of law, human rights and gender equality; the need for intersectional measures for achieving equality and inclusion; the importance of addressing discrimination and challenges faced persons with disabilities belonging to minorities; the importance of accountability for past atrocities, land restitution and compensation.

Participants emphasized the significance of looking at the environmental injustices that certain minority communities suffer from and the heightened vulnerability of persons belonging to minorities during political crises and conflict areas. In addition, participants called for the UN and member states to implement intersectional, inclusive education policies and to improve infrastructure to better serve diverse communities and those in a marginalized situation and called for global efforts at the UN level to support conventions that protect minority languages.

Concluding remarks

The Special Rapporteur on minority issues Prof. Nicolas Levrat concluded by thanking the Chairpersons, the Secretariat of the Forum, volunteers and interpreters who supported the Forum, as well as all contributions by panellists and participants – for having shared their experience, expertise and recommendations to the Forum. He took good note of the repeated calls for strengthening the Forum, making it longer and even making it permanent, and committed to conveying the message to the Human Rights Council. Prof. Levrat also noted the 654 registered participants and more than 300 requests for taking the floor, as well as the fact that all requests could be accommodated, and that every organization had at least one opportunity to speak at the Forum.

²¹ The integral version of the statement of Mr. Hani Anouti can be consulted [here](#).

²² Interventions in the interactive dialogue part of item 4 on “Protection and promotion of the rights of persons belonging to minority groups towards cohesive societies” can be consulted on the UN WebTV [here](#).

With regard to the content of the Forum, the Special Rapporteur was struck and amazed by the vast diversity of issues and situations that were expressed in so few hours, referring to the UNGA that said on 10 December 1948 about the fate of minorities, “it is difficult to adopt a uniform solution of this complex and delicate questions, which has special aspects in each State in which it arise”. He emphasized that this is the whole dialectic challenge of raising minority issues as human rights in that we naturally all support and promote the universality of human rights, as we are all “born free and equal in dignity and rights”. But at the same time, we should all accept to acknowledge the diversity and specificity of the aspirations and claims of persons belonging to minorities. He noted that this dialectic between universality and specificity is the whole challenge of minority issues as human rights. The key to work towards a positive outcome to this apparent tension is to understand that universal does not mean uniform.

Prof. Levrat noted that there is room for diversity in universality and according to his knowledge, acquired as a scholar and supported by much scholarly research by colleagues from various scientific fields, pluralism and diversity will not weaken universality; quite on the contrary, they shall make it more robust; stronger; grounded not only in political philosophy, but in the concrete experience and practice of all persons and communities, as human rights are not only concepts and values, but also the product of daily life experiences. The Special Rapporteur emphasized that those who enjoy respect of their human rights – hopefully a majority of human beings – are not necessarily aware of the diversity and complexity of institutions, procedures and decisions that make this possible. Those who do not fully benefit from the enjoyment of all rights, alas very often persons belonging to minorities, are on the contrary highly, and often painfully aware of the deprivation of their rights, whatever the reasons for their dire situation. Prof. Levrat noted that this is why this Forum exists, allowing every voice to be heard, problems to be exposed, shared and explained.

The Special Rapporteur stated that he will transmit recommendations from these two days of interactive discussions to the Human Rights Council by particularly insisting on some to be given priority by member States and concluded by saying that human rights is a matter for human beings to be enjoyed and to be implemented and that he will take proper “human time” to process all inputs submitted in the interactive dialogue of the Forum.

Assoc. Prof. Elena Lazăr, Co-Chair of the Forum, thanked the panellists and all participants for their exchanges and sharing point of views on minority rights. She thanked everyone’s efforts to make this event successful.

She continued by stating that in an evolving global society in which questions of diversity intersect with social and economic considerations, ensuring the effective participation of persons belonging to minorities in social and economic life has become even more pertinent. Assoc. Prof. Lazăr noted that at the international level, there is a discernible gap in addressing several problems encountered by persons belonging to minorities, especially persons in vulnerable situations, in the realization of social and economic rights. She added that many difficult instances have been reported during the Forum and that it was saddening to hear all those testimonies about abuses and discriminatory practices towards persons belonging to minorities. She pointed out though, that there are no quick fixes and there is no one-size-fits-all approach, but very much adapted to the social and political realities in each State. The result should be that solutions are implemented in order to ensure that social and economic rights are exercised to the fullest by persons belonging to minorities, while at the same time not affecting their inclusion into the society where they live, but rather playing in its benefit.

She emphasized the importance of increased engagement by States with the aim of enhancing the socio-economic inclusion of persons belonging to minorities using successful practices developed around the world, including at regional level, or within the framework of various international organizations could prove a useful starting point. She also noted that equal access to public goods and services without direct or indirect discrimination should be ensured and is a necessary precondition for the effective social and economic participation of

persons belonging to minorities. Assoc. Prof. Lazăr equally stated that attention should also be paid to organise the education systems, including the vocational training, in order to ensure that everyone has equal access to acquire the skills necessary to participate effectively in the economy of the State of citizenship/residence.

She drew the attention of the participants to the fact that inter-State co-operation is another tool able to assist in the realisation of the socio-economic rights of persons belonging to minorities. However, it is imperative that this co-operation is founded on the strict observance of international law and principles, which do not accept *the kinship argument* beyond measures aimed at ensuring the protection of the linguistic and cultural identity of ethnics. Hence, in the absence of the express consent of the State of citizenship/residence unilateral measures concerning the socio-economic situation of persons belonging to minorities cannot be taken by other State/States, irrespective of the relation of kinship in between that State/those States and the targeted persons. She noted that this has been underscored in the OSCE HCNM recommendations on the effective participation of national minorities in the social and economic life, which further qualifies such discriminatory unilateral support as potentially contributing to tensions or even conflict. Hence, dialogue in general about the promotion and the protection of the rights of persons belonging to ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, which the '92 declaration on their rights underlines, contribute in no small way to their equality, social inclusion, and socio-economic participation and to the social stability of the States where they live and more broadly to regional and global political and social stability. The importance attached to UN spaces for dialogue, meaningful participation, and exchanges, such as at the Forum on Minority Issues, where stakeholders can participate and contribute in a free and open manner, to exposing problems and advancing solutions aimed at ensuring the effective realisation of their individual rights including in the socio-economic sphere, must be equally emphasized.

She added that as it has been stated in the opening session, this year's Forum has been unique since it has also prefaced the 75th anniversary of UDHR and has been tailored to accommodate all voices and has successfully accomplished this task.

To conclude, Assoc. Prof. Lazăr quoted Martin Luther King Jr., who said: "Almost always, the creative dedicated persons belonging to minorities have made the world better. Therefore, I invite you all to be creative and focus on comprehensive strategies."

Prof. Petra Roter, Co-Chair of the Forum, started her concluding remarks by reflecting on minority issues in general, and on the forum as a platform for dialogue on minority issues. She pointed to the notable presence of socio-economic and other forms of inequalities, the still too frequent perception of minorities as a problem rather than an integral and valued part of our diverse societies, providing the basis for exclusive policies, often securitizing minorities and minority issues, as well as to the misunderstanding of the substance of minority rights that go – and need to go – beyond prevention of discrimination.

She noted that exclusion, inequality, abuse, violence against persons belonging to different minorities – all cause frustration, detachment and lead to disintegration rather than cohesion of societies. Importantly, cohesion will not be achieved by imposing one language and one culture upon everyone living in a state. This is a problem that we still witness in the form of such identity politics and policies, which are reflected also in the socio-economic field and in access (or lack thereof) to effective participation regarding socio economic issues.

Prof. Roter acknowledged that many speakers raised the point of the general absence of the formal permanent space for advocacy for minority rights within the UN and added that this is truly a pity – as this absence leaves a lot of space for marginalizing not just minorities and persons belonging to them, but also marginalizing minority rights as human rights. The issue of "The Fate of Minorities" or the promise of the UN back in 1948 not to remain indifferent to the fate of minorities, thus has many dimensions and many forms. Not only do we need to understand them, but we need to understand diversity within minorities – hence different needs, interests and concerns. She noted that there were many calls at the Forum for understanding intersectional issues persons belonging to minorities face.

Prof. Roter concluded by saying that she hoped that states would be able to understand that the 'fate of minorities' is about the fate of their people at home - whose potential is not recognized or realized. Actions against persons belonging to minorities or against minorities, or the failure to prevent such actions by other individuals, in person or online, are neither rational nor reasonable. And above all – such anti-minority actions are not about dignity for all, but only for some. She recalled that as a human being and an independent expert on minority issues, she was hoping that this Forum and the 75th anniversary of both resolutions – on the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the one titled The Fate of Minorities, would give us all enough courage to understand what is really at stake – on the ground, right now.