

Statement by H.E. Laura Dupuy Lasserre

President of the Human Rights Council

Opening of the fifth session of the
Forum on Minority Issues

Tuesday, 27 November 2012, 10:00 a.m.
Palais des Nations, Salle XX

**Madam Chair,
Madam Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Distinguished delegates and participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great pleasure for me to address this important gathering once again this year as we open the fifth session of the Forum on Minority Issues that will focus on *“Implementing the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities: Identifying positive practices and opportunities”*.

I would like to express my warm welcome to Ms. Soyata Maiga, who has kindly accepted the important task of chairing this session of the Forum and who brings her great experience to these proceedings, including as a Commissioner of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights. I would also like to warmly welcome representatives of Member States, United Nations specialized agencies, representatives of human rights mechanisms and bodies, international and regional organisations, national human rights institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations, academics and other experts.

I am delighted that once again this year many minority representatives from all regions, including many young human rights advocates, will also participate in the work of this Forum, bringing their wealth of knowledge to the discussions and sharing their personal experiences of the challenges and good practices in the countries where they live. The views and ideas of persons belonging to minorities must be prominent throughout the Forum’s proceedings.

Twenty years ago, United Nations Member States recognised the gap that existed in minority rights protection and made a pledge to meet the challenges that exist in all regions by unanimously adopting the Declaration on the Rights of National or Ethnic, Religious and

Linguistic Minorities. While progress has been made, we have to concede that many challenges remain and violations of the rights of persons belonging to minorities still occur and take multiple forms.

In many countries we can see the influence of the Declaration in constitutions, legislation and guidelines for the protection of minority rights. It has inspired many initiatives that build upon the fundamental rights and principles that it contains - equality, non-discrimination, participation, consultation, the richness and positive contribution of diversity to our societies. However there is still a lot of work required from all stakeholders, including States and members of minority groups themselves, for the promises and potential contained in the Declaration to become a reality for all. I emphasise the fact that the twin principles of equality and non-discrimination, which are the foundation upon which the whole international human rights system is built, are equally the grounds on which the Council has been established and continues to build its work on.

The Human Rights Council has recognised the importance of consistently addressing minority issues through the creation of strong mechanisms such as the mandate of the Independent Expert on minority issues and the Forum on Minority Issues.

The Forum has established itself as the foremost international platform for dialogue among all stakeholders from within and outside the UN system on the promotion and protection of the rights of minorities. It has enabled to hear the voice of minorities from all over the world and has been an essential opportunity for sharing best practices and promoting mutual understanding of minority issues, as envisaged in the Human Rights Council resolution 6/15 that established the Forum and resolution 19/23 of March 2012 that renewed it. The Forum has demonstrated its potential in providing valuable guidance to the international community, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other human rights actors at international and regional levels. It has also provided tools and resources to Governments, political actors, minority groups and civil society in their efforts to promote equality and respect for diversity where they are needed most, at the national and local level. For these reasons, I welcome the high level of interest and participation in all sessions of this Forum to date.

The variety of experiences and best practices that will be presented here will feed into the recommendations that will be presented by the Independent Expert to the Human Rights Council in March 2013, in order to be then adapted to different countries and minority situations.

This fifth session of the Forum recognises the timely occasion provided by the commemoration in 2012 of the 20th anniversary of the Declaration, to review its implementation and its impact on national legislation, institutional mechanisms and policy. It is also a chance for all of us to renew our commitment to upholding the principles enshrined in the UN Declaration.

The Council has welcomed the comprehensive and action-oriented recommendations that have emanated from the previous four sessions and I take this opportunity to commend the Forum for the publication of its compilation of recommendations from all previous sessions which will facilitate its wider dissemination among all stakeholders.

Madam Chair, Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish you a fruitful dialogue over the next 2 days and I also make a call to keep this discussion open all year long, in order to discuss constructively new and remaining challenges, seeking practical solutions to improve the lives of minorities everywhere.

Thank you.

