

Closing remarks

First allow me to thank and congratulate our Chair, Hedina Sijercic, for the excellent job that she has done for us in expertly guiding this session and managing our very busy agenda. I think you will agree with me that it was a difficult job that she has handled with skill.

I also want to extend my particular thanks to Mr. Adama Dieng the Secretary General's Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide and Mr. Heiner Beilefeldt, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief for joining us at this Forum. I was particularly pleased that they brought their experience to this event, but that they also had the opportunity to personally hear your interventions that are highly relevant to their mandates. It is our intention to consider possibilities for our UN mandates to collaborate in our efforts ahead to promote the rights of religious minorities and bring the challenges to the attention of the UN's bodies and mechanisms here in Geneva, in New York and elsewhere.

I also want to thank you all sincerely for your participation and your contributions over the last two days which have been truly inspiring and motivating. I noted in my report to the General Assembly in October this year that I felt that this Forum provided an appropriate, timely and inclusive venue for these important discussions on the rights of religious minorities and for the elaboration of recommendations that are truly based on global knowledge and experience. The rich interventions that you have made truly provide a vital resource for this Forum and its recommendations, but also for my work and that of my fellow mandate holders, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and others.

It would be impossible for me to try to summarize or do justice to all that has been said over the last two days, but let me say that I have been deeply impressed by the quality of your interventions, the energy in which you have approached this session, and the constructive nature of many of the comments that have been made and interactions that I have witnessed. You have presented many problems...but you have also recognized the need to propose solutions and provide creative ideas and positive practices that can be shared and inspire us all. Perhaps most of all, there has been a strong message about the need for dialogue and to build bridges of understanding, acceptance and trust.

This Forum and your information has reinforced the need for better implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities for religious minorities - not only in the area of freedom of religion or belief, but in other essential areas of minority rights...the right of religious minorities to take a full and equal role in all aspects of society. Many of you have made references to the Declaration and the principles of minority rights contained within it in your statements, and I urge you all to continue to seek ways to make the provisions of the Declaration a reality in your own countries.

In conclusion, one of the most important messages that I want to convey to you is to continue and enhance the dialogue that has taken place here beyond this room and as you return to your homes, your cities and your communities. This Forum and the recommendations that it produces only fulfil their potential when they are translated into action on the ground and I stand ready alongside my UN counterparts to support and assist you in your vital national efforts.

I want to close by sincerely thanking the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for its exceptional work and support to me in ensuring that this Forum ran so smoothly. Our interpreters have also had a difficult task and deserve a special thanks from us all. To all participants, I congratulate you and wish you every success in your important work ahead.