



Programme of Work

15th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues

"Review. Rethink. Reform."

30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Minority Rights"

(1-2 December, Geneva, Room XX)

THURSDAY, 1 DECEMBER

10 AM – 10:07 AM (local time in Geneva) Opening performance by minority artists

Spotlight Team International Arts

10:07 AM – 10:40 AM (local time in Geneva) Item 1: Opening Meeting

1. Statement by the President of the UN General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Csaba Kőrösi (*pre-recorded video*)
2. Statement by the President of the Human Rights Council, H.E. Mr. Federico Villegas
3. Statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Volker Türk
4. Statement by the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities, H.E. Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov (*pre-recorded video*)
5. Statement by the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Mr. Fernand de Varennes
6. Statement by the Chair of the Forum, Mr. Daniel Abwa

10:40 AM – 11:15 AM (local time in Geneva) Item 2: Review: Normative frameworks and the mainstreaming of the Declaration at the UN

Under this item, the Forum will review the scope of the Declaration, the groups that it covers, and those that it leaves behind, and ways in which the scope of the normative framework can be made more relevant and effective. The Declaration, adopted in 1992, remains the only global instrument for the protection of minority rights. It reinforces and builds on the rights enshrined in the United Nations human rights framework and is centred on protecting and promoting the existence, equality, identity and effective participation of national or ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities in all areas covered by the Declaration.

Participants will consider the degree to which the Declaration has enabled progress to be achieved in protecting minority rights globally. In his statement to the high-level meeting to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration, on 21 September 2022, the Secretary-General said: “The hard truth is that, 30 years on, the world is falling short. Far short.”

As the Special Rapporteur on minority issues pointed out in the concept notes prepared for the four regional forums held in 2022, the Declaration must be better understood, acknowledged and implemented. The Forum will aim to identify best practices and developments from international and regional bodies that present useful models for securing a more effective normative framework. Under this item, participants will be encouraged to take a fresh look at mainstreaming the Declaration and the human rights of minorities within the United Nations system.

Participants will consider the findings of the Special Rapporteur set out in his report to the General Assembly and share their views on the evolution and positioning of the Declaration in the institutions, structures and initiatives of the United Nations.

1. Mr. Mohammad Shahabuddin, Chair in International Law & Human Rights, Birmingham Law School, University of Birmingham
2. Ms. Anna-Mária Bíró, Director of the Tom Lantos Institute

3. Mr. Ojot Ojulu, East Africa Regional representative for the Danish Institute for Human Rights
4. Mr. Pere Aragonès i Garcia, President of the Regional Government of Catalonia, Spain

11:15 – 13:00 (local time in Geneva) Interactive dialogue

13:00-15:00 (local time in Geneva) Lunch break and side-events

3 PM – 3: 25 PM (local time in Geneva) Item 3: Rethink: Minority rights defenders and their role in promoting principles of the Declaration

Under this item, the Forum will aim to identify challenges faced by minority rights defenders, in particular women minority rights defenders, best practices and ways to advance defenders' work in promoting the realization of the Declaration and bringing the principles of the Declaration into practice.

Discussions will spotlight the contributions of minority activists in achieving human rights for all. Participants will consider the multidimensional challenges faced by human rights defenders belonging to minority groups, some of which have been extensively reflected upon by the Special Rapporteur, with a view to elaborating sustainable solutions.

Participants will be invited to draw from the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights, in which he offered a blueprint for all Governments to address long-standing issues of discrimination, including through partnerships with the grass-roots leadership of affected communities. Participants will share their views about building partnerships in support of and with minority leaders, especially minority women and young people.

Participants will take stock of the situation of the civic space for minority groups, which has been highlighted in a number of Human Rights Council resolutions, including Council resolutions 32/31 and 38/12.

Discussions will be centred on the means to protect and enlarge civic space for minority groups and to enhance civic participation among minorities. Participants will be encouraged to provide recommendations for addressing, preventing and reporting cases of reprisals against minority representatives who are cooperating with the United Nations to advance the implementation of the Declaration.

1. Ms. Zubayra Shamseden, Vice President, World Uyghur Congress
2. Ms. Poonam Mohtey, Coprincipal Investigator, Samata Foundation
3. Ms. Diane Alai, Representative of the Bahai International Community to the UN

3: 25 PM – 6 PM (local time in Geneva) Interactive dialogue

6.45 PM – 9 PM (local time in Geneva) screening and discussion around minority rights related documentary at Cinema Empire (Rue de Carouge 72, Geneva). More details about the screening [here](#).

FRIDAY, 2 DECEMBER

10 AM – 10:35 AM (local time in Geneva) Item 4: Reform: Filling the gaps in the implementation of the human rights of minorities

Under this item, the Forum will consider ways to eliminate the persisting gaps in the implementation of the Declaration and means to achieve tangible progress. The Secretary General has said: “We are not dealing with gaps – we are dealing with outright inaction and negligence in the protection of minority rights.” Participants will also consider how

preexisting obstacles, which were expanded by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, have made the implementation gaps even wider, in particular for women belonging to minority groups.

Participants will take into consideration the conclusions of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, who in his reports has pointed out that minorities are more than three quarters of the world's stateless and that their numbers are increasing, that minorities in many countries are disproportionately the targets of hate speech and hate crimes, that there are growing restrictions on, and even prohibition from, being educated in their own languages and that, in most violent conflicts in recent decades, minorities have faced the exclusion or denial of their rights or their grievances being instrumentalized by outside forces for geopolitical reasons.

While developing their suggestions on filling the gaps, participants will also be invited to consider the Special Rapporteur's recent report, in which he urged the Human Rights Council to initiate a study on how to strengthen the protection of minority rights, including through a new United Nations treaty, and how to operationalize the Secretary-General's call, in 2013, to mainstream and integrate minority rights across all pillars and activities of the United Nations, and urged the United Nations system to reactivate and implement the integration of minority rights into its work at the global, regional and country levels.

Wide-reaching discussions with the participation of minorities are needed on the ways forward and on the means of advancing the protection of the human rights of minorities. Participants will consider: whether additional instruments at the international or regional levels are needed, whether existing norms should be strengthened through better implementation, oversight and enforcement, whether businesses or other international economic institutions, including development aid, should be better included in the efforts to protect the rights of minorities, the role of the media in the protection and promotion of minority rights, and in addressing the gaps in the minority protection regime identified during the two days of discussions of the Forum, and how the Declaration can be used to respond to the new challenges that have appeared since its adoption. The Forum welcomes innovative proposals

for developing measures to address the ever-increasing gaps at the international, regional and national levels.

1. Ms. Dafina Savic, Founder, non-profit organization Romanipe and co-founder of Uena
2. Mr. Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua, Associate Professor, School of Law, University of Ghana
3. Ms. Farah Mihlar, Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Emergency and Development at Oxford Brookes
4. Mr. Lorant Vincze, Member of the European Parliament

10:35 AM – 1 PM (local time in Geneva) Interactive dialogue

1 PM – 3 PM (local time in Geneva) Lunch break and side-events

3 PM – 3:30 PM (local time in Geneva) Item 5: Open dialogue: urgent situations of minorities

Recognizing that, since its establishment 15 years ago, the Forum on Minority Issues has been a unique platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues affecting persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minority groups, under this item, the Forum welcomes constructive exchanges and the sharing of information on issues of urgent concern.

1. Ms. Sitarah Mohammadi, Spokesperson, World Hazara Council
2. Ms. Lecia Brooks, Chief of staff and culture, Southern Poverty Law Center
3. Mr. Igor Pimenov, President, Association for Support of Schools with Russian Language of Instruction in Latvia

3:30 PM – 5:45 PM (local time in Geneva) Interactive dialogue

5:45 PM – 6 PM (local time in Geneva) Item 6: Concluding remarks

Concluding remarks by **Mr. Fernand de Varennes**, Special Rapporteur on minority issues

Concluding remarks by **Mr. Daniel Abwa**, Chairperson of the Forum on Minority Issues