



CONCEPT NOTE

17th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues

28 – 29 November 2024

Minority representation and self-representation in public spaces and discourses

1. The 17th session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues will be convened on 28 and 29 November 2024 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 6/15 of 28 September 2007 and resolution 19/23 of 23 March 2012. This year, the theme of the UN Forum is **the representation and self-representation of minorities in public spaces and discourses**.

A. Background

2. The 17th UN Forum on Minority Issues focuses on **promoting the inclusion of national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities through their representation and self-representation in public spaces and discourses**.
3. The representation of minorities in society as a whole impacts their effective participation in decision making and in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life, as laid out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. **Self-representation of minorities in public spaces is key to the substantial and positive contribution of minorities to society, with a view to change the societal perception of minorities as constitutive and valuable parts of more open, cohesive and diverse societies**.
4. Fair representation is twofold. On the one hand, states must ensure that persons belonging to minority groups enjoy equal rights without discrimination on any ground and must take appropriate measures to facilitate the representation of

minorities through law, public policies, as well as the equitable redistribution of resources in public spaces. On the other hand, the portrayal of minorities in public spaces and discourses is indispensable for acknowledging the positive contribution of minorities to society as a whole. Yet, this can only be achieved by strengthening the agency of persons belonging to minorities. Drawing on the self-representation of minorities in their public portrayal is an essential way to ensure respect and counter racism, stigmatization and inferiorization. Both aspects will contribute to enriching society as a whole.

5. **The Forum focuses on the portrayal of national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities** in the public sphere and the private sphere whenever these two spheres intersect. **It explores primarily the production of public discourses on minorities and the participation of minorities in shaping these discourses based on their self-representation.**
6. More specifically, the 17th session of the Forum delves into the representation of minorities in **public space, education, media, and culture**. For each of these four themes, the Forum aims to identify how discourses and symbols may convey biases and negative stereotypes associated to minorities. The lack of representation and the misrepresentation of minorities in the public sphere fuel prejudices against persons belonging to minorities, leading to scapegoating, polarizing speech (up to hate speech), and eventually increased tensions, discrimination, and violence. They also contribute to the invisibilization or misrepresentation of issues faced by minorities.
7. In contrast, the Forum recognizes that discourses and symbols may also work toward the social recognition of minorities. Self-representation by persons belonging to minorities who are able to express and promote their identity is key to achieving this goal. Further, fair representation of persons belonging to minorities by outsiders of the minority groups is an essential component of inclusive and diverse societies that aim to leave no one behind and where persons belonging to minority groups can thrive.
8. The 17th session of the Forum is an opportunity to identify existing **challenges** and **best practices** at the international, regional, national, and local levels with regard to representations of minorities in public discourses and symbols. Furthermore, it aims at exploring **solutions** to promote better representations of minorities as a factor of inclusion.
9. **The Forum will build on and update the recommendations** prepared at earlier Forum sessions, more particularly at the 13th session regarding “Hate speech, Social Media and Minorities” (A/HRC/46/58) and at the 16th session on “Minorities and Cohesive societies: Equality, Social Inclusion and Socioeconomic participation” (A/HRC/55/70). It also follows up on the reports of the Special Rapporteurs on Minority Issues, in particular the report to the General Assembly in 2008 on “Minority Rights and the Protection of Cultural Diversity” (A/63/207), the recommendations report of the twelfth session of the Forum on minority issues on “Education, language and the human rights of minorities” (A(HRC/FMI/2019/1),

and the report to the Human Rights Council in 2021 on “Hate speech, social media and minorities” (A/HRC/46/57).

B. General Objectives

10. The UN Forum on Minority Issues provides a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining 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.
11. The 17th UN Forum on Minority Issues aims:
 - to initiate a dialogue on minority representations in public spaces and discourses to provide opportunities for minorities to express how and under what modalities they want to be portrayed and represented;
 - to identify and analyze opportunities, best practices, and initiatives that focus on the misrepresentation and lack of representation of minorities in public spaces and discourses, in order to strengthen the recognition of minorities as valuable and constitutive parts societies and to promote positive change in this regard;
 - to contribute to efforts to integrate and mainstream minority issues into the institutions, mechanisms and initiatives of the United Nations system at the global, regional and domestic levels, including through coordination among United Nations mechanisms, bodies and specialized agencies, funds and programmes;
 - to produce thematic recommendations to be reported to the Human Rights Council by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues.
12. The Forum examines state practices through legislation, policies and programs, alongside civil society initiatives. It shall emphasize the prominent contributions of other key stakeholders, including international and regional organizations and various forms of cooperation, in achieving the above-mentioned goals. Particular focus will be placed on the empowerment of minorities to individual and collective expression which reflects positively and accurately on the important role played by minority peoples and groups in enriching our diverse societies.

C. Participants

13. The UN Forum shall be open to the participation of States, United Nations mechanisms, treaty bodies and specialized agencies, funds and programmes, intergovernmental organizations, international and regional organizations and mechanisms in the field of human rights, national human rights institutions and other relevant national bodies and other stakeholders, including internet companies and social media platforms, civil society representatives, academics and experts on minority issues, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. The Forum shall also be open to other NGOs and organizations representing minorities whose aims and purposes are in conformity with the spirit, purposes, and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

D. Areas of discussion

14. The focus of the discussion will address the following overarching themes:

- **Public space:** highlighting the (lack of) representation of minorities in the names of streets, public places and institutions as well as architectural and ornamental installations; analyzing minorities presence, both effective and symbolic, in public policies and measures related to political symbols such as national and regional calendars (through for instance official celebrations and public holidays); discussing the role and place of minorities in memorial policies and practices; addressing the right or prohibition of minorities to show religious or cultural symbols in public spaces; assessing the (lack of) opportunities of minorities to participate in those decisions.
- **Education:** assessing how minority students effectively exercise their right to learn about their own history and culture; addressing the role of education to ensure that all students shall learn about the existence, specificities and contribution of minority groups to society as a whole; discussing the presence or absence of a curriculum emphasizing cultural diversity and the contribution of minority figures with an express focus on discourses on minorities history; assessing the involvement of minorities in the development of the parts of the curriculum that directly affect them.
- **Media:** identifying elements of languages regarding minorities in traditional and social media; apprehending the specific challenges and opportunities linked to the representation and self-representation of minorities through social media; addressing scapegoating, polarizing speech, hate speech as well as highlighting good practices of inclusive discourses on minority in the media; exploring instances of pluri-linguistic media or minority language medias; observing media contents and the broadcasting of minority cultures and traditions.
- **Culture:** addressing the representation/misrepresentation of minorities in art and culture, as well as the biases and prejudices that may be conveyed; evaluating the possibility for minorities to engage in their own cultural and traditional activities; assessing the opportunities for minorities to represent themselves in art and culture.

15. An intersectional perspective will be applied to all areas of discussion to address the particular situations of vulnerability of persons belonging to minorities who are at the intersection of diverse forms of discrimination, particularly minority women.

E. Inputs

16. The UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues encourages all participants to contribute to the discussion and dialogue by sharing experiences and views about the main areas of discussion of the UN Forum.

17. More specifically, participants are encouraged to provide available information and data on the challenges that they are facing in relation to the representation and self-representation of minorities in public spaces and discourses, as well as initiatives and good practices to promote their fair representation.

F. Outcome

18. Based on the dialogue and contributions of the participants a summary of the discussion of the Forum will be prepared by the Chairperson of the UN Forum, and the Special Rapporteur on minority issues will prepare a report on the recommendations of the UN Forum to the Human Rights Council.