

# Minority Artists for Human Rights

Global Art Action 2024-2028



Zahra Hassan Marwan, 2023



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# Overview

Launched for the first time in 2022, the **International Art Contest for Minority Artists** aims to unleash the power of art to drive positive global action for human rights. UN Human Rights (OHCHR) works with partners to scale up significantly holistic action in support of minority artists as human rights defenders with the aim to educate, connect and empower individuals while creating a global collective of art and support. At the core of this effort is an International Art Contest for Minority Artists held annually around diverse themes.

On this basis, UN Human Rights and its partners build a **comprehensive program of support for minority artists as human rights defenders**, involving strengthened protection of minority artists as human rights defenders; extended outreach and awareness-raising to reach diverse audiences and excluded groups; development of a network of named cities including Geneva as hubs for minority art and culture, through the Global Network of Cities Standing for Minority Rights; a deepening of the inter-connectivity between minority artists and the United Nations system of human rights protection. The action is envisioned as an expanding partnership between UN Human Rights and a range of institutions, partners, communities and constituencies.

The **Minority Artists for Human Rights** initiative's programming aims to expand these actions to engage with a diverse and wider public. With our International Art Contest and art work displayed in different galleries, libraries, and virtual spaces, and through educational workshops and work with civil society organizations, we will continue to create a safe space for minority artists, for cultural dialogue, critical thinking and freedom of artistic expression as a fundamental principle of our human rights, the identification and ending of stigma, and above all the advancement of minority inclusion and the celebration of diversity. We want to build a collective and platform for continuous learning, bringing together present and future generations of artists that provide a voice to the voiceless, and driving positive change. We will continue to engage and grow with partners that make us stronger to reach more people and to advocate for the respect of human rights for all.



UNITED NATIONS  
**HUMAN RIGHTS**  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

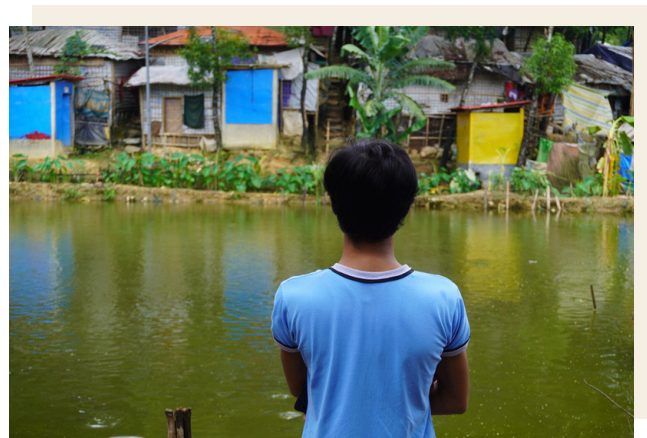
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# Minority Artists as Human Rights Defenders

**Minority artist human rights defenders play a crucial role in promoting, advancing, and raising awareness of human rights.** The arts, including minority arts, are powerful platforms for civil society to overcome trauma, address grievance or heal from past human rights abuses, as well as to reflect on positive social change and paths toward greater respect for human rights for all. The arts have the power to speak to diverse audiences about topics of utmost public concern, such as violence, discrimination, hate, xenophobia, exclusion, conflicts and segregation.

At the same time, **the activities of minority artist human rights defenders expose them to a wide range of threats** – including attack, acts of intimidation and various other forms of reprisal – from a multitude of actors. In 2021, the civil society organization Freemuse documented at least 1,251 acts of violation of artistic freedom in 103 countries throughout the world as well as in the online space, including artists being killed, jailed, brought to trial, attacked, and subjected to other forms of persecution.

Recognizing the threats facing minority artists worldwide as well as the transformative potential and power of arts to advance human rights, UN Human Rights has increasingly engaged with minority artist human rights defenders. During the 2020-2021 period, UN Human Rights began working with Freemuse and Minority Rights Group International by profiling minority artist human rights defenders via a series of webinars on the theme **“Minority Artists, Voice and Dissidence”**. The pilot program aimed to amplify minority artists’ voices, and to advance positive discourse in contexts of structural or systemic discrimination, stigma, and exclusion.



Photos taken by Abdullah, one of the award winners of the 2022 International Art Contest and member of the Judges Panel of the 2023 International Art Contest. A Rohingya photographer born stateless in Myanmar and currently living in a refugee camp in Bangladesh, Abdullah’s photos chronicle the daily experiences, everyday struggles, and embodied stories of Rohingya refugees.

For its 2022 programming, UN Human Rights and partners Freemuse and Minority Rights Group International and with the support of the City of Geneva, organized for the first time the **International Art Contest for Minority Artists**. The first edition of the Contest invited submissions by minority artists working on statelessness themes. On 3 November 2022, a gala hybrid event in Geneva and online was organized to celebrate the work of 7 minority artists from various parts of the globe. The Award Ceremony also marked the launch of an exhibition and catalogue featuring the artwork of the 7 laureates, information on minority statelessness and the right to nationality, and details of global action to end statelessness.

In 2023, the Second Edition of the International Art Contest for Minority Artists focusses on intersectional forms of discrimination. In 2023, 8 artists from countries around the world are honored, at a ceremony taking place in November. A range of adjunct activities take place during and following up the Geneva events, to raise awareness of these artists, their art, and the human rights issues they address.

Over the course of the first two editions of the International Art Contest, more than 120 minority artists coming from all continents of the globe have engaged with this initiative.



Minority artists human rights defenders (from left to right, top to bottom): Karthoum Dembele (Minority Youth Artist Award laureate 2023), Babatunde "Akande" Tribe (Minority Artist Award laureate 2023), Yuliya Lanina (member of Judges Panel 2022), Bianca Batlle Nguema (Minority Artist Award laureate 2023), Aluizio de Azevedo Silva Júnior (Honorable Mention recipient 2023).

# Actions 2024-2028

During the next phase period 2024-2028, UN Human Rights and its partners aim to significantly scale up these efforts, building to the year 2028 that will mark the 80th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Through the **Minority Artists for Human Rights** initiative and future editions of the International Art Contest for Minority Artists, UN Human Rights will continue engaging with and inviting minority artists working on a wide range of themes of relevance to shed light on some of the most prominent topics within human rights. Upcoming art contests will be organized around strategic themes to be decided. Our efforts involve:

Action 2024-2028

**Expanding and enriching the program's outreach**, as well as **establishing its durability** as an annual event on the global human rights calendar

**Heightening the involvement of minority artist award winners in outreach activities** to strengthen understanding of minority rights worldwide

**Building a worldwide community of support** among participants and supporters

**Seizing human rights educational opportunities available**, and the program's involvement with leading minority human rights defenders

**Developing a Global Network of Cities Standing for Minority Rights**, centred on the Arts, Culture and Defending Those Most at Risk of Being Left Behind, and including Geneva and cities on other continents

**Deepening the involvement of Geneva-based institutions in minority artists and human rights initiatives**, including educational institutions; cultural institutions; annual cultural events; grassroots civil society actors working in support of the most excluded; leading figures from Geneva society engaged in support for culture, the arts and human rights; Geneva's governing institutions at cantonal and municipal level

**Building a program for Senior Minority Fellows** connecting Geneva as a human rights city to a range of diverse countries around the world

**Improving access to resources by minority artists** to advance their work, including by providing scholarships for higher-level study for minority artists involved in human rights

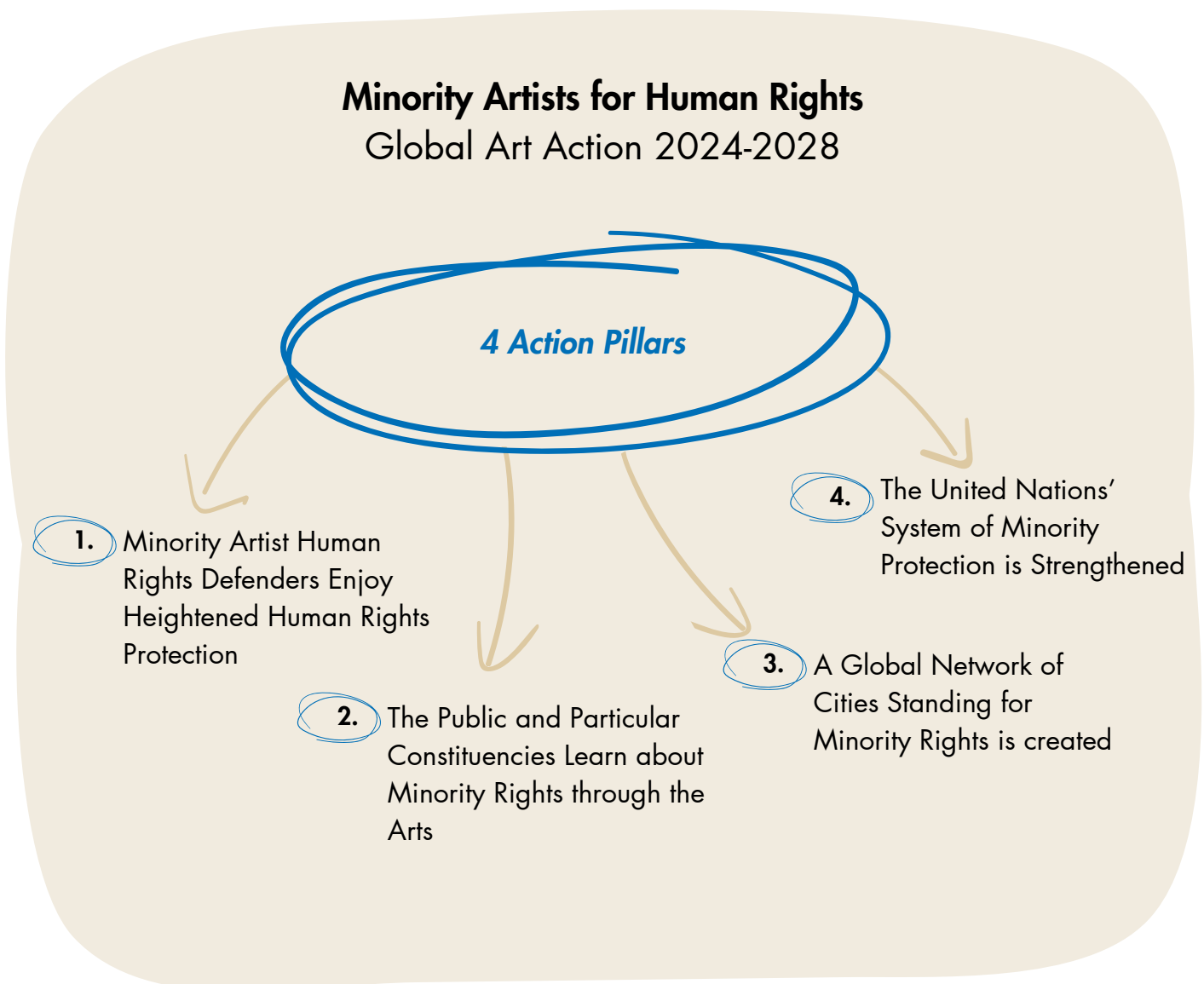
**Placing minority cultural rights defenders in UN country and regional teams** around the world to undertake outreach and awareness-raising activities

**Linking the events and programming to global events**, such as the annual United Nations Forum on Minority Issues, and the UN system of human rights protection

In **2028**, UN Human Rights and partners will undertake a **global retrospective of the first seven years of the minority artists initiative**, including a comprehensive exhibition featuring the artwork of 60+ artists in Geneva and a documentary series on minority artists. The retrospective will celebrate minority artists as human rights defenders in all corners of the globe.

A **global network of human rights-supportive cities is placed at the center of this international initiative**, working with other human rights-supportive cities, civil society activists and minority artist human rights defenders, with the overarching goal of strengthening the United Nations system of minority rights protection.

In 2028, the project will also engage an evaluation team to take stock of action to date, draw lessons learned, and bring recommendations for the next cycle. **The action is slated to begin a new cycle from the year 2029.**

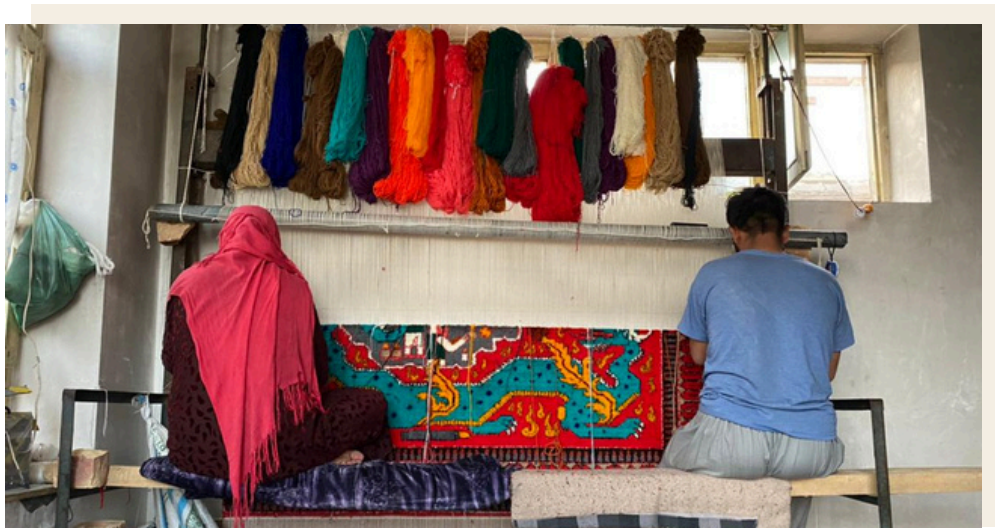


# Action Pillar 1

## Minority Artist Human Rights Defenders Enjoy Heightened Human Rights Protection

During 2024-2028, UN Human Rights and partners will provide direct support and heightened visibility to 60+ minority artists as agents of change throughout the world, and to amplify their voice to promote minority rights worldwide. By enabling minority artists as agents of change – globally, in the communities from which they emerge, and on national stages across the globe – UN Human Rights has the ambition to reach directly at least 20,000 people with minority rights, inclusion, diversity and solidarity messaging by 2028. At least 2500 people will be directly involved in deeper educational, advocacy and minority rights promotion activities.

We will launch annually the International Art Contest for Minority Artists with a focus on various human rights themes, including an annual Youth Minority Artist Award, to celebrate the work and engagement of minority artist human rights defenders. The laureates will take part in outreach and interface activities, including various events in Geneva-based cultural, educational and human rights institutions. Trainings for minority artists on possibilities available under the UN human rights mechanisms for protection and awareness raising of minority human rights defenders will be organized, as well as outreach and awareness-raising events for various segments of the public. UN Human Rights will also initiate, administer and manage a scholarship program for minority artists reaching a minimum of 30 minority artists over the course of the action.



Artistic workshop in Afghanistan. Photo: Khadim Ali.



## RESULTS OF ACTION PILLAR 1

**60+ minority artists** have access to a global platform to raise awareness about human rights challenges in their country and to strengthen understanding of minority rights worldwide through arts, and are trained in human rights protection.

**30+ minority artists** enjoy scholarship support to advance their work.

**1000+ minority artists** are reached and involved in the UN system through applications to the International Art Contest for Minority Artists.

**Countries and communities throughout the world** on all continents gain heightened understanding of minority rights, inclusion, diversity and solidarity as a result of broad dissemination of results, art and minority voice.



Naser Moradi, one of the laureates of the 2022 International Art Contest, painting outdoor murals on the grounds of an immigration detention centre in Australia.

# Action Pillar 2

## The Public and Particular Constituencies Learn about Minority Rights through the Arts

UN Human Rights and partners will promote positive discourse and narratives on minority rights and human rights both globally and locally, including by enhancing visibility and advocacy on human rights through extended communication and outreach activities, notably on social media and virtual platforms. We will further raise awareness of human rights issues facing minority artists among the general public, especially the youth, through communication, outreach and awareness-raising tools that can be accessed by and speak to large and diverse constituencies.

We will implement a program of cultural activities featuring the artworks of the contest laureates. We aim to: organize at least 7 annual public art exhibitions in Geneva and various countries worldwide up until 2028; publish 6 editions of an art catalogue; organize a major retrospective of artworks and 60+ artists celebrated during the period 2022-2028; hold annual award ceremonies for the International Art Contest for Minority Artists; develop and distribute materials to raise awareness among public constituencies on the links between the arts and human rights, and the role of minority artists as human rights defenders; support the creation of a documentary series about minority artist human rights defenders; implement collaborative awareness-raising activities with community-based schools; develop online materials relating to arts and human rights; profile minority artists' work and positive narratives on social media platforms; and develop an online, interactive gallery of minority arts and artists that will amplify the reach of minority arts globally and serve to engender a community of involved artists, art appreciation, and support.



Welcoming children and youth to UN Human Rights offices in Geneva, as part of Human Rights 75 awareness-raising activities. Credits: UN Human Rights, 2023.

## RESULTS OF ACTION PILLAR 2

UN Human Rights will directly engage with constituencies that may otherwise be unlikely to engage with the human rights agenda through the use of arts as a powerful and universal language, able to transcend barriers of politics, to alter perceptions and convey minority rights messaging, with **at least 20,000 people reached** directly with minority rights, inclusion, diversity and solidarity messaging by 2028.

**2500+ people** will be directly involved in deeper educational, advocacy and minority rights promotion activities.

The **International Art Contest for Minority Artists** becomes a durable event on the global UN human rights calendar with large publicity and social media outreach.



Exhibition of International Art Contest for Minority Artists on Statelessness.  
Photo: Thomas Alboth, 2022.



Art workshop with kids, 75th anniversary of UDHR.  
Photo: UN Human Rights, 2023.

# Action Pillar 3

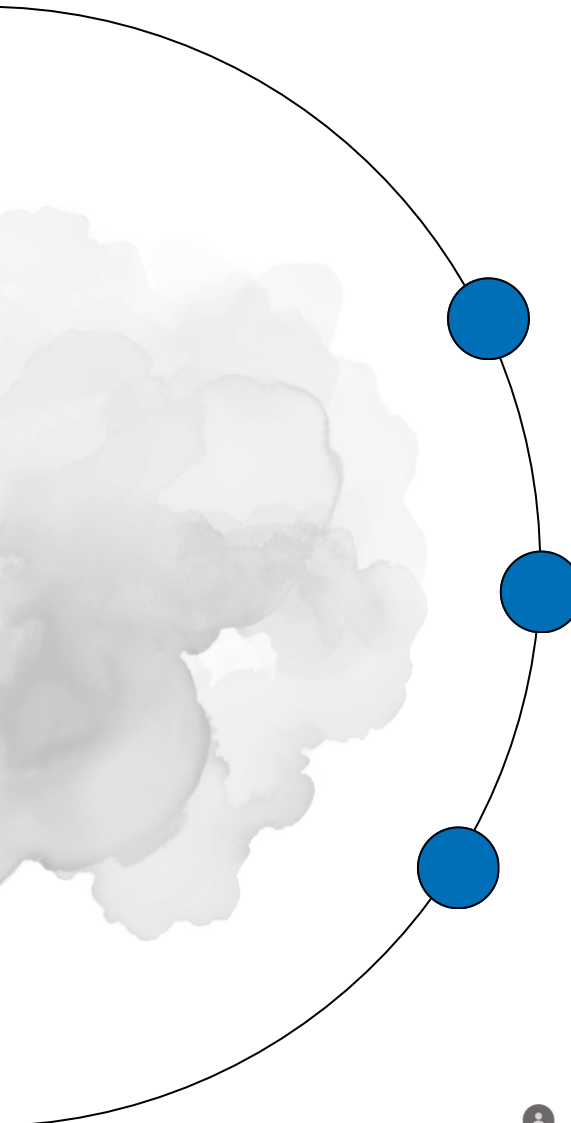
## Global Network of Cities for Minority Rights

UN Human Rights and partners will develop a Global Network of Cities Standing for Minority Rights, centered on the arts, culture and defending those most at risk of being Left behind, and including Geneva and cities on other continents, including by supporting the advancement of Geneva as a human rights city with diversity profiles; linking cities in key points worldwide via arts and human rights; deepening relations between UN Human Rights, Geneva-based grassroots civil society organisations working with the most excluded, educational institutions, cultural institutions and museums, and governing institutions, including the City of Geneva, the Republic and Canton of Geneva, and the Genève Internationale initiatives, and a new Global Network of Cities Standing for Minority Rights.

We will identify and cultivate at least 5 cities worldwide, including Geneva, to act as a Global Network of Cities Standing for Minority Rights. During 2024, in consultation with relevant existing groups and networks – including the United Cities and Local Governments network, the International Coalition for Inclusive and Sustainable Cities, and the Geneva Cities Hub – UN Human Rights and its partners will launch an open call to form a Global Network of Cities for Human Rights.

We will deepen relations with – and in the involvement of – Geneva-based educational institutions, including primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions, such as local schools, the University of Geneva; work jointly with cultural institutions such as the Geneva Ethnographic Museum (MEG) to organize cultural activities, including a large retrospective exhibition featuring 60+ minority artists in 2028, year marking the celebration of the 80th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; develop programming with annual cultural events organized around the world; advance involvement of grassroots civil society actors working in support of the most excluded, including through open consultations for joint activities and the implementation of cultural activities benefitting those at risk of being left behind; engage with leading figures from civil society and committed to support culture, the arts and human rights.

## RESULTS OF ACTION PILLAR 3



**A Global Network of Cities Standing for Minority Rights** is established and takes up action in support of minority artists human rights defenders.

**A network of public institutions and civil society organizations is consolidated in Geneva and other Global Network Cities** around the International Art Contest for Minority Rights.

**Synergies to profile Geneva and the other Global Network Cities** as dedicated to support culture, human rights, the arts, and to defend those at risk of being left behind are strengthened.



# Action Pillar 4

## The United Nations System of Minority Protection is Strengthened

By creating links and synergies with key events on the UN minority rights agenda – most notably the annual United Nations Forum on Minority Issues –, UN Human Rights and partners aim to strengthen the UN system of minority rights protection and heightening participation of minority rights defenders in UN global events.

We will develop training tools for minority human rights defenders, with a focus on participation in UN system and the international standards that protect human rights defenders facing repression, attempts to silence minority defenders, violations of freedom of expression and cultural rights, or any further threats.

We will undertake annual placement of UN Senior Minority Fellows in UN country or regional offices, with a dedicated budget to implement outreach activities aiming to promote cultural rights at the country level, such as exhibitions, workshops, and cultural activities with minority artists and cultural rights defenders.



Left: Poster for a 2021 webinar within the Minority Artists, Voice, and Dissidence program. Right: Minority rights training for children in Nigeria in 2022, convened by UN Human Rights Senior Minority Fellow Adaza Josephine Ako.

## RESULTS OF ACTION PILLAR 4

**The participation of minority individuals and organizations in the UN system** is strengthened and **local minority voices** are heard in global forums, including the UN Forum on Minority Issues.

**A generation of minority rights defenders is enabled** as legally competent advocate to promote and protect minority rights at the local and global levels, including by working with minority artist human rights defenders.

**30+ Senior Minority Fellows** are placed in UN country or regional offices around the world, to advance minority cultural rights mainstreaming, outreach and awareness-raising, including at grassroots community level.



Left: The United Nations Human Rights Council. Right: UN Human Rights Minority Fellowship Program at the gates to Palais des Nations, Geneva 2019.

# Meet Our Community

Meet some of the people who are part of our Minority Artists for Human Rights community !



**Zahra Hassan Marwan**, a formerly stateless artist using art to tell stories about home, migration and human rights to children

Zahra Hassan Marwan is a formerly stateless artist belonging to the Ayam minority of Kuwait and based in the United States. Zahra wrote and illustrated a children's book entitled *Where Butterflies Fill the Sky*, which offers a compelling and deeply personal story of how people learn to live as stateless. The judges of the International Art Contest noted that this book has the potential to help stateless children feel represented and to raise awareness on the pain and human rights violations caused by statelessness in a powerful and sensitive manner. Through the use of poetic drawings, this book constitutes a tool for countering negative stereotypes or discriminatory discourses targeting stateless persons, including by appealing to the readers' empathy through the depiction of the personal and emotional experiences of statelessness. Such artwork eventually makes visible the emotional journey of minority artists as human rights defenders. Zahra was a winner of the International Art Contest for Minority Artists in 2022, and she joined the Contest's Judge's Panel in 2023.



Zahra Hassan Marwan, *Where Butterflies Fill the Sky*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022.



**Carine Ay  l   Durand**, Director of the Ethnographic Museum of Geneva (MEG) and Member of the Judges Panel of the International Art Contest 2023

Carine Ay  l   Durand is a social anthropologist who completed her PhD at the University of Cambridge after a MPhil in Ethnology and a MA in International Negotiation at Aix-en-Provence University (France). She has worked for over twenty years in various curatorial and research capacities in different museums. After being Chief Curator at the Ethnographic Museum of Geneva (MEG), she was appointed Director of MEG on 1st July 2022. Since 1998, she has conducted long-term anthropological field research crossing the boundaries of disciplines between social anthropology, education, performance studies, and art. Carine Ay  l   Durand joined the Contest's Judge's Panel in 2023. "Art and artists are powerful to raise awareness about the struggles that minorities face and their unique experiences. This contest opens avenues to reflect collectively on a more nuanced understanding of inequality and social justice," she said.





**Abdullah, a Rohingya photographer using his camera to document the everyday life of Rohingya refugees in one of the world's largest camps**

Abdullah is a Rohingya photographer born stateless in Myanmar and currently living in Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh, one of the world's largest refugee camp. "In the camp, we neither have livelihood nor education for children. As a refugee myself, I chose this platform to share our suffering with the world. I am also trying to promote youth who have talents and an interest in art such as videography, photography, music, drawing and poetry by collecting their stories," said Abdullah. Using a documentary approach, Abdullah's photographs chronicle the daily experiences, everyday struggles and embodied stories of Rohingya children, women and men in one of the world's largest refugee camps. The Judges Panel acknowledged Abdullah's courage and dedication to bring attention to the loss, deprivation, and displacement experienced by more than 2 million Rohingya people, through his photographs and videos, as well as on his social media platforms. Abdullah was a winner of the International Art Contest for Minority Artists in 2022, and he joined the Contest's Judge's Panel in 2023.



**Rohingya youth being hopeless**

Kutupalong refugee camp, Camp-3, Bangladesh, June 2021

"Standing on a hill...

Can see, greens growing on shelters.

A bridge connecting two edges of land,

Can't find the bridge connecting our homeland.

All the joys of childhood and adolescence are sought in this hand. But find only the existential crisis.

Is it our destiny? What is it?"



**Khadim Ali**, visual artist belonging to the Hazara ethnic minority of Afghanistan and Member of the Judges Panel of the 2022 International Art Contest

Born in 1978 in Quetta, Pakistan, Khadim Ali currently lives and works in Sydney, Australia and Kabul, Afghanistan. Ali was trained in classical miniature painting at the National College of Arts in Lahore and in mural painting and calligraphy in Tehran. Khadim Ali received his Master of Fine Art (MFA) from the University of New South Wales in 2016. He belongs to the Hazara ethnic minority who comes from the central part of Afghanistan. Rich in traditional and modern motifs of Eastern and Western art-historical references, Ali's work tells stories about loss of his own cultural heritage and of human values, and explores how meaning shifts as words and images are twisted through ideological adoption. Ali's intricate works depict stories of demons and angels, conquest and war through the lens of the persecuted Hazara community. Ali joined the Judges Panel of the International Art Contest 2022: "Minorities are often voiceless. I think art is the only way to decrease the intensity of violence in a community and invite members from different ethnicities to gather under one roof and create harmony," said Ali.



Artwork by Khadim Ali. Photos: Khadim Ali.



**Alexandra Xanthaki**, UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights and Member of the Judges Panel of the 2022 and 2023 International Art Contest

Alexandra Xanthaki was appointed UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights in October 2021. A leading expert on cultural rights, Xanthaki (LLB Athens; LLM Queens, Belfast; PhD Keele) is Professor of Law at Brunel University London, UK and the Research Director of the Brunel Law School. A prolific author on minority and indigenous rights, Xanthaki has over 50 publications varying from cultural rights of minorities and indigenous peoples to cultural diversity, cultural heritage, balancing cultural rights with other rights and interests, and multicultural aspects of international human rights law. "The stories and work of minority artists must be visible. Artists have long helped us imagine a better world," said Xanthaki.



**Jean Philippe Moiseau**, artist belonging to the Haitian minority in the Dominican Republic and laureate of the 2022 International Art Contest

Belonging to the Haitian minority in the Dominican Republic, Jean Philippe Moiseau is a plastic and recycling artist who explores the complex forms of discrimination facing Haitian communities and their descendants born in the Dominican Republic through his paintings, sculptures, engraved metal objects and masks. Some of his artwork depicts the impacts of discriminatory laws, policies, and practices facing Haitian minorities in the Dominican Republic. Moiseau's bravery is reflected by the political meaning of his artwork and the way he seeks to examine and make visible difficult human rights issues, such as the forced labor of Haitians in the Dominican Republic or the consequences of statelessness. Moiseau uses traditional techniques to discuss contemporary themes and combines recycled materials with natural elements, such as jagua palm, gourds, driftwood or seeds, that are of particular importance to Haitian culture and identity. Moiseau was one of the 2022 laureates of the International Art Contest.



**L'Immigrant [The Immigrant]**  
Dominican Republic, 2020  
Acrylic on wood and gourds, 25x30x70"



**Madan Sara**  
Dominican Republic, 2022  
Acrylic on canvas, 40x50"

# UN Human Rights and the Road to Human Rights 80

In 2023, UN Human Rights led a year-long initiative – Human Rights 75 – to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UDHR). The main goals of Human Rights 75 focus on universality, progress and engagement with States and relevant actors under the leadership of UN Human Rights, together with its partners. The initiative culminates in a high-level event in December 2023 during which global pledges and ideas for a vision for the future of human rights will be announced.

Adopted in the aftermath of World War II on 10 December 1948, the UDHR recognizes that governance oriented toward promoting, protecting and fulfilling human rights is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace around the globe. One of the world’s most groundbreaking international commitments, the UDHR represents a set of common values and universal, indivisible and inalienable rights, recognizing the equal dignity and worth of every person, and constitutes a bedrock of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the 75 years since the proclamation of the UDHR, **human rights have advanced worldwide and shown their potential as the catalyst to progress in various areas**, including access to education, employment, fair pay, voting rights, healthcare, free speech, privacy, and mutual respect, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, or any discriminatory ground.

In 2023, the world faces **ongoing and new challenges**, deadly conflicts and violence, deepening inequalities, rising racism, xenophobia and hate speech, climate change and environmental destruction that threaten the rights of many, in particular those most marginalized, such as minorities and other groups facing racial and other bias-based discrimination. Given such challenges and the global backlash against human rights, the UDHR is more relevant than ever as it provides guideposts to advance collective action to leave no one behind.

**The Minority Artists for Human Rights initiative spans the period from Human Rights 75 to Human Rights 80**, the next milestone in the journey of human rights to improve the world and the lives of all of its inhabitants. **We hope you will join us on this journey!**



# Building a Global Programme

The Minority Artists for Human Rights initiative responds to the need to use innovative ideas to galvanise action and build resilience at scale, reaching and engaging people in new ways, wherever they are. Our global initiative **uses art as the content, medium and channel to spotlight key human rights issues that need urgent attention**. We aim to build a network of global partners to advocate for human rights action. Partners provide the support to grow and scale reaching to more people and advocating for the protection of human rights for all; build a community of minority artists and supporters in mutual solidarity and defense; provide support to human rights defenders; advance understanding, awareness and the celebration of our diverse societies; and work toward the strengthening of the United Nations system of minority rights protection. Through the arts as a medium, **UN Human Rights aims to advance meaningful discussion of the world's most pressing concerns for the benefit of all**.

*Join us in this  
exciting initiative!*



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**Website:** <https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/minority-artists-voice-and-dissidence>

