

International Contest for Minority Artists

2024 Edition

Memory in the Present

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

- William Faulkner

The effective exercise of minority rights is intimately linked with visions and understanding of history in the present. Minority inclusion is frequently driven by public understanding of society as welcoming diversity. Minority exclusion, by contrast, often derives from an understanding of “our history” which defines minorities outside the circle of the legitimate. At the same time, minorities often carry with them the imprint of unrectified historical injustice. Establishing the public record is a core component of a human rights-based polity.

The international human rights system has increasingly grappled with public memory as a condition of human rights-based justice. For example, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence has held that memorialization is a pillar of transitional justice, whose purpose is “to establish a dialogic truth, that is, to create the conditions for a debate withing society on the causes and consequences of past crimes and violence and on the attribution of direct and indirect responsibility”¹.

In a 2020 report, the UN Special Rapporteur observed “[...] the crucial role played by memorialization processes in the context of transitional justice, which is fully recognized by the rules and standards of contemporary international law”². He further noted the importance of memorialization to address contemporary forms of exclusion and discrimination, including those facing minority communities: “The work carried out on these past violations serves as a basis for reflection on the present and identification of contemporary issues related to exclusion, discrimination, marginalization and abuses of power, which are often linked to toxic political cultures. ... Positive work in the area of memory

¹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, “Memorialization processes in the context of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law: the fifth pillar of transitional justice”, [UN Doc. A/HRC/45/45](#), 9 July 2020, para. 36.

² *Ibid.*

not only helps to build democratic cultures in which human rights are respected but also fulfils the legal obligation of States to guarantee human rights.”³

I. **International Contest for Minority Artists 2024**

On the occasion of the 31st Anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities on 18 December 2023, UN Human Rights (OHCHR) and the non-governmental organizations Minority Rights Group International (<https://minorityrights.org/>) and Freemuse (<https://freemuse.org>) launch the **Third Edition of the International Contest for Minority Artists**, with a focus on the theme of **Memory in the Present**.

The application form for the contest is housed here: <https://freemuse.org/events/international-art-contest-for-minority-artists/>.

APPLICATIONS FOR THE 2024 CONTEST SHOULD BE SUBMITTED ON THAT LINK.

Artists who identify as belonging to a minority are invited to submit high-quality electronic images of up to five works of art related to minorities and memory in the present. The Judges Panel will select three minority artists, groups of artists, or art projects to receive non-hierarchical awards and one minority artists to receive the Minority Artist Award for Youth. The final deadline for submission is **15 February 2024**.

The award-winners will be announced in November 2024, during a Ceremony organized in Geneva, Switzerland. On this occasion, an exhibition and a catalogue featuring the awarded artists will be publicly launched. The ceremony will be followed by a series of in-person events in Geneva, including with public schools, human rights and cultural institutions.

The International Contest for Minority Artists is part of the **Minority Artists for Human Rights Initiative** (2024-2028), a comprehensive program of support for minority artists as human rights defenders.

II. **Background: Memory, Transitional Justice, and Minorities**

Minority communities throughout the world have faced dark periods of history, marked by oppression, dehumanization and serious human rights violations, including slavery, genocide and other forms of large-scale persecution, forced evictions and expulsion, segregation, structural discrimination and marginalization in most areas of life. However, in many countries, the dark periods of history have not yet been properly recognized or memorialized; in some cases, such experiences may even be deliberately denied, or distorted by those in power or other groups in society based on discriminatory grounds or hatred. When the painful experiences of the past are not properly recognized or denied, it is often impossible for victims and survivors as well as their families and communities to overcome trauma and heal,

³ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, “Memorialization processes in the context of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law: the fifth pillar of transitional justice”, *op. cit.*

and for society as a whole to address existing tensions and legacy of past divisions.

The process of memorialization is considered a key pillar of transitional justice, whose purpose is “to establish a dialogic truth, that is, to create the conditions for a debate withing society on the causes and consequences of past crimes and violence and on the attribution of direct and indirect responsibility”⁴. In his 2020 report, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence observed “[...] the crucial role played by memorialization processes in the context of transitional justice, which is fully recognized by the rules and standards of contemporary international law”⁵. He further noted the importance of memorialization to address contemporary forms of exclusion and discrimination, including those facing minority communities. “The work carried out on these past violations serves as a basis for reflection on the present and identification of contemporary issues related to exclusion, discrimination, marginalization and abuses of power, which are often linked to toxic political cultures,” wrote the Special Rapporteur. “Positive work in the area of memory not only helps to build democratic cultures in which human rights are respected but also fulfils the legal obligation of States to guarantee human rights.”⁶

In countries where minorities have been confronted with histories of human rights abuses, the recognition of past histories and the work of memorialization cut across all aspects of full reparation and reconciliation. Memorialization encapsulates a diverse and broad basket of methods, programs and practices that aim to “understand the mechanisms of oppression and dehumanization that always precede large-scale violence, open up a broad debate on the causes and consequences of past violence and on the need to build a different future”⁷. Shedding light on past histories and advancing the process of memorialization are also key to ensuring the preservation and transmission of past memories to future generations. Furthermore, memorialization is an instrument of forward-looking social transformations that can foster dialogue, trust, inclusion, and ultimately reconciliation. The voice of the victims of human rights violations, including minority communities that have faced such violations, must be at the core of such process, in order to recognize the painful experiences but also to avoid possible distortions that perpetrators may try to impose.

However, in many countries around the world, the process of memorialization needs to be strengthened, in particular when it comes to minority histories and memories. For example, episodes of persecution may not yet have been properly recognized or memorialized. In other cases, information is partial and may be distorted by stereotypes and bias. At the same time, the positive contributions of minorities to societies may have also been excluded from official history⁸.

⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, “Memorialization processes in the context of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law: the fifth pillar of transitional justice”, [UN Doc. A/HRC/45/45](#), 9 July 2020, para. 36.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 59.

⁸ For more information on Roma and Memorialization, see :

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/RomaMemorializationSeptember2022-GenevaRoundtableOutcomeReport.pdf>

III. Partnership

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights, www.ohchr.org) is the leading UN entity on human rights. We represent the world's commitment to the promotion and protection of the full range of human rights and freedoms set out in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

Freemuse (www.freemuse.org) is an independent international non-governmental organisation advocating for freedom of artistic expression and cultural diversity. Freemuse has United Nations Special Consultative Status to the Economic and Social Council (UN-ECOSOC) and Consultative Status with UNESCO. Freemuse operates within an international human rights and legal framework which upholds the principles of accountability, participation, equality, non-discrimination and cultural diversity.

Minority Rights Group International (<https://minorityrights.org/>) campaigns worldwide with around 150 partners in over 50 countries to ensure that disadvantaged minorities and indigenous peoples, often the poorest of the poor, can make their voices heard. Through its programmes, publications, advocacy, legal cases, consultancies, training and education, and our action in the media, we support minorities and indigenous peoples as they strive to defend their rights – to the lands they live on, to the languages they speak, to the beliefs they practise, to the cultures they enjoy, to equal opportunities in education and employment, and to full participation in public life.

IV. Previous Editions of the International Contest for Minority Artists

The First Edition of the International Contest for Minority Artists was launched in 2022 by UN Human Rights, UNHCR, Freemuse and MRG with a focus on minority artists working on statelessness themes. On 3 November 2022, at a [gala hybrid event in Geneva and online](#), on the basis of decisions by the Judges Panel, awards were provided to three minority artists working on statelessness themes: Zahra Hassan Marwan (artist and author); Jean Philippe Moiseau (plastic and recycling artist); Abdullah (photographer and videographer). Four further minority artists received honourable mention: Brang Li (painter and visual artist); Amin Taasha (painter and visual artist); Naser Moradi (painter); Mawa Rannahr (painter). The catalogue of the 2022 contest is available [here](#).

The Second Edition of the International Contest for Minority Artists was organized in 2023 by UN Human Rights, Freemuse and MRG, with a focus on minority artists working on themes of intersectionality and multiple forms of discrimination. On 2 November 2023, at a gala hybrid event in Geneva, awards were provided to Babatunde “Tribe” Akande (multidisciplinary visual artist); Bianca Batlle Nguema (painter); Mehdi Rajabian (composer and musician). Karthoum Dembele (photographer) received the Youth Minority Artist Award. Four artists received honorable mentions: Aluizio de Azevedo Silva Júnior (visual artist, filmmaker and writer); Tufan Chakma (visual artist); Andrew Wong (visual artist); Elahe Zivardar (painter). A full catalogue of the artists' work is available [here](#). The laureates of the 2023 Contest were invited to Geneva for one week to participate in a series of human rights, cultural and artistic activities.

V. Objectives of the Third Edition of the International Contest for Minority Artists

The UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence has observed that “[m]emorialization takes many forms”, and that it “should be a tool for fostering recognition of otherness, the consideration of all persons as rights holders and the promotion of peace, justice, and social coexistence”⁹. Experiences in the area of memorialization can include using the arts, academia, museums and other forums, rewriting history textbooks used in schools, changing the names of localities, streets and parks, building memorials and statues to change the “memoryscape”, organizing official and unofficial commemorations of various historical events and figures, establishing on-site, itinerant and online museums and exhibitions, delivering official apologies for and condemnations of the past, as well as initiating unofficial truth projects that might rely on oral history and other documentation method, among other instances.

Given the importance of issues related to memory for societies seeking to recover from serious conflicts or periods of repression in which human rights and/or international humanitarian law were violated, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence has recalled that, “[t]he United Nations can play a very important role in memory work”¹⁰. The 2024 International Contest for Minority Artists aligns with this recommendation to support memorialization efforts. It aims to do so by shedding light on the role and work of artists in the process of memorialization in different countries and contexts, and giving visibility to the narratives, histories and memories expressed through arts by minority individuals and communities. In particular, artistic forms of expression, such as museums, plays, concerts, pictorial exhibits, can play an important role to recognize the diversity of past experiences characterized by human rights violations.

As part of UN Human Rights’ efforts to support memorialization efforts based on arts and creative activities, the Third Edition of the International Contest aims to encourage and support the work of minority artists as human rights defenders, educate, connect and empower minority individuals and communities as well as societies in general, as concerns the need to better recognize minority histories and memories to build peaceful societies. Artistic forms of expression can indeed be a nexus to opening a collective space for society to come together, acknowledge past suffering, overcome trauma, reflect on legacies of the past and the darkest chapters of history, and, eventually, move toward easing tensions and advancing reconciliation.

The third edition of the International Contest for Minority Artists also echoes the year-long activities organized by UN Human Rights and its partners, in the context of the 80th anniversary of the Roma Holocaust that will take place on 2 August 2024. Up until December 2024, UN Human Rights will work to implement a large range of actions aimed at strengthening human rights work to support Roma civil society engagement for

⁹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, “Memorialization processes in the context of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law: the fifth pillar of transitional justice”, [UN Doc. A/HRC/45/45](#), 9 July 2020, para. 32.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, para. 73.

memorialization, address antigypsyism and discrimination against Romani communities, and encourage the implementation of public memorialization policies at national levels.

The Third Edition of the International Contest for Minority Artists stands at the heart of the **Minority Artists for Human Rights (2024-2028)**, a global initiative that aims to build a collective and platform for continuous learning, bringing together present and future generations of minority artists that provide a voice to the voiceless, and driving positive change.

VI. Eligibility and Application to the Minority Artists Awards

Artists who self-identify as belonging to a national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minority are welcome to apply to the International Contest for Minority Artists. All artworks focusing on the recognition of minority histories and memories in the present as a theme are eligible, including but not limited to photography, painting, video, installation, drawing, sculpture, dancing, music, etc. Due to practical reasons, it is however required that a presentation of the artwork(s) be submitted in a digital format.

UN Human Rights does not request the rights to the artwork(s). However, it will ask for (1) explicit affirmation from the artist that UN Human Rights and partners are enabled to profile the artists and use the virtual presentation of the artwork(s) in public specifically in connection with the contest and its promotion; and (2) that UN Human Rights and partners will not return copies of any works submitted.

When applying to the award, entrants will submit a short biography (including on their minority background), a paragraph describing their approach to the theme of the 2024 contest, and a selection of up to 5 pieces of their artwork that relate to such theme.

Four awards each will be offered by the Judging Panel; among these awards, one Minority Youth Artist Award will be reserved for artists aged between 18-24¹¹. The Judges Panel can also grant honorable mentions. The award-winners and honorable mentions will be publicly announced in November 2024.

VII. Judges Panel

The contest is adjudicated by a voluntary Judges Panel, comprising minority artists and independent experts in relevant fields.

The Judges Panel will meet twice (virtually) to assess and review the applications:

¹¹ There is no universally agreed international definition of the youth age group. For statistical purposes, however, the United Nations defines 'youth' as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. This definition, which arose in the context of preparations for the International Youth Year (1985) (see A/36/215), was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 36/28 of 1981. For more information, see : <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>.

(1) Meeting 1: end of March (*March 27 as indicative date, to be confirmed*)

(2) Meeting 2: mid-April (*April 17 as indicative date, to be confirmed*)

The Judges Panel is invited to oversee eligible applications and award four awards to four artists, including the Minority Youth Artist Award. In addition to the four awards, the Judges Panel can decide on additional modes of recognition, including any honorary runners-up or honorable mentions.

When reviewing the entrant artists and their artwork, criteria to be discussed by the Judging Panel may include, but are not limited to:

- Artistic merit
- Elements in the artist's work giving insights on minority issues, identity and/or experience
- Relevance of the artist's views and work to the topic of the contest
- Creativity and innovation
- Effective reach and impact of more established works or perceived potential of increasing visibility of less known ones
- Bravery and/or originality in addressing difficult themes or issues
- Dedication

The above-mentioned criteria are not exhaustive, and award-winners may not meet all of these criteria. The decision of the Judging Panel will be taken on a consensual basis, it should be final and not subject to appeal.

To facilitate the reviewing work of the Judges Panel, a pre-vetting group – consisting of UN Human Rights, Freemuse, Minority Rights Group International – will assess all applications received and checked their eligibility against the following criteria:

(1) The applicant self-identifies as belonging to a minority in accordance with the 1992 UN Minorities Declaration; AND

(2) The artwork(s) submitted by the applicant relate(s) to the contest's theme, *i.e.* minorities histories and memory in the present.

In addition, one or more artists or experts in aesthetics can be engaged if needed to provide support and assistance to the pre-vetting team.

VII. Comms

Primary hashtag for the contest is:

#MinorityArtists4HumanRights

Other hashtags in regular use of relevance to the themes of the 2024 contest may also be used.

Following the launch of the contest on 18 December and before the 15 February deadline for contest submissions, the partners will issue follow-up communications profiling the Judges Panel members.

VIII. Planning

18 December 2023 <i>Anniversary of the UN Declaration on Minorities</i>	Online launching of the application to the Third Edition of the International Contest for Minority Artists
18 December 2023 – 15 February 2024	Online reminders and comms products profiling the Judges panel
15 February 2024	Deadline for minority artists to apply (submissions close)
18 March 2024	Delivery of applications to Panel of Judges panel following pre-vetting
March-April 2024	Judges Panel reviews applications (indicative date : march 27, April 17).
May-October 2024	Pre-vetting team prepares the exhibition and catalogue in collaboration with selected artists
November 2024	Public announcement of the award winners, including on organizers’ social media and UN Human Rights website

VII. Resources

- UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights:
<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/CulturalRights/Pages/SRCulturalRightsIndex.aspx>
- UN Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities:
<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Minorities/Pages/UNNetworkRacialDiscriminationProtectionMinorities.aspx>
- OHCHR Page on Minority Artists, Voice and Dissidence:
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/minority-artists-voice-and-dissidence>
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, “Memorialization processes in the context of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law: the fifth pillar of transitional justice”, [UN Doc. A/HRC/45/45](#), 9 July 2020.
- Roma and Memorialization :
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/RomaMemorializationSeptember2022-GenevaRoundtableOutcomeReport.pdf>
- 2023 Exhibition Catalogue of the International Contest for Minority Artists on the theme of intersectionality:

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/2023-catalogue-of-international-art-contest.pdf>

- 2022 Exhibition Catalogue of the International Contest for Minority Artists on the theme of statelessness:

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/2022-11-03/ONLINE-Exhibition-Catalogue-Minority-Artists.pdf>