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**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND REPORTS OF THE OFFICE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER AND THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

**The rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and
linguistic minorities**

Report of the Secretary-General*

* Late submission

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Human Rights Council, in its decision 2/102, requested the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to continue with the fulfilment of their activities, in accordance with all previous decisions adopted by the Commission on Human Rights and to update the relevant reports and studies. Accordingly, the report of the Secretary-General on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities (A/HRC/4/109) was submitted to the Council at its fourth session. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is submitting the present interim report on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

2. The present report outlines some of the main interventions undertaken by OHCHR to strengthen the promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities since the previous report. They include efforts to promote dialogue and mutual understanding on thematic issues, to support capacity-building of OHCHR staff, public officials from Member States as well as civil society and to strengthen inter-agency cooperation. The report also suggests a timeline and template for future reports to the Council.

II. WORK OF THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

3. The work of OHCHR in relation to minorities is guided by the High Commissioner's Strategic Management Plans (2006-2007 and 2008-2009), focusing in particular on increasing compliance with human rights standards in national laws and programmes; the number of measures to improve access of marginalized groups to policy decision-making; the number of rights-holders making use of human rights mechanisms; the awareness of the international community of human rights situations; and the integration of human rights standards into United Nations system policies and programmes. Particular attention is being paid to capacity-building of various actors such as civil society and OHCHR staff, the mainstreaming of minority rights in the work of the United Nations through inter-agency cooperation, and efforts to promote dialogue and mutual understanding on thematic issues. OHCHR also services the mandates of the forum on minority issues and the independent expert on minority issues. Further information on the forum is provided below, while that on the work of the independent expert is contained in the reports of the expert submitted to the Council (A/HRC/4/9 and Add.1-3 and A/HRC/7/23 and Add.1-3).

A. Capacity-building of civil society, staff and other partners

4. With regard to training of civil society, OHCHR established the Minority Fellowship Programme in 2005 with a view to building the capacity of civil society and empowering representatives of minorities to know their rights and to use United Nations human rights mechanisms. The Programme consists of intensive training at OHCHR headquarters and currently has two components: an English-speaking component lasting on average three months; and an Arabic-speaking component, launched in 2007 as a two-week pilot and to be continued

in 2008 for three weeks. A total of 34 representatives of different ethnic, religious and linguistic communities from all regions of the world have benefited from the Programme since its inception. Over the past 18 months, fellowship participants have come from different minority communities and countries: Hazara from Afghanistan, Russian from Azerbaijan, Bihari from Bangladesh, Sikh from India, Chechen, Sabian-Mandean and Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian from Iraq, Golan Heights Syrian Arab from Israel and Rom from Ukraine.

5. OHCHR also supports community-led trainings financed by the OHCHR grants committee. From 25 to 29 September 2007, OHCHR supported a community-led training session for Roma in Latin America, organized by the non-governmental organization Identidad Cultural Romani de Argentina. The event was attended by Romani human rights defenders from Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile and Spain and was the first ever attempt to bring together representatives from Romani communities in various Latin American countries for the purposes of human rights training. OHCHR participated by providing briefings on international human rights mechanisms.

6. With regard to staff training, following its well-received pilot in Asia in April 2007, OHCHR is currently preparing a training workshop on the promotion and protection of the human rights of minorities and indigenous peoples for OHCHR staff in Africa, to be held in Addis Ababa in October 2008. OHCHR has also been concentrating on the preparation of information tools for its staff, United Nations partners and other practitioners, most notably an Information note on minorities, which answers commonly-asked questions regarding minorities and identifies elements that should be included in strategies to address the situation of minorities in United Nations country programmes.

7. Finally, OHCHR contributes to the capacity-building of public officials in States Members of the United Nations. For example, in November 2007, OHCHR delivered training on United Nations standards and mechanisms for the protection of minority rights to public officials from various ministries (Interior, Justice, Foreign Affairs, Labour), parliamentary secretariats and the judiciary from countries in the Balkans and the Caucasus, but also from Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Belarus, within the framework of a seminar organized by the European Commission for Democracy through Law of the Council of Europe.

B. Inter-agency cooperation

8. Article 9 of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (General Assembly resolution 47/135) is a cornerstone for pursuing the inclusion of minority issues into the work of members of the United Nations family, stipulating that “the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system should contribute to the full realization of the rights and principles set forth in the declaration, within their respective fields. Efforts are being made by OHCHR to integrate minority issues into the work of United Nations country teams, activities under Action 2, and the Common Country Assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. The United Nations development agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), are well placed to influence and work on the multidisciplinary dimensions of minority issues and to focus on cases of disparity and inequality.

9. To this end, OHCHR organized in 2007 several meetings of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Minorities, comprising OHCHR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the World Health Organization, bodies interested in strengthening cooperation on minority issues. In 2007, the Group agreed that improved protection for minorities was timely and that existing human rights mechanisms provided protection but needed to be used more effectively, noting the importance of integrating minority issues into common country strategies and processes aimed at realizing the Millennium Development Goals. In addition, the Group held a meeting with seven relevant special procedures mandate-holders and discussed key challenges for the protection and promotion of the rights of minorities in their respective areas of expertise. OHCHR will strengthen further the work of the Group through closer partnerships and cooperation with United Nations agencies and programmes as part of its strategy to mainstream minority rights throughout the United Nations system and promote awareness about the Declaration on the Rights of Minorities. OHCHR is also engaged in bilateral inter-agency cooperation, for example, in the preparation of the UNDP resource guide on minorities.

C. Building thematic expertise

10. With a view to offering guidance for technical assistance, and pursuant to paragraph 74 (a) of the Durban Programme of Action, which urged States and invited non-governmental organizations and the private sector to create and implement policies that promote a high-quality and diverse police force free from racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and recruit actively all groups, including minorities, into public employment, including the police force and other agencies within the criminal justice system, such as prosecutors, OHCHR, in cooperation with ILO, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the independent expert on minority issues, held an expert meeting on integration with diversity in policing in Vienna on 15 and 16 January 2008, hosted by the Government of Austria.

11. OHCHR invited 10 senior professionals from the police services from different regions and countries (Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Hungary, India, Ireland, Nigeria, Pakistan, Samoa and South Africa) to participate in the meeting as experts and deliver presentations focused on sharing good experiences and lessons learned in relation to inclusion with diversity in policing. An additional 16 participants represented other United Nations bodies, regional intergovernmental organizations and civil society. Besides the sharing of experiences and lessons learned, the main objective of the meeting was to determine whether it would be useful to develop an OHCHR guidance note on the practical application of human rights principles and provisions related to integration with diversity. A draft of the guidance note was reviewed and discussed during the meeting. The meeting participants agreed that it would be useful to produce guidelines on integration with diversity in policing, based on the current draft. OHCHR subsequently commissioned the preparation of guidelines and good practice for policing with diversity, which will be available in the near future and provide practical guidance and examples

of good practices to assist Governments, United Nations officials, non-governmental organizations and others in ensuring that agencies of the criminal justice system and law enforcement agencies are representative of, and responsive and accountable to the community as a whole.¹

D. Forum on minority issues

12. Pursuant to Council resolution 6/15, a forum on minority issues has been established. The forum will provide a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, which will provide thematic contributions and expertise to the work of the independent expert on minority issues. The forum will identify and analyse best practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives for the further implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Minorities. It will meet annually for two working days allocated to thematic discussions. The independent expert will guide the work of the forum, prepare its annual meetings and report on the thematic recommendations of the forum to the Council. In resolution 6/15, the Council requested its President to appoint, for each session, on the basis of regional rotation, and in consultation with regional groups, a chairperson of the forum among experts on minority issues. `

13. The inaugural session of the forum will be held on 15 and 16 December 2008 at United Nations Headquarters in Geneva. Its thematic focus will be on minorities and access to education. Viktória Mohácsi from Hungary has been appointed as Chairperson of the session.

III. CONCLUSIONS

14. **Since the previous report, the main activities related to minorities undertaken by OHCHR include capacity-building of civil society, staff and other partners; inter-agency cooperation; building thematic expertise; and preparations for the forum on minority issues. The Council is invited to consider whether a final report providing information on OHCHR activities related to minorities in 2008 and a review of relevant developments arising out of the work of the treaty bodies, special procedures and the universal periodic review process should be submitted to the Council at its tenth session. The Council might also consider grouping all reports on minorities, including that of the independent expert on minority issues, the forum on minority issues and the High Commissioner at one time of the year in order to facilitate governmental delegations and permit greater participation by minority organizations in the work of the Council on this issue, if they so wish. Lastly, the Council might want to consider whether it would be more appropriate for the final version of the present report and further reports to be submitted by the High Commissioner instead of by the Secretary-General.**

¹ An OHCHR report on the expert meeting is available at www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/minorities/seminar.htm.