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Human Rights Council

Forum on Minority Issues

Fourteenth session

2 and 3 December 2021

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

Provisional agenda and annotations

Provisional agenda

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2. Root causes of contemporary conflicts involving minorities.
3. Legal and institutional frameworks: the human rights of minorities and conflict prevention.
4. Focusing on the rights of minorities and effective prevention of conflicts.
5. Towards a lasting peace: positive initiatives to better protect the rights of minorities to prevent conflicts.
6. Concluding remarks.

Annotations

1. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

Venue

Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 6/15 and 19/23, the fourteenth session of the Forum on Minority Issues will be held on 2 and 3 December 2021 in Geneva (Palais des Nations, Room XX) and online.

The Forum on Minority Issues will have before it the provisional agenda contained in the present document to consider for adoption. The programme of work for the session is contained in the annex.

Opening meeting

The President of the Human Rights Council will deliver an opening statement, which will be followed by statements from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Chair of the Forum on Minority Issues and the Special Rapporteur on minority issues.

Documentation

The documents for the session will be made available on the website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Minority/Pages/Session14.aspx).



Discussions

During the two-day session, participants will be invited to contribute to four panel discussions under the general topic of “Conflict prevention and the protection of the human rights of minorities”. Each panel discussion will be introduced briefly by a number of experts and facilitated by a moderator, who will guide the discussion towards the formulation of specific recommendations. Recommendations emanating from four regional forums (the Americas, Africa and the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe) held in 2021 under the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues will also be considered, in order to include greater regional input and views on the issues to be discussed at the session.

Participants will be encouraged to make statements or comments, to answer questions from the moderator and to suggest recommendations to be included in the outcome document that the Special Rapporteur will present to the Human Rights Council at its forty-ninth session.

2. Root causes of contemporary conflicts involving minorities

States where promises of equality and universal human rights for minorities appear hollow because of discriminatory or exclusionary practices are fertile ground for long-standing grievances leading to frustration, resentment, anger and, eventually, violence. As the groundbreaking joint United Nations and World Bank study of 2018 on *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* pointed out, the main drivers of instability globally are group-based grievances around exclusion and injustice; in other words, the root causes of most of today’s violent conflicts are usually intimately linked to breaches of the human rights of minority communities.

A fresh look at these issues and the need to better address the grievances of minorities and the protection of their human rights is necessary to give new impetus to a human rights system with regard to the protection of certain minorities.

Grievances may fester beneath the surface for years, or even decades, before violent conflict breaks out. Certain situations of systematic exclusion may escalate from chronic grievances to violent conflict because of numerous factors, such as the denial of status to a minority language, the denigration of a community’s identity or unequal participation in employment or educational or public life, and exclusion from the equal benefits of economic and resource allocation. Developing a capacity to identify the root causes of conflicts is crucial for States and intergovernmental organizations.

Inspired by and building upon the report presented more than 10 years ago by the first Independent Expert on minority issues, on minority rights and conflict prevention (A/HRC/16/45), and more recent developments, such as *Pathways to Peace*, the Forum will, at the present session, reflect on identifying and addressing the root causes of conflicts involving minorities. It will consider how early awareness of root causes involving State policies and practices that disadvantage or exclude minorities can also be the most effective means to prevent conflicts. Participants will focus on how to monitor risk factors. Lastly, the Forum will explore the role of States, intergovernmental organizations, civil society and minorities in tackling at an early stage the root causes that may be in breach of human rights obligations, such as the right to equality and the prohibition of discrimination.

3. Legal and institutional frameworks: the human rights of minorities and conflict prevention

The Declaration on the Rights of Minorities states in its preamble that the implementation of minority rights contributes to the stability of States. Since the Declaration was adopted in 1992, this assumption has since been developed in successive resolutions of the General Assembly, the Commission on Human Rights and the Human Rights Council, in the reports of the Secretary-General (see A/54/2000, paras. 202–203), outcome documents of a number of conferences (see A/CONF.189/12 and Corr.1, chap. I), and policy processes.

Evidence and history show that the protection and promotion of the human rights of minorities and their aspirations result in a greater sense of national unity and identity, and ultimately reduced tensions and long-term stability. In other words, societies in which legal and institutional frameworks allow minorities to use their language freely, to practice their culture and religion and to participate in political and economic life on an equal footing with the rest of the population are less likely to be societies in which tensions deteriorate into violent conflict.

At the present session, the Forum will identify and discuss key factors that can help international and regional human rights law to be used as a powerful tool to prevent violent conflicts. Participants will examine how referring to and utilizing the body of standards and jurisprudence concerning the protection of minorities under international law can prevent escalation into conflict. The Forum will develop a common understanding of the role of the protection of the human rights of minorities in preventing conflicts, and discuss legal, institutional and policy challenges to address long-standing grievances that may lead to tensions and possible conflicts, as outlined in *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*.

The Forum will also consider the role of policies and programmes that are inclusive, or on the contrary exclusive, of the human rights and identities of minorities. It will explore how the specific needs and aspirations of minorities, and their human rights, can be better taken into account by national, regional and international institutions when developing policies aimed at ensuring peaceful coexistence.

In order to further clarify the role of legal and institutional frameworks, participants will consider the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence,¹ according to which many conflicts worldwide in recent decades have also, to varying degrees, contained a component of incitement to national, racial or religious hatred.

4. Focusing on the rights of minorities and effective prevention of conflicts

Conflict preventive measures are most likely to be effective if they are undertaken at an early point and are carefully targeted. This requires early warning and a differentiated assessment of the circumstances of each case, as highlighted by the Secretary-General in his report on early warning, assessment and the responsibility to protect (A/64/864).

Since most contemporary violent conflicts involve grievances over exclusionary or discriminatory practices that affect minorities, incorporating minority rights indicators into early warning systems would allow earlier identification of potential conflicts. Focusing on the human rights of minorities and how they are denied or misapplied offers pathways towards more effective early steps in identifying the root causes of tensions leading to conflicts, and an early warning of patterns of discrimination and other human rights breaches, which have to be addressed to prevent conflicts.

Forum participants will reflect on how dedicated and specialized mechanisms with appropriate mandates can concentrate on the minority dimension of conflicts by identifying situations where there is systematic denial of the rights of minorities. They will examine the existence of early conflict prevention mechanisms at various levels, including at the international, regional, subregional, national and local levels. Discussions will also touch upon the need to focus on minorities and pool the outputs of the early warning systems of United Nations agencies, funds, programmes and agencies, and of other intergovernmental organizations. Participants will consider what makes such mechanisms a compelling tool for effectively preventing costly and protracted conflicts involving minorities.

Participants will pay special attention to the importance of including a gender perspective in early effective conflict prevention, and will rely on the recommendations made by the Forum at its fourth session with regard to guaranteeing the rights of minority women and girls (see A/HRC/19/71), who may be particularly vulnerable in conflict and post-conflict situations.

¹ See A/HRC/22/17/Add.4, appendix.

As prevention is usually discussed in a post-conflict context, and given that stopping violence once a conflict has erupted is far more difficult (and costly) than preventing one, the Forum will aim to shift the focus towards prevention.

5. Towards a lasting peace: positive initiatives to better protect the rights of minorities to prevent conflicts

Wide-reaching discussions with the participation of minorities are needed on the ways forward and means to advance the protection of the human rights of minorities and the prevention of conflicts involving them. A number of questions should be asked, such as whether additional instruments at the international or regional levels are needed; whether existing norms have to be strengthened through better implementation, oversight and enforcement; and whether the recognition and protection of the rights of minorities should be highlighted even more in United Nations conflict prevention tools and mechanisms. Innovative proposals are invited to help to develop norms, mechanisms and practices that can significantly improve early and effective prevention of protracted and deadly conflicts. Particular attention should be paid to how equal respect for the human rights of minorities can be integrated in all areas of conflict prevention work of the United Nations and other stakeholders.

The session will focus on practical solutions designed to prevent violent conflicts involving minorities. Participants will discuss the role of United Nations agencies, national human rights institutions, civil society and other stakeholders. In order to further clarify positive initiatives to prevent conflicts, participants will consider the Beirut Declaration on Faith for Rights² and its 18 commitments.³ More specifically, participants will reflect on the commitment by faith-based and civil society actors to exchange on practices in areas of mediation, early detection of communal tensions and remedial techniques.

Participants will also debate the role of minority youth and women as valuable innovators and agents of change, whose contributions should be seen as an essential part of preventing conflicts and building peaceful communities, as recommended by the Forum at its tenth session (see A/HRC/37/73). Participants will also reflect on the benefits of minority youth and minority women ownership and leadership in conflict prevention processes.

From capacity-building programmes and interfaith dialogues to accountability for past atrocities, the current session will aim to inspire more awareness-raising activities and to raise the visibility of the human rights of minorities as a key tool in conflict prevention, and ways forward to better reflect and incorporate them in conflict prevention strategies and mechanisms.

6. Concluding remarks

Participants will draw on the outcomes of the two days of discussion to reflect on the best ways of addressing the issue of conflict prevention and the protection of the human rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

Participants will be encouraged to identify and define, in relation to each item of the present agenda, a number of recommendations to States, intergovernmental organizations, national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors for the promotion and fulfilment of the rights of persons belonging to minorities in relation to preventing conflicts involving minorities.

The Chair of the Forum on Minority Issues and the Special Rapporteur on minority issues will make concluding remarks, including proposals for follow-up steps to be taken together with Forum participants

² Available from www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/21451/BeirutDeclarationonFaithforRights.pdf.

³ Available from www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/21451/18CommitmentsonFaithforRights.pdf.

Annex

Programme of work

<i>Date/time</i>	<i>Agenda item</i>	<i>Programme</i>
Thursday, 2 December 2021		
10 a.m.–1 p.m.	1. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work	<p>Opening of the Forum on Minority Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and opening remarks by the President of the Human Rights Council • Remarks by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights • Remarks by the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide • Remarks by the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation • Remarks by the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) High Commissioner on National Minorities • Remarks by the Chair of the Forum on Minority Issues • Remarks by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues
	2. Root causes of contemporary conflicts involving minorities	
3–6 p.m.	3. Legal and institutional framework: the human rights of minorities and conflict prevention	
Friday, 2 December 2021		

<i>Date/time</i>	<i>Agenda item</i>	<i>Programme</i>
10 a.m.–1 p.m.	4. Focusing on the rights of minorities and effective early prevention of conflicts	
3–6 p.m.	5. Towards a lasting peace: positive initiatives to better protect the rights of minorities to prevent conflicts	
	6. Concluding remarks	
