



SUMMARY OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

High-level meeting to mark the commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities

21 September 2022, United Nations Headquarters, New York

The President of the General Assembly convened a high-level meeting to mark the commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities on Wednesday, 21 September 2022, at United Nations Headquarters, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 76/168. This summary is prepared in accordance with the mandate of the General Assembly in the aforementioned resolution.

The high-level meeting was an important opportunity to take stock and evaluate the implementation of the Declaration, identify constraints and achievements, showcase examples of good practices, and set priorities for the future. The high-level meeting was open to Member States, observers, the United Nations system, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC. The President of the General Assembly, through letters dated 1 August 2022 and 13 September 2022, also asked Member States to use the opportunity to present voluntary pledges.

The present summary is intended to assist Member States of the United Nations to chart the way forward and recommit their engagement to fully protect of the rights of minorities, as expressed in the Declaration adopted 30 years ago.

Opening segment

In his opening remarks, the President of the General Assembly underlined that the protection of the rights of minorities is vital to conflict prevention, the achievement of sustainable development, and the fulfilment of human rights. He added that the Declaration is more relevant today than ever before. The President urged Member States to act urgently to protect the rights of minorities in their countries.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations stressed that, 30 years after the adoption of the Declaration, the international community deals with outright inaction and negligence in the protection of minority rights. Minorities face forced assimilation, persecution, prejudice, hatred and violence. He stated that minorities are being stripped of their political and citizenship rights, their cultures stifled, their languages suppressed, and their religious practices curtailed. He added that more than 75 per cent of the world's

Stateless people belong to minorities, while the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected minority communities, with women and girls belonging to minorities often being the worst off. The Secretary-General added that the high-level meeting should be a catalyst for action.

The Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights highlighted that the concurrent crises of climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of war and conflict disproportionately affect minorities. These effects are exacerbated by structural inequalities, the scapegoating of minorities and marginalization deeply rooted in societies. The Declaration provides the global minority rights framework, but progress in implementation has stalled, and in some cases even regressed. She added that the answer is not unity based on imposed assimilation, but a celebration of diversity where pluralistic, multiple and multilayered identities foster understanding and mutual respect. She added that actions at the national and multilateral levels were urgently needed to raise the priority of minority rights on the global agenda and to mobilize the political will to realize this commitment with renewed resolve.

The Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues highlighted the dramatic increase of hate speech in social media, pointing out that minorities were overwhelmingly targeted. The Special Rapporteur added that it is not a coincidence that there are now more violent internal conflicts globally than at any time in the past 30 years. He concluded that the anniversary of the Declaration was an opportunity to complete an unfinished story, to deal more effectively with the challenges faced by minorities, and to provide much-needed space for minorities, including by creating a permanent forum and a voluntary fund.

Ms. Nadia Murad, Nobel Peace Laureate, UNODC Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking, and President of *Nadia's Initiative* shared her personal story growing up as a representative of a minority group in Iraq. She underlined that every nation in the world is strengthened when each individual has rights, authority, autonomy and a voice. She called on all countries to end discrimination, embrace diversity, and include minorities in government and asked the international community to take practical steps to make the ideals of the Declaration a reality.

General debate

The general debate included statements by 64 Member States, 3 Observers and 4 civil society organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC.

Challenges:

Participants highlighted that minority issues often lie at the heart of many crises and conflicts around the world. The underlying causes of conflict often include the violation of the rights of persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities. It was pointed out that long-standing grievances by minority groups can destabilize countries and regions. Other times, minorities are instrumentalized as a pretext to justify armed conflict.

Speakers have underlined the disturbing trend of discrimination facing minority groups worldwide. Multiple forms of discrimination resulted in marginalization, exclusion and violence. Women and girls belonging to minorities endure intersecting forms of discrimination, while religious minorities continue to experience xenophobia and intolerance in many regions around the world. Minorities are also increasingly

targeted by hate speech on the Internet and social media, sometimes leading to hate crimes. They face threats, harassment, violence, and even calls for genocide, on the basis of ethnicity, national or social origin, race, religion or language or other characteristics. Speakers indicated that minorities have also been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and other global crises like climate change.

Participants described other challenges, including statelessness, which continues to be common among minorities, and the underrepresentation of minorities in political decision-making.

Best practices:

Many participants highlighted the importance of strong **constitutional and legal frameworks** as the basis to ensure the protection of minority rights in their countries. Countries across the world have incorporated the principle of equality of all without discrimination based on language, race, origin, faith or religion in their constitution. Others have also included in their legislation the right of everyone to fully express their language and culture. One speaker described the introduction of a new law which grants birth certificates for all persons to remedy statelessness in the country.

Speakers highlighted the importance of minorities' participation at all levels of **public decision-making**. Many countries have implemented laws that prescribe the **representation of minority groups** in parliament, with some introducing minimum quotas for minorities. Others shared the establishment of independent human rights bodies for the protection of minority rights. Awareness raising about election processes in regions densely populated by minorities and translation of relevant documents into minority languages were also mentioned as effective measures to promote the participation of minorities in public life.

Speakers further noted the importance of protecting freedom of religion for all, and shared good practices to combat and prevent hate crimes and **hate speech** through monitoring, preventing, and countering it online and offline. Another speaker shared their country's zero tolerance policy against incitement to hatred. The promotion of tolerance and mutual respect through interreligious dialogue was also mentioned as a good example to promote understanding.

Several participants highlighted best practices for the protection of **minority languages**, including by ensuring access to quality **education** in minority languages, the publication of all laws in minority languages, as well as access to vocational and higher education in minority languages. It was further noted that access to education for all, including persons without citizenship, was key to protect the right to education of minorities.

Participants noted universal health coverage as an important tool to protect the **right to health** of minorities. One speaker highlighted the critical role of disseminating health information in minority languages during the pandemic to protect vulnerable populations.

Other effective measures highlighted during the general debate included the provision of financial support for organizations representing minority groups, the empowerment of women and girls belonging to minorities and ensuring the right to land ownership for all without discrimination.

Voluntary pledges and commitments:

Several participants made commitments to strengthen the promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic, inter alia, by:

- *Introducing digitalization projects targeted at minority groups*
- *Increasing support for education in minority languages at a young age*
- *Combatting all forms of discrimination, promoting diversity*
- *Ensuring effective participation of minorities in public affairs*
- *Nurturing diversity and inclusion through education, including through greater breadth of translations*
- *Continuing to strengthen social and economic integration of minorities*
- *Introducing training in equal opportunities for public officials*
- *Implementing a new national plan against discrimination as the basis to protect rights of all minority groups*
- *Ensuring access to education for all, with particular emphasis on those historically marginalized*
- *Supporting the preservation of minority languages through effective public policies*
- *Supporting the rehabilitation of cultural monuments, funding to theaters, museums and various cultural events of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities*
- *Actively promoting respect for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of all persons*

Calls for action:

Participants used the occasion to call for action Member States and the international community to strengthen the protection of the rights of minorities. One speaker stressed that Member States must intensify their commitment to “leave no one behind”, including by addressing multiple, aggravated and intersecting forms of discrimination and eradicating any incitement to hatred against persons belonging to minorities. Some countries made strong calls for the protection of religious minorities.

Another speaker added that it is key to ensure minorities’ full inclusion and meaningful participation in peace processes, conflict prevention and conflict analysis, as well as their representation at all levels of decision-making. Women's participation in decision-making processes must be guaranteed, especially for women and girls in vulnerable situations. Another speaker noted that the protection of minority languages should be a global priority.

In situations where minorities face serious, widespread or systematic human rights violations, Member States urged parties to respect their obligations under international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law.

In addition to Member States and Observers of the General Assembly, four representatives of civil society organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council delivered statements at the general debate. The speakers represented the following organizations: Coptic Orphans Support Association, Minority Rights Group International, Solidariedade Na Mokili and the Baha'i International Community and offered practical reflections to members of the General Assembly.

Closing segment

In closing, the President of Club de Madrid, Mr. Danilo Türk, recalled that peace, human rights and non-discrimination are prerequisites to effectively implement policies for the protection of minorities. He underlined the need for a constant dialogue between minorities and Member States and stressed that the rights of minorities should be permanently on the United Nations' agenda. He added that the 30th anniversary represents an opportunity to give more attention to minority issues to facilitate positive measures for the protection of minorities. He concluded that the issue of minorities must be at the top of the priorities of the international community.

In his closing remarks, the President of the General Assembly recalled that the Declaration remains the universal guide in the protection of persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. The statements delivered during the high-level meeting underlined that respecting the rights of minorities leads to peaceful and inclusive societies in support of social and political stability. He thanked those who pledged to implement concrete measures to promote the rights of minorities and recalled the proposal to create, within the United Nations, a permanent body dedicated to minorities. He urged all Member States to implement practical solutions for the protection of all minorities by seizing the momentum generated by the high-level meeting.