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Forum on Minority Issues
Nineteenth session
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Concept note by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Nicolas Levrat, on the nineteenth session of the Forum on Minority Issues, concerning advancing minority rights through regional initiatives and cooperation

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I. Introduction and background to the Forum on Minority Issues

1. The nineteenth session of the Forum on Minority Issues will be convened on 26 and 27 November 2026 at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 6/15 and 19/23.

II. Theme of the nineteenth session of the Forum on Minority Issues

2. The theme of the nineteenth session of the Forum on Minority Issues will be "Advancing minority rights through regional initiatives and cooperation".

3. Three panel discussions are to be organized, on the following sub-themes:

(a) Regional frameworks, mechanisms and initiatives to advance minority rights;

(b) Effective inclusion of minority voices at the regional level;

(c) Enforcing minority rights regionally through monitoring, litigation and other accountability processes.

III. Background

4. The normative framework established by the United Nations provides a strong foundation on regional cooperation concerning minority issues. In the preamble of its resolution 47/135 adopting the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the General Assembly recognized the important achievements made in the protection of minorities under regional, subregional and bilateral frameworks, further noting that the achievements can provide a useful source of inspiration for future United Nations activities. It thus underscored the value of regional experiences as a source of normative development and practical guidance and highlighted the role of cooperation within and across regions as a catalyst for advancing minority rights.

5. The Declaration itself reinforces this orientation by emphasizing participatory rights that extend beyond the national sphere. Article 2 (3) affirms that persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in decisions at the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live. This provision reflects an understanding that decision-making processes affecting minorities often transcend national boundaries and that spaces at the subregional, regional and international levels all constitute important arenas for inclusive governance, policy coordination and the articulation of minority perspectives.

6. Building on these foundations, the mandate establishing the Forum on Minority Issues[1] emphasized both regional inclusivity and cooperation. In its resolution 6/15, the Human Rights Council, in addition to calling for the participation of relevant stakeholders from all regions, expresses the expectation that the Forum will support the efforts of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to strengthen cooperation among United Nations mechanisms, bodies and specialized agencies, funds and programmes engaged in the promotion and protection of minority rights, including at the regional level. In this sense, the Forum is uniquely positioned as a platform not only for dialogue, but also for fostering synergies across institutional and geographical boundaries, facilitating the exchange of experiences and promoting coordinated approaches to minority protection.

[1] Human Rights Council resolution 6/15.

7. As effective protection of minority rights commonly involves multilateral efforts, whether at global or regional level, it is important to leverage regional frameworks, enhance participatory processes at multiple levels and strengthen coordination among international and regional actors in order to advance the effective protection of persons belonging to minorities.

8. The goal of the nineteenth session of the Forum on Minority Issues is to highlight the role of regional frameworks, mechanisms, initiatives and collaborative efforts of civil society actors in advancing the rights of minorities, while identifying the gaps, challenges and opportunities that exist across different regional contexts in fully implementing international standards on minority rights.

9. Despite the existence of an international framework for the protection of minority rights, its implementation remains uneven across regions. Where regional frameworks do exist, they vary considerably in scope and strength, and their existence does not in itself guarantee effective protection. Implementation gaps and restricted access to justice remain persistent challenges across all regions. This uneven landscape leaves minority communities with different levels of protection depending on where they live, underscoring the need for more effective and inclusive regional approaches to minority rights that are aligned with international standards.

10. At its nineteenth session, the Forum on Minority Issues aims to highlight that regional mechanisms, when inclusive and responsive to the needs of all minority communities, can play a critical role in bridging international standards and local realities. States and regional bodies, where they exist, are responsible for ensuring that these mechanisms are accessible to all minorities within their respective regions and that they genuinely respond to the needs and reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

11. The Forum will also highlight good practices and initiatives through which minority communities and civil society organizations have actively engaged with regional mechanisms to advocate for stronger protections, greater representation and more accountable enforcement of minority rights, underscoring the essential role of persons belonging to minorities as rights holders and active agents in advancing and engaging with regional human rights frameworks. Strengthening regional mechanisms for the protection and promotion of minority rights is essential for ensuring that international human rights obligations translate into concrete improvements in the lives of persons belonging to minorities, wherever they live.

12. The theme of the nineteenth session of the Forum also aligns with Sustainable Development Goals 10 (reduced inequalities), 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and 17 (partnerships for the Goals). Under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals minorities remain among the most marginalized and structurally excluded populations who should not be left behind.

13. The Forum recognizes the challenges linked to the complex reality of minority rights protection at the regional level. Minorities can face not only the absence of adequate regional frameworks, but also barriers to access to existing mechanisms, whether regional or international. Such barriers arise, for example, from a lack of resources, compulsory use of one official language and other accessibility constraints, limited legal standing and political resistance from States. These challenges are especially acutely felt by marginalized groups within minorities, including women, young people, older persons, migrants, persons with disabilities and persons with diverse sexual orientation or gender identity, among others, who often face intersectional discrimination from dominant groups and from within their own communities.

14. At the same time, the Forum seeks to underscore the transformative potential of inclusive regional mechanisms, which are based on and promote the principles of representation, inclusive participation, non-discrimination and equality to empower minority communities and support the fulfilment of their human rights. In such settings, minority rights are not only protected and promoted, but persons belonging to minorities are recognized as active agents of peace, justice and collective resilience, contributing to shaping a more just and cohesive future for society.

15. In addition, the nineteenth session of the Forum provides an opportunity to examine good practices in facilitating the active engagement of minority communities and civil society with regional mechanisms, advancing strategic litigation and strengthening accountability. The focus will be on identifying concrete solutions, practical tools, inclusive policies and initiatives that facilitate the meaningful participation of minorities in regional processes, ensuring that they can shape the human rights agendas that affect them.

16. The Forum will follow up and build on its previous sessions and the discussions that were conducted through the regional forums on minority issues held between 2019 and 2022.[2] It will also follow up on the reports of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, in particular the 2024 report to the General Assembly on institutional designs promoting minorities' effective participation towards diverse and inclusive societies.[3]

IV. General objectives

17. The Forum on Minority Issues provides a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, as well as thematic contributions to and expertise for the work of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues. The Forum also provides a platform for identifying and analysing best practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives for the further implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

18. At its nineteenth session, the Forum will:

(a) Examine existing regional human rights frameworks and assess the extent to which they incorporate and implement international minority rights standards, while identifying regions where such frameworks are absent or limited;

(b) Analyse how regional mechanisms translate international norms on minority rights into concrete protection on the ground through norms development, rights promotion, monitoring and reporting and by providing rights holders with avenues for remedy and reparation. The analysis will include both litigation pathways and non-litigation accountability processes and will identify promising practices in each of those areas;

(c) Explore, in regions where no formal minority rights framework or mechanisms exist, how the multilateral system and States can encourage their development, including by supporting regional civil society in setting up regional mechanisms that could, over time, grow into formal platforms, and identify what support and protection the international community would need to provide for civil society actors to participate in this process effectively and safely;

(d) Foster communication and collaboration between regional mechanisms and United Nations mechanisms, including through the sharing of information, best practices and common approaches to implementation challenges, while preserving the diversity and regional specificity that constitute a strength of regional systems;

(e) Showcase how civil society organizations, community leaders and minority representatives are actively identifying and responding to both opportunities and shortcomings in existing regional frameworks, and the impacts of this work on minority communities;

(f) Explore the unique role of regional bodies and initiatives in addressing context-specific challenges faced by persons belonging to minorities, including in areas where no binding regional framework on minority rights exists;

(g) Apply an intersectional perspective to address the particular situations of vulnerability faced by persons belonging to minorities at the intersection of multiple and compounding forms of discrimination;

[2] See https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-minority-issues/regional-forums-minority-issues.
[3] A/79/169.

(h) Deliver thematic recommendations to be reported to the Human Rights Council by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 19/23.

V. Participants

19. The Forum on Minority Issues is open to the participation of States, United Nations mechanisms, bodies and specialized agencies, funds and programmes, intergovernmental organizations, regional organizations and mechanisms in the field of human rights, national human rights institutions and other relevant national bodies and academics, experts and non-governmental organizations working on minority issues. The Forum is also open to other non-governmental organizations whose aims and purposes are in conformity with the spirit, purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

VI. Areas of discussion

20. The focus of the discussion will address the following overarching themes:

(a) Regional frameworks, mechanisms and initiatives to advance minority rights. Key discussion areas will include:

(i) Assessing the treatment of specific minority rights under existing regional human rights frameworks and the capacity of these frameworks to effectively influence States to protect minority rights;

(ii) Examining the relationship between international minority rights standards and regional instruments, including areas where regional frameworks fall short of international standards and areas where they have advanced more protective standards. This includes a discussion on the binding or soft-law tools that are being and could be developed to strengthen minority rights protection at the regional level;

(iii) Identifying opportunities for strengthening and/or establishing regional human rights frameworks and mechanisms;

(iv) Discussing how regional civil society coordination initiatives and advocacy efforts by minority communities and civil society can promote and protect minority rights in a region, including through coalition-building, peer learning, regional advocacy strategies and engagement with regional standard-setting bodies. This includes examining how such initiatives can push for the adoption or strengthening of regional minority rights frameworks and their effective implementation;

(b) Effective inclusion of minority voices at the regional level. Key discussion areas will include:

(i) Examining the structural and practical barriers that may prevent persons belonging to minorities from meaningfully participating in regional mechanisms, including lack of resources, language constraints, limited legal standing and political obstacles, with a special focus on barriers that impact in particular those affected by intersectional discrimination;

(ii) Highlighting good practices for inclusive engagement, including examples where minorities have successfully shaped regional human rights agendas and where regional mechanisms have cooperated among themselves or with United Nations mechanisms to facilitate participation and agency, and exploring the role of civil society coalitions in filling gaps left by weak or absent formal frameworks;

(iii) Discussing strategies for strengthening minority agency in regional decision-making processes, for ensuring that minorities can meaningfully shape the agendas that directly affect them and for drawing on models of inclusive participation from diverse legal, cultural and political contexts;

(iv) Examining how minorities in regions without formal regional mechanisms can leverage global and United Nations mechanisms as spaces for transnational advocacy

and norms development, and exploring how these global spaces can inspire, complement or fill the gap of absent regional frameworks;

(c) Enforcing minority rights regionally through monitoring, litigation and other accountability processes. Key discussion areas will include:

(i) Examining how regional human rights mechanisms may develop minority rights standards and translate minority rights norms into concrete protection on the ground, through both litigation and non-litigation pathways, including State reporting, urgent appeals, country visits, mediation and other monitoring and accountability processes;

(ii) Highlighting the role of regional treaty bodies, specialized mechanisms and civil society engagement in setting and advancing standards for minority rights protection, with a focus on the development of jurisprudence and the use of strategic litigation to clarify norms and establish binding precedents;

(iii) Identifying the barriers and challenges that persons belonging to minorities face in accessing regional justice mechanisms, including procedural obstacles, lack of legal representation, resource constraints and the limited enforceability of regional decisions, and exploring concrete strategies and good practices to overcome these barriers and strengthen minorities' access to justice delivered by regional mechanisms;

(iv) Exploring practical ways in which civil society, in regions where no formal mechanisms exist, can begin to establish the groundwork for future formal regional mechanisms, through regional human rights monitoring, information-collection and -sharing, domestic and international advocacy and platform-strengthening, and identifying the support and protection that the international community would need to provide to enable civil society to fulfil this role.

21. An intersectional perspective will be applied to all areas of the discussion to address the particular situations of vulnerability, as well as the vital contributions, of persons belonging to minorities who are at the intersection of diverse forms of discrimination, including women, young people, older persons, migrants, persons with disabilities and persons with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, among others.

VII. Inputs

22. The Special Rapporteur on minority issues encourages all participants to contribute to the discussion and dialogue by sharing experiences and views about the main areas of discussion of the Forum on Minority Issues.

VIII. Outcome

23. A summary of the discussion of the Forum on Minority Issues at its nineteenth session, based on the dialogue and contributions of the participants, will be prepared by the Chair of the Forum. The Special Rapporteur on minority issues will prepare a report on the recommendations of the Forum for submission to the Human Rights Council at its sixty-fourth session.