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Madam Chair, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to speak at the 18th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues. In line with the theme of this session, I will focus on how minorities contribute to the economic, social, cultural, political and institutional dimensions of society. I will also highlight why minorities cannot make such a contribution unless their own right to development is realised. In fact, the right to development provides a pathway for minorities to contribute fully to economic, social, cultural and political development of fellow citizens too.

Madam Chair

Ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic and sexual minorities are often excluded or marginalised from enjoying economic opportunities. Yet, minorities still play a critical role in the economy of many countries. They do so by showing entrepreneur skills not only to earn livelihood for themselves but also create jobs for others. Minorities also show solidarity with peers who are let down by the formal economic system. For example, by providing temporary shelter, vocational training and micro credit, they offer an economic inclusion ladder to other community members.

Minorities also contribute immensely to the social and cultural fabric of society. They do so by showcasing their unique culture, wearing traditional dresses, celebrating religious festivals, preserving distinct languages and dialects, and sharing their food recipes. In other words, minorities enable societies to understand, value and cherish diversity.

In the political sphere too, minorities are under-represented due to structural discriminations that they face. Yet, minorities all over the world have shown resilience to break barriers and join mainstream politics at all government levels. By doing so, they have brought to the fore the plight of minorities and advanced legal and policy reforms to address systemic exclusions. Minority leaders have also offered political mentorship to youth from minority communities.

At the institutional level, minorities bring their lived experiences to the architecture of governance to ensure that all institutions are responsive to the diverse needs, interests and rights of minorities. Moreover, without an adequate representation of minorities in governance institutions, these institutions will not be reflective of society.

Distinguished delegates

It is clear to me that despite facing numerous barriers and discriminations, minorities contribute immensely to all aspects of society. However, the world community has not leveraged the full potential of minorities to contribute to the economic, social, cultural and political development of peoples.

In my view, the right to development provides a transformative pathway to tap into the potential of minorities to contribute to building inclusive, sustainable and peaceful societies. Drawing on various aspects of the right to development, let me provide seven concrete suggestions on how to achieve this goal.

First, States should respect both individual and collective identities of minorities. Doing so will be in line with the right to development, which is a universal human right with both individual and collective dimensions.

Second, States, UN agencies, businesses and other actors should ensure that minorities are able to participate in decision making processes not merely about their own development but also of the entire society. Such participation must be active, free and meaningful.

Third, considering that minorities face multiple forms of discrimination, all decision makers should apply an intersectional approach while putting in place policies, programmes and projects directed to empower minorities.

Fourth, a fair distribution of income and development benefits is a key principle of the right to development directly relevant for minorities. States could, for example, use public procurement contracts to achieve fair distribution of economic opportunities. They should also consider offering preferential loans to minorities to study or start a new business. Similarly, minorities' access to new technologies should be guided by the fair distribution principle.

Fifth, since minorities often bear disproportionate burden of conflicts, securing and sustaining peace is more critical for minorities. The right to development provides a recipe for achieving

peace through disarmament. States should therefor divert their resources from militarisation to realising the Sustainable Development Goals of minorities.

Sixth, States should respect minorities' right to internal self-determination. Unity in diversity is feasible. In fact, national unity is stronger when minorities are given space to preserve their autonomous way of life and culture, rather than forced to integrate with the majority.

Seventh, State should harness the potential of international cooperation in the form of official development assistance, technology transfer, capacity building and technical assistance to achieve substantive equality for minorities.

Madam Chair

Let me conclude by encouraging States, UN agencies, businesses and other actors to take decisive steps to realise the right to development of all minorities. If minorities in all world regions can enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development without any discrimination, they will contribute more to building an inclusive, peaceful and sustainable society in which no one is left behind.

I thank you for your attention.