18 December 2024

Concept Note

International Contest for Minority Artists 2025

Belonging, Place and Loss

The 2025 Edition of the Contest invites creative interpretation of the relationships of minorities with belonging, place and loss. The 2025 theme constitutes an exploration of minority rights and minority experience in relation to questions of belonging, environmental justice and climate change, as well as wider questions of minority attachment to place and existence, as well as loss of community, language and culture.

Climate change and environmental harm disrupts land, resources, and ecosystems upon which minority communities rely. They also aggravate existing inequalities and often affect minorities disproportionately. In recent decades, minority movements have called attention to the placement of polluting factories, toxic waste sites and other degradation practices in minority-dominated areas, as well as the disproportionate impacts these activities have on the lives of minorities, a practice identified as "environmental racism". Aspects of these harms are also gendered, with disproportionate impact on women and girls.

In a global environment of heightened hate speech and stigma, minorities also experience loss and disruption from place, as well as forces leading to alienation from home and culture.

Minority artists play a key role in articulating and challenging environmental racism and climate-change related harms, and rendering them into forms which can grip the public imagination. Minority expression brings to light the disruption of lifeworlds and renders expressions of grief at loss into objects of beauty and power. Minority artists also render visions of renewal, care, resilience and strength.

The 2025 edition of the Contest invites minority artists to submit artworks addressing themes related to the intersection of environmental degradation, cultural loss, and the fight for a just, equitable future based on human rights. The contest celebrates the strength and relevance of minority perspectives to understand the linkages between minority rights and human rights on the one hand, and environmental justice and action to combat and reverse climate change on the other hand. It aims to shed light on minority-driven solutions to face the

adverse effects of climate change and environmental harm, and to illuminate the minority experience of loss of place and culture.

International Contest for Minority Artists 2025

On 18 December 2024, the 32nd Anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, UN Human Rights (OHCHR), the non-governmental organizations Minority Rights Group International (https://minorityrights.org/) and Freemuse (https://freemuse.org), and the City of Geneva launch the **2025 Edition of the International Contest for Minority Artists**, with a focus on the theme of **Belonging, Place and Loss.**

Artists who identify as belonging to a national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minority are invited to submit high-quality electronic images of up to five works of art related to the 2025 theme. The Judges Panel will select three minority artists, groups of artists, or art projects to receive non-hierarchical awards and one minority artists to receive the Minority Artist Award for Youth. The final deadline for submission is **1 March 2025**. The award-winners will be announced in November 2025.

The International Contest for Minority Artists is part of the **Minority Artists for Human Rights Initiative** (2024-2028), a comprehensive program of support for minority artists as human rights defenders. The Minority Artists for Human Rights Initiative aims to further the protection of minority artists as human rights defenders; extend outreach and awareness-raising to reach diverse audiences and excluded groups; develop a network of named cities including Geneva as hubs for minority art and culture, through a global network of cities supporting minority rights; and deepen the inter-connectivity between minority artists and the United Nations system of human rights protection.

Background: Minority Rights, Belonging, Place and Loss

The international human rights framework addresses the themes of belonging, place and loss from a number of angles.

The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992)

The first Independent Expert on Minority Issues set out four principle areas of concern related to minorities around the world, based on the Declaration on the Rights of Minorities and other relevant international standards relating to minority rights:

(a) Protecting a minority's existence, including through protection of their physical integrity and the prevention of genocide;

(b) Protecting and promoting cultural and social identity, including the right of individuals to choose which ethnic, linguistic or religious groups they wish to be identified with, and the right of those groups to affirm and protect their collective identity and to reject forced assimilation;

(c) Ensuring effective non-discrimination and equality, including ending structural or systemic discrimination; and

(d) Ensuring effective participation of members of minorities in public life, especially with regard to decisions that affect them.[1]

Human Rights and the Environment

The United Nations human rights system recognizes a right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and has established an independent Special Rapporteur focussing on this right to report to the Human Rights Council to examine human rights obligations in this area; promote best practices; identify challenges and obstacles; and to conduct country visits and respond to human rights violations.[2] The most recent Human Rights Council resolution on the human rights and the environment recognizes that "degradation and loss of biodiversity often result from and reinforce existing patterns of discrimination, and that environmental harm can have disastrous and at times geographically dispersed consequences for the quality of life of indigenous peoples, local communities, peasants and others who rely directly on the products of forests, rivers, lakes, wetlands and oceans for their food, fuel and medicine, resulting in further inequality and marginalization".[3]

Human Rights and Climate Change

In its current work, OHCHR aims, in line with the **2030 Agenda** and the **Paris Agreement on climate change**, to promote a human rights-based approach to climate action. This requires that States take ambitious adaptation and mitigation measures that are inclusive and respectful of communities affected by climate change, including minorities. We aim to achieve this through: collaboration with partners to integrate human rights in environmental laws and policies; support for the inclusion of civil society in environmental decision-making processes, access to information and effective remedies for victims; assisting human rights mechanisms to address environmental issues, including climate change; advocacy on behalf of environmental human rights defenders – including minority rights defenders – and supporting efforts by the UN system to protect them; research and advocacy to address human rights harms caused by environmental degradation, particularly to groups in vulnerable situations. Further information on human rights-based approaches to climate change, as well as on OHCHR's work in this area, is available at: **link**.

Environmental Racism/Environmental Justice

A specific treaty in the UN system is dedicated to environmental justice: the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters ("Aarhus Convention") provides a framework for human rights defenders to challenge environmental harms in the three named areas.[4] The UN human rights system has also dedicated attention to the disparate impact on minorities and others facing racial discrimination of the global climate crisis, building on **civil society's efforts in this area**. In 2022, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance presented a **report** on these issues to the General Assembly, stating: "Climate justice seeks historical accountability from nations and entities responsible for climate change and calls for a radical transformation of the contemporary systems that shape the relationship between humans and the rest of the planet. The status

[1] E/CN.4/2006/74, para.22.
[2] https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-environment.
[3] A/HRC/RES/46/7.
[4] https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XXVII-13&chapter=27

quo is that global and national systems distribute the suffering associated with the global ecological crisis on a racially discriminatory basis."[5] The Special Rapporteur urged Member States and stakeholders within the UN environmental and climate governance system to stop racially discriminatory human rights violations relating to climate and the environment, and systematically hold the transnational corporations accountable for environmental racism and climate injustice. Reparations for historical and contemporary environmental and climate harms rooted in historic injustice must also be prioritised. The Special Rapporteur also recommended meaningful participation of racially, ethnically and nationally marginalised persons and peoples in global and national climate governance, including women, gender-diverse persons, persons with disabilities, refugees, migrants and stateless persons. The work of the Special Rapporteur is complemented by that of UN bodies dedicated to specific groups. For example, in March 2021, the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent presented its conclusions and recommendations of its twenty-eighth session, on "Environmental justice, the climate crisis and people of African descent". In the **report**, the Working Group provides guidance on how to effectively address environmental injustice, racial disparities, unequal protection and the unique impact of the climate crisis and environmental racism on people of African descent.

Minorities, Human Rights and Place

Land usage and land disruption impact directly on the enjoyment of a number of human rights. For many people, land is a source of livelihood, and is central to economic rights. Land is also often linked to peoples' identities, and so is tied to social and cultural rights. The human rights aspects of land affect a range of issues including poverty reduction and development; peacebuilding; humanitarian assistance; disaster prevention and recovery; urban and rural planning.

Food insecurity, climate change and rapid urbanization have also refocused attention on how land is being used, controlled and managed by States and private actors. Urban development projects have led to socioeconomic polarization in cities owing to escalating costs of land and housing, depletion of low-income housing and ghettoization of stigmatized minorities. Forced eviction for millions of people around the world results in their being homeless, landless, or living in extreme poverty and destitution. Eviction from housing and land very frequently disproportionately affects marginalized or stigmatized minorities. Matters related to women, housing and land have also been extensively explored.

Partnership

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights, www.ohchr.org) is the leading UN entity on human rights. We represent the world's commitment to the promotion and protection of the full range of human rights and freedoms set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Freemuse (www.freemuse.org) is an independent international non-governmental organisation advocating for freedom of artistic expression and cultural diversity. Freemuse has United Nations Special Consultative Status to the Economic and Social Council (UN-ECOSOC) and Consultative Status with UNESCO. Freemuse operates within an international

[5] https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/11/global-climate-crisis-racial-justice-crisis-un-expert.

human rights and legal framework which upholds the principles of accountability, participation, equality, non-discrimination and cultural diversity.

Minority Rights Group International (https://minorityrights.org/) campaigns worldwide with around 150 partners in over 50 countries to ensure that disadvantaged minorities and indigenous peoples, often the poorest of the poor, can make their voices heard. Through its programmes, publications, advocacy, legal cases, consultancies, training and education, and our action in the media, we support minorities and indigenous peoples as they strive to defend their rights – to the lands they live on, to the languages they speak, to the beliefs they practise, to the cultures they enjoy, to equal opportunities in education and employment, and to full participation in public life.

In 2024, following several years of financial and technical support, the City of Geneva joined the initiative in partnership. During 2024, the partners also worked closely with and with the support of other partners, including the Centre des Arts of the International School of Geneva (Ecolint), the Loterie Romande, the Department of Public Education, Training and Youth of the Republic and Canton of Geneva; as well as other donors who requested not to be named.

Previous Editions of the International Contest for Minority Artists

The International Contest for Minority Artists began in 2022, following a series of webinars supporting minority artists, convened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Past editions of the Art Contest for Minority Artists – covering the three themes of Statelessness (2022), done jointly with UNHCR; Intersectionality (2023); and **Memory in the Present** (2024) (catalogue forthcoming).

Objectives of the 2025 Edition of the International Contest for Minority Artists

The 2025 Edition of the International Contest for Minority Artists stands at the heart of the **Minority Artists for Human Rights** (2024-2028), a global initiative that aims to build a collective and platform for continuous learning, bringing together present and future generations of minority artists that provide a voice to the voiceless, and driving positive change. The initiative encapsulates a comprehensive program of support for minority artists as human rights defenders, involving four pillars: strengthened protection of minority artists as human rights defenders; extended outreach and awareness-raising to reach diverse audiences and excluded groups; development of a network of named cities including Geneva as hubs for minority art and culture, through the Global Network of Cities Standing for Minority Rights; a deepening of the inter-connectivity between minority artists and the United Nations system of human rights protection. The action is envisioned as an expanding partnership between UN Human Rights and a range of institutions, partners, communities and constituencies.

Eligibility and Application to the Minority Artists Awards

Artists who self-identify as belonging to a national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minority are invited to apply to the 2025 Edition of the International Contest for Minority Artists. All artworks focusing on themes related to minority rights, belonging, environmental justice and climate change are eligible, including but not limited to photography, painting, video, installation, drawing, sculpture, digital arts, dancing, music, etc. Due to practical reasons, it is

however required that a presentation of the artwork(s) be submitted in a digital format. There is no application fee for the contest.

UN Human Rights does not request the rights to the artwork(s). However, it will ask for (1) explicit affirmation from the artist that UN Human Rights and partners are enabled to profile the artists and use the virtual presentation of the artwork(s) in public specifically in connection with the contest and its promotion; and (2) that UN Human Rights and partners will not return copies of any works submitted.

When applying to the award, entrants will submit a short biography (including on their minority background), a paragraph describing their approach to the theme of the 2025 contest, and a selection of up to 5 pieces of their artwork that relate to such theme.

Four awards each will be offered by the Judging Panel; among these awards, one Minority Youth Artist Award will be reserved for artists aged between 18-35. The Judges Panel can also recognize additional artists through honourable mention.

Women and LGBTQI+ artists belonging to minorities are particularly encouraged to apply to the Contest.

The partners regret that they are unable to contact all unsuccessful applicants to the contest. The award-winners and minority artists receiving honourable mention will be publicly announced in November 2025.

Process and Assessment Criteria

Following technical assessment by the partners to determine eligibility, decisions on the awards is taken by an independent Judges Panel. The Judges Panel reviews eligible applications and decides on awards for four awards to four artists, including the Minority Youth Artist Award. In addition to the four awards, the Judges Panel may decide on additional modes of recognition, including any honorary runners-up or honourable mention.

When reviewing the entrant artists and their artwork, criteria to be discussed by the Judges Panel may include, but are not limited to:

- Artistic merit
- Elements in the artist's work giving insights on minority issues, identity and/or experience
- Relevance of the artist's views and work to the topic of the contest
- Creativity and innovation
- Effective reach and impact of more established works or perceived potential of increasing visibility of less known ones
- Bravery and/or originality in addressing difficult themes or issues
- Dedication

The above-mentioned criteria are not exhaustive, and award-winners may not meet all of these criteria. The decision of the Judges Panel will be taken on a consensual basis, it should be final and not subject to appeal. To the best extent possible, the award portfolio will reflect the broadest possible diversity of artists and art, as well as gender and geographic balance.

To facilitate the reviewing work of the Judges Panel, a pre-vetting group – consisting of UN Human Rights, Freemuse, Minority Rights Group International – will assess all applications received and checked their eligibility against the following criteria:

(1) The applicant self-identifies as belonging to a minority in accordance with the 1992 UN Minorities Declaration; AND

(2) The artwork(s) submitted by the applicant relate(s) to the 2025 contest theme.

In addition, one or more artists or experts in aesthetics may be engaged to evaluate aesthetic aspects.

Comms

Hashtags for the contest are:
#MinorityArtists4HumanRights

Following the launch of the contest on 18 December and before the 1 March 2025 deadline for contest submissions, the partners will issue follow-up communications profiling the Judges Panel members.

Planning

18 December 2024 *Anniversary of the UN Declaration on Minorities*	**Online launching of the application 2025 Edition of the International Contest for Minority Artists**
18 December 2024 – 1 March 2025	Online reminders and comms products profiling the Judges panel
1 March 2025	Deadline for minority artists to apply (submissions close)
25 March 2025	Delivery of applications to Panel of Judges panel following pre-vetting
March-April 2025	Judges Panel reviews applications (indicative dates for online meetings : April 8 and April 18)
May-October 2025	Pre-vetting team prepares the exhibition and catalogue in collaboration with selected artists
November 2025	Public announcement of the award winners, including on organizers' social media and UN Human Rights website

Resources

- UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues : https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-minority-issues/about-mandate
- UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/CulturalRights/Pages/SRCulturalRightsIndex.aspx

- UN Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Minorities/Pages/UNNetworkRacialDiscriminationProtectionMinorities.aspx
- OHCHR Page on Minority Artists, Voice and Dissidence: https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/minority-artists-voice-and-dissidence

Annex I. On-line Application Form for Minority Artists

All artists who self-define as belonging to a minority are invited to submit an application to the Minority Artists Awards digitally. Artists must complete the entry form and upload files or internet links (URL) of up to 5 artworks of their choice.

Artists are expected to submit electronic copies of their arts or links to their on-line arts. However, artists will not lose their intellectual property and usage rights on the submitted materials. Files uploaded to the contest website should be solely images of the artwork and not contain photographic images of the contestant nor other individuals.

Women and LGBTQI+ artists belonging to minorities are particularly encouraged to apply to the Contest.

1. Eligibility criteria

- Applicants must identify themselves as belonging to a national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minority, in accordance with the 1992 UN Minorities Declaration.
- Applicants can be of any nationality or stateless.
- All art formats are eligible, there are no limitations on style or medium. Submissions must however be in electronic format.
- The artwork speaks to the theme of shedding light on the theme of "Belonging, Place and Loss".
- Application to the contest is free-of charge; there is no application and no facilitation fee. Efforts to impose charges for application should please be reported to: ohchr-minorities@un.org.
- Submissions of collaborative works by multiple minority artists are welcome.
- The work submitted must have been made by the applicant(s) or must be the result of collaborative efforts in which the applicant is included.
- The artwork must be submitted in digital format.

2. Submission Form

Personal information

1. First Name / Last Name

2. Nationality / Stateless

3. National, ethnic, religious or linguistic minority to which the artist identifies

4. Date of birth

5. Contact information
- Email
- Phone (including country calling code):

6. Social media (optional)
- Website:
- Instagram:
- Facebook:
- Others:

Biography and artistic commitments

7. Please provide a short biography of the artist. The biographical statement should include information on the artist's minority background – i.e. in relation to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic belonging – and, if relevant, how the artist's experience relates to the theme of the contest (250 words max.)

8. Please describe how your artworks work explore, expose and/or address matters relating to belonging, place, and loss (200 words max.). This statement may in particular reflect on aspects related to climate change and the environment if/as relevant.

9. Artist's statement: Please set out your vision for the ideas of the 2025 contest: "Belonging, Place and Loss" (200 words max.).

Selection of up to 5 materials relating to "Belonging, Place and Loss"

Artwork #1 (required)
- Title of the artwork:
- Year of creation:
- Upload document (PDF, JPEG) or URL:
- Short description of the artwork, the artistic research and technical realization and comments by the artist (150 words max.)

Artwork #2 (optional)
- Title of the artwork:
- Year of creation:
- Upload document (PDF, JPEG) or URL:
- Short description of the artwork, the artistic research and technical realization and comments by the artist (150 words max.)

Artwork #3 (optional)
- Title of the artwork:
- Year of creation:
- Upload document (PDF, JPEG) or URL:

- Short description of the artwork, the artistic research and technical realization and comments by the artist (150 words max.)

Artwork #4 (optional)
- Title of the artwork:
- Year of creation:
- Upload document (PDF, JPEG) or URL:
- Short description of the artwork, the artistic research and technical realization and comments by the artist (150 words max.)

Artwork #5 (optional)
- Title of the artwork:
- Year of creation:
- Upload document (PDF, JPEG) or URL:
- Short description of the artwork, the artistic research and technical realization and comments by the artist (150 words max.)

Consent

Consent *
I hereby agree that UN Human Rights, MRG, Freemuse, the City of Geneva and their partners use the information, documents, and links submitted through this application for the purpose of granting and publicizing the contest and the awards. Intellectual property and usage rights otherwise remain with the artists.

Consent *
I hereby agree that the material submitted may be used publically by the project partners in the announcements of the winners of the awards, and may also be used in public awareness-raising events linked to the contest, such as in online post-contest promotion as well as in in-person events or exhibitions linked to the contest, to be determined.

Consent *
By submitting artwork to the contest, I affirm that I have obtained written consent from all individuals whose image or likeness appears in the artwork, and that I have obtained the necessary rights, licenses, consents, and permissions to use all material such as music, images, text and other content in the submission.

Consent *
I hereby understand that by submitting this application, I may be contacted by email or phone by UN Human Rights, Freemuse, MRG, or the City of Geneva.

Consent *
I agree that materials submitted in this process will not be returned.