

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 55th SESSION

### Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on minority issues

21 March 2024

**Mr Nicolas Levrat, Special Rapporteur on minority issues**, stressed the Forum's significance for discussing minority issues within the UN system. With minority concerns often underrepresented, the Forum offers a unique platform for minority voices to be heard. Prioritizing this, the SR advocated for extending the Forum's annual sessions to at least three days to foster more inclusive dialogue on minority rights. The SR emphasized the importance of engaging all stakeholders in discussions to effectively address minority issues within the framework of human rights protection. He articulated three key aspects of this vision, including the necessity of specific treatment for various minority groups, the interaction between minority rights and individual human rights, and the contribution of minority identities to national identities.

Reflecting on the historical context, Mr Levrat's acknowledged the complexity and specificity of minority issues, necessitating tailored approaches in each state where they arise. Despite the challenges, it is important not remaining indifferent to the fate of minorities. There is an intricate relationship between diversity, human rights implementation, and the protection of minority rights, stressing the need to both treat individuals equally and recognize and accommodate differences. Implementing minority rights requires acknowledging and tolerating differentiated measures by states to ensure equal treatment in line with universal human rights principles.

The SR outlined seven specific priorities for the mandate, focusing on pragmatic actions to protect and promote the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities. These priorities include addressing daily challenges faced by minorities, enhancing the integration of minority issues within UN activities, and strengthening collaboration with various stakeholders. Mr Levrat delineated thematic reports aimed at understanding and addressing minority issues, covering topics such as mapping global minority issues, exploring identity challenges, analyzing minority representation in national societies, and examining the intersection of diasporas and minority issues. Mr Levrat asked support from states to include this issue of minorities in the post-2030 Agenda.

**Paraguay (Concerned country)** expressed that the dialogue held during the visit facilitated constructive exchanges, enabling a review of processes, and identifying areas for improvement. Paraguay welcomed the objective view provided in the report and commits to analyzing and implementing the recommendations for better protection of minorities, particularly indigenous peoples, and people of African descent.

**Tajikistan (Concerned country)** emphasized its commitment to improving legal mechanisms to uphold the rule of law and protect human rights, integrating recommendations from special rapporteur visits into national strategies and action plans. Tajikistan stressed it fosters interethnic harmony, supporting cultural and linguistic diversity while countering organized crime that threatens socioeconomic development and stability, particularly in the autonomous region of Badakhshan.

### Interactive dialogue

32 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. **Most countries** echoed their support to the UN declaration on the rights of persons belonging to minorities in building inclusive and peaceful societies. Despite progress, they recognized the persistent challenges minorities face worldwide, stressing the importance of cultural diversity as a source of wealth and creativity. Education and policies promoting equality and integration were highlighted, aiming to ensure equal opportunities and foster intercultural dialogue. Countries underscored their commitment to

pluralism, safeguarding religious rights, and promoting social cohesion for all citizens. They acknowledged the need for enhanced protection of minority rights, emphasizing the role of nondiscrimination in realizing universal human rights. The post-2030 agenda was identified as a key opportunity to address minority issues comprehensively. The **EU** urged all states to uphold the rights of minority groups as outlined in the UN Declaration. Emphasizing the importance of inclusion for societal cohesion and prosperity, the EU condemned persecution and discrimination against minorities, advocating for their full and equal exercise of rights.

**Gambia**, tinted the pervasive challenges faced by minorities, including discrimination, social exclusion, and restricted opportunities, which significantly affect their cultural and religious identities across numerous regions. **Poland** drew attention to the concerning situation in Belarus, where authorities target independent groups, including members of national minorities like the Polish minority. **Pakistan** underscored the need for incremental progress and condemns the rise in discrimination and political scapegoating of minorities. The country called for greater international support in addressing these challenges. **Tunisia** and **Egypt** strongly condemned Islamophobic acts such as attacks on Muslim communities and Quran burnings in various countries. These actions insult religious beliefs, counter principles of peace and tolerance, and fuel hate and intolerance.

**Armenia** raised its concerns about Azerbaijan's treatment of ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, with references to violations such as the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage. Highlighting Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian stance and a decline in political rights, Armenia warned of serious threats to minority rights in Azerbaijan. In efforts to ensure equal treatment, **Azerbaijan** has announced plans for the reintegration of Armenian residents in its Karabakh region, urging Armenia to respect the rights of displaced minorities. Azerbaijan accused Armenia of plundering Azerbaijan's cultural heritage.

**Russia**, and **Cuba** expressed concern over acts of violence against minorities in countries with developed democracies. **South Africa**, called for accelerated efforts to implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, particularly in protecting the rights of people of African descent. It advocated for global attention to the antiracism agenda and pledges continued support for the meaningful participation of minority groups in council efforts to end discrimination worldwide. **Venezuela** expressed concern over rising hate speech and xenophobic rhetoric targeting minorities globally, highlighting the threat posed by extremist movements and far-right parties. **China** objected to the inclusion in the report of the former SR's endorsement for anti-China separatist activities. However, China acknowledged the SR's intention to address minority issues within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and calls for targeted measures to tackle poverty, education, and healthcare disparities faced by minorities. **Afghanistan** referred to the dire situation in Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover, with systematic discrimination and exclusion threatening the rights of minorities. Hazara, Shia, and other minority groups face targeted attacks, leading to fear and instability within their communities. Restrictions on religious and cultural freedoms, forced evictions, and violence exacerbate the plight of minority communities, including Tajik, Turkmen, Uzbek, Hindu, Sikh, and others.

**Belarus** criticized Baltic countries for their discriminatory policies towards Belarusian and Russian speakers and expressed concern over media censorship in Tajikistan. **Ukraine** condemned Russia's manipulation of minority issues to justify aggression against Ukraine. It emphasizes Russia's forced deportations and resettlements, targeting both Ukrainian and Russian minorities.

Emphasizing the importance of considering children's distinct rights, **UNICEF** urged the special rapporteur to ensure children's voices are heard in all consultation processes, including regional minority forums. Discrimination against children based on ethnicity, language, and religion remains prevalent worldwide, leading to significant disparities in access to critical services such as education, healthcare, and sanitation.

**Most NGOs** highlighted the importance of adopting a bottom-up approach, starting from the lived realities of minority communities, and stressed the need for an intersectional lens to address multiple layers of oppression effectively. There was widespread agreement with the call for urgent policy reforms and narrative change initiatives to enhance minority inclusion in decision-making processes, as well as support for the proposal to integrate minority rights into the SDGs framework and post-2030 agenda. Additionally, they expressed concern for the shrinking civic space faced by minority rights defenders. **Sikh Human Rights Group** identified populist democracy as a factor contributing to discrimination and threats against national, religious, ethnic, and cultural minorities. They suggested a complementary declaration on diversity to promote inclusivity and diversity globally, emphasizing the importance of paragraph 67 from the Durban Declaration in addressing barriers faced by minority groups with complex identities. **Rajasthan Samgrah Kalyan Sansthan** underscored the importance of the Triple Talaq Bill in India, which criminalizes instant Triple Talaq and provides legal safeguards to Muslim women against arbitrary divorces.

For the **Institut International pour les Droits et le Développement**, gender-based violence against displaced Syrian women in Lebanon was a pressing concern. Urgent action is needed to address this issue, starting with recognizing the legal status of displaced Syrians in Lebanon to mitigate risks and facilitate access to legal justice. **ARC International** referred to the discrimination against Azerbaijanis in northwest Iran, who are denied education in their language and face employment bias due to their accents. Civil activists advocating for their rights are unfairly prosecuted, and women and girls from these minority groups endure compounded discrimination.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (32 country delegations):

*European Union, Gambia (on behalf of the African Group), Poland, Austria, Pakistan, Egypt, Armenia, Switzerland, Cameroon, Georgia, Slovenia, United States of America, Malawi, Russian Federation, Togo, South Africa, Iraq, Venezuela, Cuba, China, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Iran, Azerbaijan, Hungary, Belarus, Cambodia, Dominican Republic, India, Ukraine, Morocco, Ireland.*

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (10):

Minorities Rights Group, Geneve pour les Droits de l'Homme, China Association for Preservation and Development of Tibetan Culture (CAPDTC), Sikh Human Rights Group, Rajasthan Samgrah Kalyan Sansthan, China Ethnic Minorities Association for External Exchanges, Institut International pour les Droits et le Développement, International Yazidis Foundation for the Prevention of Genocide, China Foundation for Human Rights Development, ARC International.

International organizations: UNICEF.

To watch the full meeting refer to the [UN WEB TV](#).