



UNITNATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues

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PRESENTATION OF THE THEMATIC REPORT

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Today is not only Nowruz and the first day of spring, it is also the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. As outlined in his first report to the UNHRC last year, minority issues are linked to a specific form of discrimination that should be eliminated by the recognition of **the need for different solutions for persons in different situations**. On the occasion of this International Day, the SR calls on all States to fully recommit to fight racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance, including against minorities.

The mandate bestowed upon me by the UNHRC requires me to promote the implementation of the **Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Minorities**. In pursuit of this mission, the SR's second report to the UNHRC proposes to explore in depth the meaning and the extent of the commitment undertaken by the UN Member States through the first article of this Declaration, which reads as follows: 'States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity.' It is clear from this wording that minorities and their identities need to be protected by each State. However, as its title indicates, the Declaration does not address the rights of minorities themselves, but the rights of persons belonging to minorities.



This wording reflects a **longstanding academic and political debate** about the holders of human rights or, in other terms, whether human rights only exist as individual rights, even when they are exerted collectively, or whether some human rights may be recognised to groups.

The debate is far from being new, and it is even far from being over. Through the thorough study on the rights to identity of persons belonging to minorities, the SR shows how the respect for the individual right to identity of persons belonging to a minority group constitutes the substance of the right to identity recognised to minorities by Article 1 of the 1992 Declaration, thus bridging the individual and collective dimension of the right to identity of persons belonging to a minority. This may sound very theoretical and abstruse, but this is not.

All over the world, persons belonging to minorities continue to face **widespread discrimination** in all areas of life, be it in school, in securing employment, in accessing public services, as well as through their representation in the media. For a brief moment, let us put ourselves in the shoes of some of the many persons belonging to minorities around the world who face such violations of rights due to **denial of their identity**. Can you imagine not being able to register your traditional name as your legal name? This traditional name has been present in your family for generations, and it is the name that your parents so thoughtfully gave to you at birth to bring honour to your ancestors.

Can you imagine being forced to choose a religion that does not represent your true belief when you apply for an official identity card at a government office, only because the face that you believe in is not officially recognised by the state? And if you don't choose an officially recognised religion, you will not be issued an identity card. Can you imagine being barred from participating in your favourite sport at school as a teenager because you wear clothing that expresses your religious affiliation? These are just a few examples of the many cases that are regularly shared with the SR. What singularizes minorities among other vulnerable groups is precisely their **collective identity as persons belonging to a minority**.

It is therefore not by chance or by accident that through this first article of the Declaration, states commit themselves to recognise and protect both the existence and the identity of minorities. Their **identity is consubstantial to the existence of minorities**. However, it is not for the state to define the identity of persons belonging to minorities. **Minority identity** results from the combined exercise of the specific right to identity by persons belonging to minorities and the recognition and protection from the state of that identity. In other words, the minority's identity will be the outcome of a process of self-identification by persons belonging to minorities based on their relational identification both with the minority group and with society as a whole. Thus, the **identity of a person belonging to a minority is not only relational, but also complex and multilayered** as this person must be able to identify him or herself as both a person belonging to a minority and as a citizen of the state.

This, in turn, implies that the national identity cannot be exclusive as it has to leave room to accommodate the positive articulation of **multilayered identities of persons belonging to minorities**. It is therefore critical for states to avoid adopting, or if need be to abolish, any legislation or practise that limits the expression of the minority identity through individual identities of persons belonging to minority groups. Such legislation or practises are contrary to the commitment of the state under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International



Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

States are committed to recognise as part of the identity of persons belonging to a minority the **unconditional right** to use their own language; the right to exert freely their religion and to express their religious affiliation, including through their appearance or the wearing of distinctive signs; the right to have identity documents which reflect who they really are, including the right to have their traditional names linked to their minority identity registered as their legal name, including when relevant, with a patronym; the right in their identity documents not to be assigned a religion which does not correspond to their own belief; and the right to have their religion properly acknowledged and recognised when included in official documents. Similarly, when relevant for identification documents, those people have the right to choose which nationality or ethnicity they are officially assigned to, including **multiple affiliations**.

States also need to acknowledge that persons belonging to a minority have the right to promote their minority identity through traditional practises, art and other cultural manifestations, including by preserving the environmental and patrimonial dimension, whether natural or urban, through which their minority identity is present in the public space. Further, states shall take no measure to impede the **transmission of elements of minority identity** from generation to generation. This implies that state authorities do not prevent the production and diffusion of information and knowledge about the role of a given minority in national history, so that on the one side, persons belonging to this minority group can understand and embrace their minority identity, and on the other, those not belonging to this minority group understand the minority identity and its contribution to society as a whole.

This is a necessary condition for such identity to be acknowledged and respected. In the spirit of sharing good practises to improve the situation of minorities worldwide, the SR is keen on hearing from states and civil society organisations during this interactive dialogue examples of how countries have implemented the commitments made under Article 1 of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Minorities.

REMARKS ON COUNTRY VISITS

During his first year as a mandate holder, the SR could not find any agreement for a country visit. The SR is very aware that this is a failure as regards the requirements of the mandate bestowed upon him by the UNHRC. Being based in Geneva, the SR has engaged throughout the year in fruitful conversation and constructive cooperation with many of permanent missions. Following such positive engagement, the SR is pleased to have secured an official country visit for the first half of this year. The SR wishes to continue his engagement with countries in this manner in order to agree on future country visits.

Today, more than ever, the need to properly address the fate of minority populations, making certain that persons belonging to minorities are not systematically discriminated, or even worse, persecuted or killed, as we too often do witness in too many countries, goes beyond a fundamental human rights issue. Dealing properly with minority issues is also a central concern for maintaining or building peaceful and thriving societies. This is actually both a domestic issue, then fully falling within the realm of the respect and implementation of human rights, but also,



much too often, an international peace and security issue, which deserves to be acknowledged and treated as such. In the current volatile and uncertain world we are living in, in this year 2025, the SR urges all countries to convey to their governments this imperative necessity to respect, protect, and actively promote the place and role of persons belonging to minorities, allowing them, through their specific identity, to contribute to society as a whole.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

On criticism from the Russian delegation that the report is theoretical, the SR explains that a choice had to be made. As time and space for reports are limited, for the SR it was important to underline this complex identity-building mechanism for states which have diversity in their population. The SR wanted to show all the difficulties that minorities have with regard to their identity, it is not only about linguistic identity. There are tremendous amounts of difficulties with religious identity, with national identity all over the world, and it is not possible to cover everything in one single report. However, the SR underlines that its mandate is not specifically on minority rights, but on minority issues, which is broader. Next year the SR will present to the UNHRC a report on minority issues, which will go into detail on what are concrete minority issues in different countries of the world. This will offer the opportunity to also address the concern expressed by Ghana on behalf of African countries about the possible extension or attempt to **give meaning to this concept of minority in different contexts**, which may be seen as political.

There is no legal definition of minority at the global level. On how to strike a balance between respecting minority identities and the respect for national legislation, the SR states that minorities and their representatives need to be associated in the making of national legislation. **National legislation is not only made for the dominant group**, but for society as a whole. Naturally, if legislation does not accommodate the right to identity of minorities, then minorities either have the choice to disappear or not to respect legislation. The responsibility lies on states to have inclusive legislation, which can be respected both by the dominant group and by minorities, which do not have to renounce their own identity.

Turning to the **instrumentalization of minority issues** in international relations, the SR asserts it is a problem. Historically, the international regime for the protection of minorities was created after the First World War to precisely avoid the instrumentalization of the issue of national minorities in Europe. But this is not a phenomenon limited to Europe, and it needs to be addressed by the multilateral system.

On the **return of cultural artefacts to countries of origin**, it may contribute to the promotion and defence of the minority identity, and it is a very good way to develop international cooperation on minority issues. In order for those communities to benefit from this return of cultural or significant identity artefacts, these communities need to be part of this process of restitution, as it is not only an intergovernmental process.

As regards **combating hate speech**, it is a very preoccupying and serious issue vis-à-vis minorities which requires to take a broader view on that. It is not only a measure to sanction or to prohibit hate speech that needs to be taken, but also to build an understanding of differences being an added value for society, meaning that in education, in design of institutions, should not



be the seed for the hate speech, should be the recognition that different identities does not entail disrespect and hate, but quite on the contrary, is an enhancement of society as a whole.

Turning to **discriminatory practises against minorities** by some authorities, Special Procedures do not have the authority to compel national authorities to live up to their international commitment, but the SR, like his colleagues, is working in cooperation with national authorities. However, as regards minority issues, it is interesting to notice that there are many situations in which discrimination is built on a mirror image. There is discrimination against this minority on one side of the border, and on the other side of the border, the dominant group from the other side is the minority being discriminated. So these problems in mirroring on both sides of the border may lead to bilateral, regional, or even better, multilateral approach.

One of the SR's greatest preoccupations is how to better ensure the place of minority issues in the multilateral system, especially with regard to discrimination issues of minority groups, it is a very relevant and good reason to not only deal with it between Special Procedures and national authorities, but also to frame it in a broader context, if possible, the multilateral one. **Minority issues are not just human rights issues.** They are not only about peace and security issues, but they are also linked to the socio-economic rights of persons belonging to minorities, and it is very often where the most severe discrimination happens. Hence, it is also linked to **the third pillar of the UN system**, namely development. The SR hopes states will support this approach aimed at bringing minority issues more at the centre of several sectoral approaches within the UN.

Last but not least, as outlined in the thematic report, the recognition of minority identities is linked to the very existence of minorities. The **denial of the minority identity** very quickly turns into an attempt to destroy the minority. Whether you call it colonialist practise or even in some cases genocide, this is why the recognition of identity is also the recognition of the existence of minority, and both need to be linked and to be recognised.

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

Views Expressed by State Delegations

Speaking on behalf of the **African Group, Ghana** takes note of the SR's report. For the African Group, issues related to protection of minorities are particularly complex and should be addressed with a holistic approach considering specificities. The African Group notes with interest that the SR's report highlights the importance of the recognition and protection by the state of the identity of persons belonging to minorities. By fully respecting this identity, tensions between minorities and dominant groups can be avoided, allowing society to thrive in its diversity. The African Group is pleased that most of the African states prioritise the protection of minorities in their national law and some even integrating it into their constitution. The African Group is concerned about the attempts to distort the concept of minority as originally defined in Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which in turn inspired the 1992 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to the National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. This could further complicate the issue and weaken the protection of minority rights. Finally, the African Group reiterates its support for the mandate of the SR and intends to continue to the implementation of the recommendations expressed in their report



Lithuania shares the SR's view that minority identity can be positively articulated through education. Therefore, Lithuania devotes particular attention to minority education. It provides additional state funding to minority schools to ensure free, quality and inclusive public education at all levels for all children in their minority language, so they can better understand, preserve and embrace their minority identity. However, Lithuania draws the SR's attention to the situation in our neighbourhood. In 2022, minority schools in Belarus were ordered to change their language of instruction to Russian or Belarusian, depriving national minorities, including Lithuanian, of the right to receive education in their mother tongue and preserve their identity. Lithuanian secondary school in Pelesa, which was fully funded by the Lithuanian Government, was closed by the Belarusian authorities on trumped-up grounds. Lithuanian minority curriculum was also removed from a secondary school. In 2023, Lithuanian minority organisations in Belarus were liquidated.

Nepal thanks the SR for deliberating on the right to identity of persons belonging to minorities. The report underscores the importance of the minority identity and national identity of the persons belonging to minorities. Nepal embraces diversity through various constitutional, legal, and institutional provisions. The constitution in its preamble defines Nepali nation as multi-ethnic, multilingual, multireligious, and multicultural society. The identity of minorities as an individual and group member have been recognised. The constitution guarantees the right to equality, non-discrimination, and freedom of religion, language, and culture. The identities of minorities have been further strengthened through ensuring representation in the state's apparatus, including in armed forces and civil administration. Anti-discriminatory and equality laws are active. Every individual has the right to transmit their cultural practises. Nepal embodies inclusive national identity through national observance of various festivals and promotion of diversities through curriculums and socio-cultural interactions.

Iraq thanks the SR for their efforts behind the report, a report which is based on analysis and studies, and which focusses on key documents on the protection of rights in Iraq. The country has always focused particularly on the protection of rights. For the past 20 years, this has been enshrined in our constitution, adopted in 2005. Article 125 protects this entire set of rights, notably for the Turkmen, Assyrian, and other minorities, including both religious and ethnic minorities. Iraq has made progress in guaranteeing the full right to participate in the process for all minorities and to meet their needs in this area. These rights are protected across our territory. Minorities are a fundamental component of our multi-religious, multi-ethnic society. Iraq looks forward to receiving the SR in June of this year in an official visit and stands ready to work together to achieve the best conclusions in this visit.

Spain thanks the SR for his report. 2025 brings celebration of the 600th anniversary of the arrival of the Gipsy people in Spain. Spain commemorates the date of 12 January 1425 when the Gipsy people entered the Iberian Peninsula through Aragon. Spain seeks to build resilience and adaptation, overcoming adversity and enriching the development of Spain. The national strategy for the Gipsy people to 2030 promotes equal rights and opportunities in all areas of life. And we are encouraging the study of the history of the Gipsy people. The State Council for the Gipsy people is a spokesperson of the Gipsies before the Spanish administration. The challenges are numerous, but the efforts will allow the Gipsy people to be correctly represented in society and education, the media and culture.



Indonesia takes notes of the SR's report and shares the SR's view that names, religions, faiths, language and other cultural heritage are vital to preserving the identities of persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. For Indonesia, a nation founded under the notion of unity in diversity, safeguarding these identities means preserving our national identity. According to our records, approximately 100,000 people adhere to traditional beliefs, some practised for millennia. Since 2016, Indonesia has implemented reforms recognising these faiths in official documents, ensuring state acknowledgement of their distinct identities. It is also concerned about the endangerment of traditional languages worldwide. Indonesia, home at least to 700 customary languages, has taken significant steps to preserve them, including integrating local languages into school curricula alongside our national language, Bahasa Indonesia. The Pact for the Future underscores the importance of strengthening global cooperation on the return or restitution of cultural properties of spiritual, ancestral, historical and cultural value to countries of origin. Indonesia seeks the SR's views on how the return or restitution of cultural properties to countries of origin could help protect the identities of national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

Egypt welcomes the SR and takes note of the report distinction between national identity, collective identity of minorities and individual identity. Egypt stresses the importance of striking a balance between respect for the cultural rights of minorities and protection of the national fabric in order to ensure coexistence and stability. The successive Egyptian constitutions have guaranteed the principle of equality before the law for everyone and affirmed equality in rights and duties without discrimination. The constitution affirms the principle of citizenship and the state's obligation to provide equal opportunity for all citizens without discrimination. Discrimination based on sex, race or language or geographical affiliation is a punishable offence. The constitution also stipulates that the right to freedom of belief is absolute and guarantees the right to practise religion freely and to establish places of worship for people of monotheistic religions. It also recognises the diversity of culture and religious heritage as a wealth that should be strengthened. In conclusion, Egypt would like to pose a question about the vision of the SR on how to strike a balance for protecting the identity of minorities and ensuring respect for national laws to promote social cohesion.

Togo thanks the SR for his report which focusses on the issue of minority identity. The Declaration on the Rights of People Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities in its first article states that states must protect the existence and identity of a national, ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic dimension of minorities. However, in many areas of the world, these minorities face difficulties in exercising their right to an identity, including their most fundamental aspect of these minorities. It is important for states can establish the preconditions to promote the identity of minority groups in order to promote more prosperous, inclusive and diverse societies. This recognition is vital to ensure the full enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms of minorities, as well as their right to a communal identity, which is as important as peace and stability in societies.

Iran takes note of the report of the SR and the recommendations provided. As a multicultural and multiethnic country, Iran believes that positive impacts of inclusive national identity on sustainable stability and prosperity. In this regard, Iran poses an inclusive citizenship policy that prevents any discrimination or marginalisation. Article 110, 99, 97, 77, 10 and 3 of the Charter of



the Citizenship of the Islamic Republic of Iran is specifically focussing on such issues. Iran's history and literature is replete with the legends and heroic identities that each belongs to different ethnicity. The legendary acts in defence of the territorial integrity and improving the identity and unity of the country is well reflected in our educational textbook. Respecting the collective rights should not be limited to specific groups in the country and their rights should be defined in a more collective national rights. In this regard, Iran condemns any attempt in misusing the concept of minority rights to weaken the national identity and unity of other countries. At the same time, Iran insists that no form of affiliation should provide immunity against law enforcement and accountability for unlawful actions. To conclude, Iran is committed to its international obligations to promote and protect all human rights for all citizens, regardless of their religion or ethnicity.

Russia read with interest the latest report of the SR and agrees with his conclusion that the UN, unfortunately, is systematically ignoring minorities in its key programme documents, as well as his recommendations on the need to recognise their identity. Russia regrets that the report focusses on general theoretical considerations and not the actual problems faced by minorities that actually impact the prosperity of societies and states and are a major factor for supporting international peace and help friendly relations between states. As previously noted, if the SR intends to promote his mandate through the legal mechanisms of the UN, then amongst his priorities, there must also be assessment of the presence of political will amongst Member States of the UN to execute their international obligations and legislation in the protection of minorities. Otherwise, there cannot be any actual progress in this area. Russia regrets that the SR, for no known reason, does not ask the question why participants of the same international legal documents, for example, the Baltics, Ukraine, or other well-known states, ignore their fundamental principles, which are also reflected, however, in their national legislation. Russia calls on the SR to focus the highest level of attention on this issue.

China thanks the SR for his presentation and appreciates the reference that the SR, in accordance with his mandate, has carried out his work in an impartial manner and engaged with China and other members and parties in constructive dialogue. China has taken note of the SR's report. Relevant issues indeed deserve further studies. In international, the complexity of minority issues is well known to all regarding the collective rights and individual rights mentioned in the report. Indeed, further discussions are needed. In the future, China is willing to carry out further discussions on these issues with the special rapporteur. China is a multi-ethnic country with 56 ethnic groups and is firmly committed to ensuring equality among them. The Government safeguards the statutory rights of these groups to preserve their cultural language and written scripts and freedom of religion and respects their customs and traditions. As the third session of the 14th National People's Congress concluded last week, all 55 ethnic minority groups were represented by their own deputies, totalling 442, accounting for 14.85% of the total deputies to the NPC, exceeding the proportion of ethnic minorities within the national population. In the future, China is willing to further enhance dialogue and cooperation with the special mechanisms, especially the SR on minority issues.

Cameroon welcomes the SR and congratulates him for the report and the conclusions. The protection of minorities is a fundamental pillar of the legal system in Cameroon. It is enshrined in its constitution, which guarantees the cultural and linguistic rights of national communities. With



more than 250 ethnic groups and rich linguistic diversity, Cameroon promotes peaceful coexistence on the basis of our national unity. The right of minorities to their identity is fully integrated into our national policies. Cameroon is putting in place a battery of measures to protect the identity of minorities, including the recognition and promotion of local languages and cultures through bilingual education, introduction of certain national languages in our education. The respect of the principle of self-identification, guaranteeing every individual the right to claim that they belong to any ethnic or linguistic group without restriction or discrimination, protection of material and immaterial heritage of minorities, also including natural and cultural sites vital for their identity. Cameroon promotes a participative, inclusive approach involving minorities in the development of national policies that concern them. It is aware of challenges and wants to ensure intergenerational succession of identity and preserved traditions. Cameroon encourages the SR and OHCHR to continue their efforts to protect and promote the rights of minorities.

Bangladesh takes note of the report by the SR and acknowledges his efforts to examine the functions of three levels of identities vis-à-vis persons belonging to minority in an effort to illustrate the complexity of multilayered identities. Religious freedom is one of the fundamental values on which Bangladesh stands. Several articles of its constitution guarantee respect for and peaceful co-existence of all religious communities and beliefs. Its national cultural policy, education policy, women development policy, and other social welfare policies are designed towards promoting religious harmony. In addition, every religious community has its own family law and issues related to marriage, divorce, and adoption are managed according to their respective religion's family law. Furthermore, Bangladesh has undertaken legislative and policy measures to protect its ethnic minorities and ensure harmonious and peaceful co-existence. It has also enacted laws to preserve and promote the culture, heritage, language, religious practises, and traditional lifestyle of all ethnic communities living in the hill districts and plain lands. Similarly, though it is not adequately covered in the report, socio-economically and educationally underprivileged minority groups such as the Dalit Horizons, tea plantation workers, and third gender persons regularly receive government assistance, including allowances, education incentives, and livelihood development assistance. Finally, Bangladesh highlights that its Government is committed to ensuring the rights of all persons in Bangladesh as the indigenous citizens of the country.

Persons belonging to minorities have the right to have their identity respected and to enjoy their own culture, to practise their religion, and to use their own language without discrimination. They are equal before the law. The authorities must create a favourable environment for the enjoyment of those rights. **Cuba** is gravely concerned at backsliding in developed countries on the rights of minorities, which are increasingly lacking protection and are victims of multiple forms of racism, discrimination, and segregation. The proliferation of hate speech against minorities is now a major challenge. Attacks on minorities also harm tolerance, inclusion, and diversity. It harms the very essence of human rights and lays the foundations for violence. This is unacceptable. It must be addressed by the UNHRC urgently and with due determination. The Forum on Minority Issues is a much-needed platform for dialogue and cooperation on issues relating to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities. This important forum is besieged by politicisation, selectivity, and the other issues with procedures.



Poland thanks the SR for his work and the report. Minorities in Poland enjoy rights that allow them not only to preserve their ethnic and linguistic identity, but also ensure conditions for their development. Wide array of regulations have been implemented in the areas of education, language, access to services, labour market, right to vote, and culture. Stable financing mechanisms allow minority communities to safeguard their cultural heritage. Poland is concerned that in many countries minority issues have been instrumentalised. Russia has sought to justify its invasion of Ukraine by falsely claiming that they are aiming to protect the minority of rights of Russian language speakers. At the same time, Russian authorities have been disproportionately mobilising men from minority ethnic groups and indigenous people to participate in this brutal war of aggression. The situation is also alarming in Belarus, when persons belonging to national minorities, including the Polish minority, have been continuously persecuted.

Slovakia thanks the SR for his report and fully supports his mandate. In Slovakia, the rights of persons belonging to national minorities are guaranteed through constitution and numerous specific laws. More than 10% of our population belongs to 15 national minorities. They are an important element of Slovak society. Their languages and cultures contribute to the diversity of our country. Slovakia is fully committed to the implementation of the highest standard when it comes to the rights of persons belonging to minorities, be them national or ethnic, religious and linguistic, including Roma. There are two central state administration bodies that promote policies for national and ethnic minorities, namely the Plenipotentiary for National Minorities and the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities. In addition, the Council for National Minorities has been recently upgraded to a permanent advisory body of the government. Minorities are thus coming even closer to the decision-making that directly impacts them. The findings of the SR's report, notably on the most defining element of minority being their identity, as an element linked to their very existence, concern all of us. Slovakia concurs that persons belonging to a minority group need the involvement of state to improve their socio-economic situation and to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. Beforehand, they need to have their identity fully recognised.

Austria thanks the SR for his report and reiterates its support for the important work of his mandate, as well as for the UN Minority Forum. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities in Article 1 emphasises the importance of protecting the diverse identities of minorities. The last Minority Forum provided an important opportunity to highlight some best practises in this regard. The representation of self and self-presentation of minorities in public spaces plays an important role in the visibility of persons belonging to minorities in society. It also provides opportunities for the expression of their identity in public spaces, if they wish to do so and remain an active part in society. In the his report, the SR highlights a number of recommendations for states to implement, and Austria invites all delegations to explore them further and also to share their own best practises. In this context, Austria supports the recommendation for states to increase their level of constructive participation in the Forum on Minority Issues.

Hungary extends its gratitude to the SR for his report, and commends the emphasis placed on Article 1 of the Declaration on Rights of Persons Belonging to Minorities. This article asserts that states have an obligation to protect the existence and identity of national or ethnic, religious and



linguistic minorities, and to encourage conditions to promote the preservation and development of that identity. Hungary agrees with this assertion. The right to identity is not an individual right, but also a right exercised as a member of a minority group, whose existence and identity should be secured across generations. The right to use one's own language and to access information and knowledge about the history and customs of the national and ethnic minority they belong to is crucial in preserving the identity of minority communities. In this respect, Hungary remains deeply concerned about the situation of the Hungarian national minority in Transcarpathia, as the free and unhindered use of their mother tongue remains severely compromised, including in regards to the right to education. Hungary recalls that restricting already acquired rights is against international norms and obligations. Hungary reiterates its strong support for the SR's mandate.

Cambodia values unity in diversity, fostering a shared national identity within Khmer culture, histories and languages. By recognising the important constitutions of minority groups to the nation's social fabric. However, integrating minority identities requires concerted efforts to promote inclusivity, respect and recognition of the role in the country's social, economic and cultural development. To uphold the rights and identities of minorities, Cambodia has implemented various policies and mechanisms to ensure the full inclusion and equality to social service and development opportunities. Notable initiatives include national policies on the development of ethnic minorities and indigenous community legislation. Additionally, an Inter-Ministerial Committee has been established to develop programmes aimed at enhancing education, reducing poverty and preserving the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities. Its efforts also include ongoing legal reform, widely accessible legal aid and awareness campaigns on minority rights. These initiatives seek to uphold social justice for all and eliminate discrimination, racism and hate speech against minorities.

Noting the SR's report, **Belarus** stresses that the protection of minority rights, including the right to identity, to transmit and maintain national culture and use national languages, are a focus of its authorities. Over 140 civil society organisations represent minorities, with representatives of 25 ethnic groups, and they work actively in our country. Belarus is taking measures to prevent and stop any acts of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Belarus is concerned at the rise in alarming tendencies in a number of European countries connected with the spread of hate speech and xenophobia based on ethnic and religious grounds, including prohibition on the use of minority languages and the destruction of culture and history. Some minorities are afraid to demonstrate, never mind protecting their identity. Often identity is connected with free use of national languages by minorities. However, in the Baltic states, there are limitations on the possibility of using the Russian language in some areas, and new risks for users. Belarus asks for the SR's view in terms of how these discriminatory tendencies impact on the community relations in countries where states teach the titular nation to reject and have a selective attitude to other ethnic groups and religions.

Welcoming the SR's report, **Georgia** states that the promotion and protection of the rights of minorities are vital to inclusive and diverse societies. Ensuring equality and combating discrimination are enshrined in Georgian legislation, in full alignment with international standards. Our commitment to these principles is reflected in national policies and legal frameworks. Georgia remains dedicated to promoting civic equality, cultural diversity, and harmonious coexistence of all ethnic groups. The State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration



for 2021-2030, along with its action plan, serves as key instruments in ensuring equal opportunities and fostering the integration of ethnic minorities in all aspects of public life. Georgia actively supports access to quality education, including state language learning programmes, bilingual education, and access to media in minority languages. Cultural identity is further promoted through state-supported theatres, museums, and cultural centres, which help preserve the rich traditions of Georgia's ethnic minorities. Civic and political participation of ethnic minorities is ensured through an inclusive electoral environment and representation in state institutions. Economic integration is encouraged via targeted vocational and employment programmes, which create opportunities for minority communities to contribute meaningfully to Georgia's development. Georgia remains steadfast in advancing civic equality and integration, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Venezuela welcomes the SR's report which gives an overview of activities carried out in 2024, and reviews the right to identity of persons belonging to minorities in Venezuela. Its constitution establishes the legal framework guaranteeing the rights of all persons, including minorities, giving priority to equality before the law. The new government plan on seven transformations establishes, among its strategies, consolidation of heterogeneity and ethnic diversity in Venezuela and the Americas, through participation by minorities and original people, strengthening their presence in decision-making bodies. Venezuela is committed to the full promotion and protection of all human rights, including the right to development of all of the population without discrimination. It is important to point out that the imposition of unilateral coercive measures is a violation of human rights of peoples who suffer it.

Armenia welcomes the SR and reiterates its support to this important mandate. As a country that has endorsed all major global and regional legal frameworks for minority rights, we nevertheless see the need to invest more efforts and address evolving needs and challenges, not only for the protection but also for minority cultures to develop and thrive. Ethnic minorities are represented in the Armenian Parliament, and since 2023, the Public Council on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities has been operating under the Human Rights Defender of Armenia. Armenia is also convinced that a sound democratic governance with inclusive and human rights-based approach at its heart is instrumental for preventing discrimination, hate crimes and violence against minorities. As deplorable as it is, in far too many cases the early warning signs are being ignored, which paves the way for atrocity, crimes and full-scale conflicts. There is a growing understanding that rigid frameworks for protection should be reinforced and minority issues should occupy a more prominent space in multilateral discussions and outcomes. Thank you, Madam Vice President.

The **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** has more than 200 nationalities on its soil, which makes of the UAE one of the most diversified countries in the world. Freedom of expression and freedom of religious belief is embraced and tolerated. Hence, the UAE has issued a federal law on the issues of houses of worship for non-Muslims and places of worship in all areas of the country. The adoption of a Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in collaboration and partnership with Abu Dhabi and Abu Dhabi authorities stresses the right of minorities and putting an end to hate speech. Out of cooperation with the international human rights mechanisms, the UAE has hosted a conference of OHCHR on religious identities and minorities in order to enhance cooperation and dialogue between minorities worldwide.



Slovenia thanks the SR for his report and his engagement on the important topic of minorities. In times when we are witnessing growing resistance to the universality of human rights as well as against multicultural and multi-ethnic coexistence, defending the rights of persons belonging to minorities is critical. In this context, Slovenia recalls that states have an obligation under international instruments and under other specific multilateral, regional or bilateral treaties which provide international legal basis for guaranteeing the rights of specific national minorities to respect and uphold those rights. Upholding these obligations not only fosters social cohesion and equality but also strengthens democratic values, human rights and rule of law, ensuring that every individual, regardless of their background, can fully participate in the cultural, social and political life of their country.

Ethiopia extends its appreciation to the SR for the comprehensive report. Ethiopia recognises that the right to identity is fundamental to the dignity, autonomy and equal participation of minority groups within the society. The principle is deeply aligned with Ethiopia's commitment to safeguarding the rights of all minorities within its boundaries. Ethiopia's constitution guarantees the full recognition and protection of identity of persons belonging to minorities, including the right to self-determination of all ethnic groups. This right underpins the enjoyment of culture, religion, language and traditions without fear of discrimination or marginalisation, ensuring that minority groups can thrive in an inclusive society. Furthermore, Ethiopia recognises both individual and collective identities of minority groups. It believes that protecting and respecting minority identities contributes to the social cohesion and fosters positive relationships between minority and dominant groups. Ethiopia's federal system is designed to enable minorities to preserve and develop their unique cultural, linguistic, religious and traditional practises. Its approach guarantees minority voices in decision-making and ensures the integration of their rights in the national policies. Additionally, Ethiopia is committed to the socio-economic development of minority communities through ensuring access to education, health care, land and other services contributing to their full participation in the national development endeavour.

While individuals belonging to minority groups possess the fundamental right to have their unique identity recognised, preserved and protected across the entire territory of the state, this right in **Ukraine** remains under constant threat due to Russia's full-scale invasion. Since 2014, Russia has systematically exploited minority issues as a false pretext for its aggression, culminated in the brutal full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. Today, the aggressor state pursues policy of de-Ukrainization, forced assimilation and demographic substitution in the temporarily occupied territories aiming to erase Ukrainian identity. The international community has rejected Russia's manipulation of minority rights as justification of war. This was reaffirmed by the International Court of Justice, which ordered Russia to immediately cease its invasion of Ukraine. This landmark decision underscored a vital truth. Fabricated narratives cannot legitimise violations of international law or serve as an excuse for military aggression. Russia's war has also caused significant cultural destruction with forces targeting Ukrainian symbols and cultural heritage. In the occupied territories, minority representatives face systematic persecution, including suppression of native languages, religious repression and the imposition of Russian identity. This action highlights the colonial nature of Russia's war. Thank you. We will move to the next speaker.

Taking note of the SR's report, **India** is steadfast in empowering linguistic and religious minority communities and in creating an enabling environment that strengthens the multiracial,



multiethnic, multicultural, multilingual and multireligious character of our nation. The Constitution of India provides for certain rights that are specific to minorities and protect their identity. Linguistic minorities are protected under the Constitution with special provisions to promote the right to conserve a distinct language, script or culture. All minorities, whether based on religion or language, have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their own choice as well as the medium of instruction in these institutions. India has a dedicated Ministry of Minority Affairs as well as a National Commission for Minorities, both of which work towards a more focused approach to addressing issues related to religious minority communities and safeguarding their interests. At the heart of its democratic ethos lies a commitment to upholding the rights of all citizens, irrespective of their religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. The Constitution of India stands as a guardian of this commitment, guaranteeing fundamental rights and freedoms devoid of discrimination.

Malawi welcomes the SR's report which seeks to examine the meaning of Article 1 of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities. We take note that the failure to recognise persons belonging to minority groups by their identity leads to numerous violations of their rights, including their minority identity. The Constitution of Malawi prohibits discrimination of any form and guarantees equal and effective protection on the grounds of race, language, religion, national, ethnic or social origin. Furthermore, the Constitution of Malawi guarantees individuals the right to use their language and participate in cultural life of their choice, as well as the right to religion, belief or thought. Malawi converges with the SR that fully respecting the identity of persons belonging to minority groups promotes harmony between minority groups and dominant groups.

Azerbaijan thanks the SR for the report which highlights the fundamental importance of the right to identity for persons belonging to minorities. The protection and promotion of minority identity are essential for upholding human rights and fostering inclusive societies. In this context, Azerbaijan expresses serious concern regarding the continued denial of the rights of Azerbaijanis who have historically lived in the territories of present-day Armenia. Despite their deep-rooted presence in the country, Azerbaijanis in Armenia have faced forced displacement and the systematic erasure of their cultural and historical heritage. They have been effectively deprived of their right to maintain and express their identity, including the right to use their language, practise their traditions, and access education and public life free from discrimination. The SR's report underscores that states have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the right to identity of minorities. The reality in Armenia stands in stark contrast of these principles. The continued denial of the fundamental rights of expelled Azerbaijanis, as well as the absence of meaningful efforts to restore their rights, including the right to return, contribute to an environment of exclusion and injustice. Azerbaijan calls on Armenia to take concrete steps to uphold the human rights of the Western Azerbaijan community, in line with its international human rights obligations, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. It urges the international community to engage actively in addressing the rights and concerns of the expelled Azerbaijani community from Armenia, to support efforts aimed at ensuring justice, recognition and equal rights for all minorities.



Views Expressed by Intergovernmental Organizations

The **European Union (EU)** thanks the SR for his report and reiterates its strong support to the mandate. The EU welcomes the topic of last year's Forum on Minority Issues, as the representation of minorities in public spaces not only plays an important role in their visibility in society, but also provides opportunities for the expression of their identity, be it through the use of their own language, the right to freedom of religion and belief, or the use of traditional practises, art, and other cultural manifestations. These elements contribute to the strengthening of the identity building of persons belonging to minorities within the broader fabric of society. The EU also shares your assessment that a person belonging to a minority should be able to access information and knowledge about the history, customs, practises, and contribution to society as a whole by the minority they belong to. The EU fully aligns with the premise that respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the human rights of all persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities contributes to political and social stability and is key for effective prevention of conflicts.

UNDP welcomes the work of the SR in clarifying states' obligations regarding the right to identity for persons belonging to minorities. UNDP is committed to contributing to good practises in protecting the human rights of minorities. Firstly, UNDP provides financial and technical support to a range of actors, including civil society and community-based organisations, to enhance the participation and representation of ethnic and religious minorities in decision-making processes and spaces. Secondly, UNDP actively collaborates with the justice sector, civil society and community-based organisations to dismantle barriers that hinder the full participation of minorities. In 2023, UNDP implemented programmes in 21 countries, working alongside faith-based organisations, religious leaders, women of faith, to safeguard human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, to prevent religious discrimination. Finally, UNDP welcomes the SR's recognition of the interconnectedness between the right to identity of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and that of other minority groups. UNDP remains committed to integrating these obligations into its development programming, ensuring the right to identity for all minorities. UNDP looks forward to strengthening cooperation with all actors in this regard.

The **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)** welcomes this discussion at a time when identity is increasingly weaponised to justify oppression and violence. Around the world, identity politics is manipulated to entrench power, suppress minorities and strip communities of their fundamental rights. From laws restricting religious expression to forced assimilation and the systematic erasure of entire communities, identity-based discrimination, hate speech and xenophobia continue to deepen divisions and perpetuate injustice. The persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and the rise of far-right nationalism across Europe serve as stark reminders of how exclusionary policies inflict widespread harm. Nowhere is this clearer than in the occupied Palestinian territories. The ongoing ethnic cleansing, forced displacement and genocide aim to establish an ethno-state at the expense of an entire people. Palestinians face systematic attempts to erase their identity through military occupation, land confiscation and settler colonialism. The destruction of religious and cultural sites alongside the indiscriminate bombing of Gaza and the collective punishment underscore the reality of this campaign of erasure. Their right to self-determination is not merely being denied, but systematically



dismantled. The international community must act to uphold the right of all people, including Palestinians, to live with dignity, preserve their identity and determine their own future.

Views Expressed by Non-Governmental Organizations

Society for Threatened Peoples wishes to bring to the attention of the 58 sessions the ongoing and systematic displacement of the Maasai community in Northern Tanzania, under the pretext of nature conservation. Those actions are often carried out with the backing of the state authorities and aided by international institutions and their constitutive grave violations of Maasai rights, undermine their survival and inflict irreversible harms on cultural heritage and their way of life. Deliberate policies, disruption and neglect of social services, such as education and health services, were rendered inaccessible. Livestock, which is central to the Maasai economy, sustenance and cultural identity, has been arbitrarily confiscated, leaving families destitute and unable to support themselves. Violence, arrest, physical assaults, violent harassment and enforced disappearance have occurred. It calls on the UNHRC to demand the end of illegal eviction of the Maasai community, illegal confiscation of the livestock, obstruction of local infrastructures and violent crackdowns by security forces.

China Ethnic Minorities Association for External Exchanges explains that in recent years, some media have claimed that China has imposed cultural oppression on the Mongolian ethnic group, such as not allowing the use of Mongolian language in schools. As a member of a minority ethnic group who grew up in Inner Mongolia, what the speaker has witnessed is a completely different situation. Firstly, China legally guarantees the freedom of all ethnic groups to learn and use their own languages. In Inner Mongolia, Mongolian language courses are offered in primary schools with corresponding textbooks and dedicated teachers. There are also Mongolian radio stations and over 100 websites. At the same time, Mongolian script is used for science in public places such as hospitals and subways, and is also featured on the RMB. Secondly, the protection and inheritance of the Mongolian language and script in China deserve recognition. There are 98 national intangible cultural heritages in Inner Mongolia, and the traditional Mongolian script is being passed down. All historical documents can be studied without obstacles, and there has been no cultural break.

Minority Rights Group (MRG) warmly welcomes the report and its exploration of the right to identity at individual, minority, community and state levels. MRG wishes to emphasise how self-identification and official recognition by the states are deeply interconnected. In Egypt, for instance, lack of state recognition of Bahá'í faith means that to access identity documents, Bahá'ís must put a dash instead of their religious affiliation, a situation that maintains their secondary status. In Myanmar, one million Rohingya were told to register as Bengalis in the country's census, indicating that they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. A government scheme to grant citizenship to Rohingya Muslims demanded that they accept this ethnic term or be excluded. With hindsight, these steps prefaced the subsequent genocidal attacks and forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya. MRG also wishes to emphasise that no minority is monolithic. Rather, groups within minorities, such as women, persons with disabilities and LGBTQI plus persons, will often be discriminated against both by the community and by society as a whole. In addition, issues such as socioeconomic status and the multigenerational effect of inherited trauma will play a role in forming intersectional experiences and positionalities. MRG agrees that a real gap on minority inclusion exists at the international level,



where the UN has fallen short, failing to mention minorities explicitly in either the SDGs or the recent Pact for the Future.

The **Movement Against Racism and for Friendship Between Peoples (MRAP)** quotes ‘the government has decided to destroy all Armenians living in Turkey. Their existence must be brought to an end, however criminal the measures to be taken.’ This was the call made on 24 April 1915 by Talat Pasha, Minister of the Interior of the Ottoman Empire, which marked the beginning of the Armenian Genocide. A genocide that the Turkish state still refuses to recognise. 110 years later, the Armenian people are still victims of serious violations of their fundamental rights and even crimes against humanity. MRAP calls on OHCHR to make public the conclusions of the missions deployed in Armenia in 2023, following the ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh. MRAP thanks the SR for his in-depth analysis of the multidimensional identities of the concept of minority and encourages all states to implement his conclusions, recognise the identity of minorities so that everyone can enjoy their personal identity. MRAP invites the SR to deepen the dialogue on minority issues with the Turkish authorities and the Azerbaijani authorities, including about the implementation of the operative clause of the November 2023 Order of the International Court of Justice.

Alliance Defending Freedom commends the SR’s advocacy for the right of minorities not to be assigned a religion which does not correspond to their own belief and to have their religion properly acknowledged and recognised. Globally, minorities face major barriers in expressing their religious identity, particularly in the context of legal identification. Adherents of unrecognised minority faiths are often forced to either indicate a different religion or forego religious identity documents altogether. This restricts their access to employment, education, health care and other essential services and in extreme cases can result in de facto statelessness. In some contexts, religious affiliation is registered at birth or is changed automatically when a parent converts to the majority religion. Subsequent changes face unjustifiably burdensome requirements or are prohibited outright, especially when converting away from the majority religion. This has serious ramifications on personal and family life, preventing legal recognition of marriage and even jeopardising parental custody. Even where documents accurately reflect religious affiliation, they can expose minorities to discrimination and targeting by state and non-state actors. Mandating the disclosure of religion in legal documents violates the right to freedom from arbitrary interference with one’s privacy. The Alliance asks the SR which concrete actions must states take to recognise, protect and promote religious identity as a basis not for further marginalisation but for genuine empowerment of persons belonging to minorities.

According to the **Sikh Human Rights Group**, the SR’s report is remarkable synthesis struggling through the range of instruments and resolution of minorities, identifying lacunae and clarifying that it is a person of a minority with rights and not a collective minority with legal rights. Indeed, cultural boundaries and definitions of minorities are decided by these states based on majority culture, thus eroding the right that the SR says a person of minority has. Meanwhile, Britain has mostly recognised group identity and practises, thus strengthening the individual right. A further paradox is that most non-Western countries historically had considerable accommodation of minorities as a group. Now they are almost all emulating the 1648 Westphalian nation-state based around majority ethnicity and also individual-orientated rights originating from the



European Enlightenment in the modern era, while privately many complain of Eurocentricity and Westernisation of legal norms. Yet no country or civilisation has come up with an alternative that reflects their pre-modern governance systems of coexistence with minorities as political if not legal entities. The Group thinks the British approach is perhaps the most inspiring where the individual right is interpreted in context of group self-identity and culture, giving the impression of a minority group right rather than just an individual right. It requests the SR to look on that for future reports.

Rajasthan Samgrah Kalyan Sansthan explains that the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India seeks to formulate one law applicable to all religious communities in matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption with a single legal framework for all citizens. As envisioned in Article 44 of the Indian Constitution, this code lays down that the state shall endeavour to secure a uniform civil code for the citizens throughout the territory of India. Currently, various communities like Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsi follow their own laws that often perpetuate gender inequalities. Progress has been made in all laws professed by different communities. These laws were treating people in their own way. Religious groups often view personal law as central to their identity. The UCC would help India navigate its path towards gender equality. Pursuing the UCC is crucial for advancing equality, fairness and the empowerment of women in India. The UCC and UN regulations have similar objectives of advocating equality, fairness and non-discrimination. The UCC is in line with international human rights principles by seeking to standardise personal laws and address gender biases. Mirroring the UN's emphasis on human rights and equality. The implementation of the UCC in India can be viewed as a step towards upholding, promoting the principles outlined in various UN treaties and conventions. Thereby strengthening the country's dedication to global human rights standards.

The **Next Century Foundation** highlights the urgent need for the inclusion and protection of minority groups in Syria. Now at greater risk than ever. Syria is home to diverse communities. Alawite, Shia, Christian, Druze, Kurdish and Sunni Arab. Each with rich histories and traditions. However, sectarian violence has long hindered their ability to practise their faith freely. Although some hoped for change under President Ahmad al-Sharaa, there are no clear signs of it decreasing. Despite promises to include and protect citizens' rights, President al-Sharaa's Government has launched attacks on the Alawite and Shia community. Threatening their livelihood and fuelling sectarian divisions. The escalating violence has deepened insecurity, forced mass displacements and further destabilised the nation. In light of these alarming developments, the Next Century Foundation calls for concrete measures. Equal legal rights for all religious groups; fair representation in government through quotas or reserved seats; and the establishment of religious advisory councils to ensure minority voices are heard. The Government must also safeguard religious sites, rebuild those damaged by conflict and enforce laws against discrimination and hate crimes. It urges Syria's new leadership to adopt policies that uphold the rights of all religious and ethnic communities. Fostering a peaceful and inclusive future.

The **Iraqi Development Organisation** draws the UNHRC's attention to the systematic discrimination against Shia Muslims in Saudi Arabia. Despite the Kingdom's reform pledges, discriminatory policies persist. Shias are barred from building mosques and religious centres and their freedom to worship and practise rituals is restricted. Competent Shia individuals are



excluded from senior government and security roles. They face economic and developmental marginalisation, despite the wealth generated by their regions. Additionally, school curriculums promote hate speech against their belief, entrenching a culture of discrimination against this minority. Shia activists and human rights defenders face extensive repression, with arbitrary arrests and trials that lack the most basic standards of justice. Recently, death sentences were handed down to five young Shia men and a businessman. Some arrested as minors on charges related to their participation in peaceful protests. In light of this ongoing violation, what concrete action can the international community and the UNHRC take to hold Saudi authorities accountable and ensure the protection of Shia minority rights?

The **European Centre for Law and Justice** explains that in Pakistan, blasphemy laws have been weaponised to silence and persecute religious minorities. Innocent Christians falsely accused of blasphemy are regularly attacked by bloodthirsty mobs. These mobs are often free to operate with impunity, are rarely challenged, and even retaliate against police who provide assistance. Furthermore, Pakistan's archaic blasphemy laws often come with harsh and unjust consequences. Anyone can be charged, tried, and convicted of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death, with little or even no evidence at all. Judges frequently do not decide cases on the merits because they are afraid of being attacked by the mobs that pack the courtrooms. This mob pressure often leads to convictions of the wrongfully accused, regardless of the evidence presented. Their affiliate is currently representing five innocent Christians who have been victims of false blasphemy prosecutions, with three of them on death row. The Centre requests that Pakistan do a better job of providing due process of law for all its citizens, including religious minorities. It is imperative that the legal system be impartial. Repealing the blasphemy laws is the ultimate goal. But in the meantime, the Centre requests that Pakistan expedite the hearings of blasphemy cases, decide them on the merits without succumbing to mob pressure, and release people who are falsely accused of committing blasphemy.

FACTS & FIGURES ON ID PARTICIPATION

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3 Inter-Governmental Organizations

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