



General Assembly

Distr.: General
4 December 2015

Original: English

Human Rights Council

Thirty-first session

Agenda items 2 and 3

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities

Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Summary

The Human Rights Council, in its resolutions 13/12 and 22/4 on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to present an annual report to the Council describing relevant developments in the work of United Nations human rights bodies and mechanisms, as well as activities undertaken by OHCHR at headquarters and in the field, that contribute to the promotion of, and respect for, the provisions of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. The present report covers the OHCHR activities in 2015.

During the period under review, OHCHR continued to address the situation of minorities in a range of contexts. In accordance with the guidance note of the Secretary-General on racial discrimination and protection of minorities, the Office reported on both positive practices and gaps in the implementation of the Declaration. It supported Governments and minority representatives with expertise and training, and led efforts to enhance system-wide action by the United Nations to advance the rights of persons belonging to minorities.



I. Introduction

1. During the period under review, serious inter-ethnic and intercommunal tensions and conflicts were reported in every region of the world. In these contexts, persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, because of their religion or ethnicity, were often targeted and forced to flee their homes to escape violence, persecution, discrimination and exclusion. With millions of others, both minorities and majorities, they now are in search of safety and dignity.

2. The traditional and social media often fuel discrimination and violence through their advocacy of racial or religious hatred against ethnic and religious minorities, which has become a recurrent pattern. Limited access and representation of minorities in shared media spaces and increasingly organized forms of extremist movements all contribute to this situation. Political parties and politicians have a responsibility with regard to the diversity of the society that they represent. This requires codes of conduct to prohibit racist political platforms and internal party mechanisms, with the capacity to impose strict sanctions on candidates who violate the said codes of conduct.

3. The international community must remain vigilant in respect of issues relating to minorities. At a Security Council open debate held in March 2015 on the victims of attacks and abuses on ethnic or religious grounds in the Middle East, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stressed that the international community's attention to the human rights of persons belonging to minorities was too often both partial and sporadic: partial, because States had often focused primarily on communities with whom they share specific cultural ties, thus overlooking abuses of other marginalized communities and dismissing concerns regarding discriminated groups in their own countries; sporadic, because the rights of persons belonging to minorities were often highlighted only after the outbreak of extreme violence – even though that eruption was virtually always preceded by years of exclusion, disregard for linguistic and religious rights, and obstacles to full participation in the political, social, cultural and economic life of the State. States that genuinely embrace the ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of their societies fight against extremism. It was only by insisting on the dignity and worth of every human being and by securing the rights and the space of minorities that societies could coexist peacefully.¹

4. It is against this background that the Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) is committed to pursuing its work to protect the rights of persons belonging to minorities as a matter of priority, in partnership with other United Nations entities, regional organizations, Member States, national human rights institutions, minority representatives, non-governmental institutions and other partners.

II. Work of the Office of the High Commissioner at headquarters and in the field

5. Throughout the year, in public statements, the High Commissioner stressed the importance of advancing non-discrimination and the protection of minorities. In pursuing its work on minority rights, OHCHR also engaged in a number of activities aiming at

¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “High Commissioner statement to Security Council on minorities in the Middle East”, 27 March 2015.

enhancing stakeholders' understanding of minority rights, encouraging legislative and policy changes and identifying good practices.

A. Work to strengthen advocacy and capacity

6. The annual Minorities Fellowship Programme is aimed at providing individuals from minority groups with in-depth knowledge of the United Nations human rights machinery and strengthening their advocacy skills to better use international human rights standards and mechanisms. In 2015, the event was held between 26 October and 28 November, and comprised two linguistic components, English and Russian. Fellows came from Albania, Azerbaijan, Colombia, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Republic of Moldova and Sri Lanka. It also included new elements, including a practical training module that covered project design, effective fund-raising for human rights, and documenting human rights violations.

7. The Senior Minority Fellowship Programme brought to Geneva a Korean ethnic minority advocate from Japan, who worked within the Indigenous Peoples and Minorities Section of OHCHR in order to gain specialized knowledge that he could take back to his community.

8. In November 2015, OHCHR organized a side event aimed at assessing the progress made and challenges remaining in the United Nations system in addressing the situation of minorities since the establishment of the Working Group on Minorities. It also considered how to ensure that the Forum on Minority Issues would continue to contribute effectively to the promotion and protection of minority rights.

9. In view of the International Decade for People of African Descent, the human rights situation concerning people of African descent was a major focus of the work of the United Nations during the period under review. The High Commissioner, as coordinator of the International Decade, participated in the first regional meeting under the programme of activities of the International Decade for People of African Descent for Latin America and the Caribbean in Brasilia, held on 3 and 4 December 2015. The objectives of the meeting were to raise awareness about the Decade, to foster regional ownership of the activities and spirit of the Decade, and to increase engagement of national and regional actors in the implementation of the programme of activities and to address the concerns of people of African descent. OHCHR also supported related mechanisms and implemented a fellowship programme for people of African descent.

B. Regional and country engagement: areas of focus

10. During the period under review, the High Commissioner spoke out against a range of human rights violations targeting minorities, and urged States and international actors to address them at an early stage. The High Commissioner publicly stressed that, if we attend to minority rights only after slaughter has begun, we have already failed.

11. In January 2015, OHCHR released a report on the situation of human rights in Libya and on related technical support and capacity-building needs, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 25/37 (A/HRC/28/51). The report contained information on the bodies of seven Egyptian Coptic Christians that were found near Benghazi. In February, more than 30 Egyptian Copts were detained in Benghazi, allegedly tortured and ordered to convert to Islam by Ansar al-Sharia, before being released a few days later and deported to Egypt. In the report, OHCHR recommended reviewing and strengthening legal and policy protections that guarantee the rights of, inter alia, minorities and take measures to facilitate access to justice for those groups.

12. The human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine, deployed in March 2014, continued to pay close attention to the rights of persons belonging to minorities, including in its regular human rights reports. For example, in February 2015, the mission reported that, although incidents of violent attacks against minorities remained rare, cases of discrimination against Roma had been reported and allegations of religious minorities being targeted in areas controlled by armed groups received. It also noted that the human rights situation for some Crimean Tatars in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, in particular political and human rights activists and community leaders, had steadily deteriorated. In September 2015, the Assistant Secretary-General, during an interactive dialogue with the Human Rights Council, observed that violations of the human rights of Crimean Tatars continued to be committed by the de facto authorities of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

13. In Iraq, OHCHR reactivated in March 2015 the committee appointed by the conference held in March 2014 on promoting the protection and respect of the rights of the diverse religious and ethnic minority communities living in Iraq. The committee, appointed to draft a set of concrete recommendations based on the road map adopted at the conference, had been unable to convene because of the conflict ongoing in the country. In July, OHCHR, in cooperation with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the Alliance of Iraqi Minorities, reported to the Human Rights Council that ethnic and religious groups in Iraq had endured discrimination and violence for a long time and, as a result of the ongoing armed conflict, the communities had become more vulnerable, and many had suffered gross violations of their human rights. In September, OHCHR together with the organization of a former OHCHR minority fellow, conducted a series of human rights training sessions, with a particular focus on the protection of minorities in the Wassit Governorate.

14. In its report submitted to the Human Rights Council at its thirtieth session (A/HRC/30/48), the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic reported that Syrians of all backgrounds had been the subject of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Commission also noted that some communities had been specifically targeted, with discriminatory intent, on the grounds of their actual or perceived religious and/or ethnic backgrounds, by the so-called “Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)” and Jabhat Al-Nusra.

15. On 25 February 2015, the High Commissioner issued a press statement in which he called upon Myanmar to redouble its efforts to revise its legislation and policies to protect the Rohingya and other minorities. The message was reinforced by OHCHR advocacy with legislative and executive authorities aimed at increasing understanding within the Government and parliament in Myanmar of the need to adopt legislation in compliance with international law and standards. In September 2015, when the Deputy High Commissioner presented an oral update to the Human Rights Council pursuant to Council resolution 29/21, she welcomed advances on a number of important human rights issues, even though they had not been matched with progress in addressing institutionalized discrimination against the Rohingya and other minorities. She called for urgent effective measures to combat prejudice, racism and religious intolerance.

16. In September 2015, the High Commissioner presented an oral update to the Human Rights Council at its thirtieth session on the investigation conducted by OHCHR into alleged serious violations and abuses of human rights and related crimes by both parties in Sri Lanka during the period covered by the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, and to establish the facts and circumstances of such alleged violations and of the crimes perpetrated with a view to avoiding impunity and ensuring accountability (see A/HRC/30/61). In the report, OHCHR described serious human rights violations, abuses and related crimes that had affected tens of thousands of individuals as well as whole

communities – Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim – not only during the period covered by the OHCHR mandate, but also over past decades. The High Commissioner expressed his hope that the new Government would seize this unique opportunity to articulate the common vision of an interdependent, just, equitable, open and diverse society.

17. Also in September 2015, the High Commissioner expressed serious concern at the ongoing forced eviction of Roma and Travellers in a number of European States, including in France and Bulgaria. He urged States to make greater efforts to treat the Roma sensitively and fairly, in accordance with international standards, emphasizing that failure to do so tended to exacerbate entrenched popular discrimination against what was already one of the most deprived and marginalized minorities in Europe.

18. In September 2015, OHCHR submitted a report to the Human Rights Council on the violations and abuses committed by Boko Haram and the impact on human rights in the affected countries, pursuant to Council resolution S-23/1 (A/HRC/30/31). In the report, OHCHR described how the insurgency had exacerbated tensions between communities and religions and increased the risk of further violence among communities.

19. In Serbia, OHCHR provided advice for the development of a new strategy for the social inclusion of the Roma community, strengthening in particular the human rights dimension of the plan as well as aspects related to discrimination in employment. OHCHR also supported the establishment and development of a new government mechanism for the implementation of international human rights recommendations, pursuant to an order of the Government in its decision of 10 December 2014, and in development throughout 2015. OHCHR, jointly with the United Nations country team, the Government and other relevant partners developed a new United Nations development assistance framework, including a specific chapter on human rights, and setting out a number of targets for Roma inclusion and aiming at representation of Romani women in Parliament.

20. In the Republic of Moldova, with the support of OHCHR, 24 Roma community mediators, were trained to document and address discrimination in their communities. In addition, two cases of Roma discrimination followed by OHCHR are being resolved through mediation between the parties concerned.

21. In December 2015, OHCHR and the United Nations office in Nepal organized a workshop to support the work of the National Dalit Commission, the National Human Rights Commission, the National Women's Commission and civil society organizations on caste-based discrimination. The workshop was followed by a round-table discussion with United Nations staff in Nepal to take stock of current initiatives to combat this form of discrimination.

22. OHCHR also worked closely with regional organizations in the area of minority rights. For example, it contributed to the Council of Europe conference on the theme "Minority protection at a crossroads", hosted by the Åland Islands Peace Institute in March 2015, and the conference on minority rights 25 years after the adoption of the Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, organized by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in Vienna in November 2015. In both instances, OHCHR stressed the complementarity of regional and United Nations standards and mechanisms on minorities and explored further areas of cooperation between the organizations concerned.

C. Strengthening the capacity of United Nations country teams

23. A training course on minority rights held in the Philippines on 16 and 17 June 2015 strengthened the capacity of the United Nations country team effectively to support the State in the implementation of international and national standards in the areas of indigenous peoples and minority rights. The training session, organized in collaboration with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, followed up to the outcome document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

24. In December 2015, a training session was organized for the United Nations country team in Myanmar with the aim of better integrating anti-discrimination and minority rights into the work of the United Nations system at the country level. The session was to be followed by workshops on international standards and mechanism pertaining to minorities for national institutions and civil society actors in Myanmar.

D. Forum on Minority Issues

25. The Forum on Minority Issues held its eighth session on 24 and 25 November 2015, focusing on the theme “Minorities in the criminal justice system”. The Forum identified ways to engage with stakeholders, including minority communities themselves, for the purpose of preventing and addressing bias and discrimination against minorities at each stage of the criminal justice system. Discussions focused on measures for the effective promotion and realization of the provisions set out in the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

III. United Nations network on racial discrimination and protection of minorities

26. The United Nations network on racial discrimination and protection of minorities pursued its efforts to boost dialogue and cooperation between relevant United Nations departments, agencies, funds and programmes in accordance with the four-year plan of action adopted in 2014.

27. The network contributed to the comprehensive study of the human rights situation of Roma worldwide, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of anti-Gypsyism prepared by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and presented to the Human Rights Council at its twenty-ninth session (A/HRC/29/24). In November 2015, the network submitted a paper on the challenges of criminal justice systems and practical measures in addressing the needs and demands of minorities to the Forum on Minority Issues at its eighth session, pursuant to its plan of action.

28. In addition, the network prepared guidance for the United Nations system on the key challenges, priorities and strategic approaches to combating discrimination based on work and descent, taking into account the outcome of consultations held in October 2015, with participation of experts from United Nations human rights bodies and agencies, academia, and civil society. In December 2015, OHCHR organized a consultation workshop for the United Nations country team in Mauritania to seek further inputs on to the Guidance Tool. The workshop will also look at entry points to address the situation of affected communities in the country, through the exchange of experiences and best practices on combatting discrimination based on work and descent.

29. In 2015, a webpage dedicated to the network on racial discrimination and the protection of minorities was posted on the United Nations Practitioners’ Portal on Human

Rights-Based Approaches to Programming (hrbaportal.org). The Portal brings together a wide range of resources designed to assist practitioners working at the country level to integrate human rights-based approaches into their programming work.

IV. Human rights treaty bodies

30. Human rights treaty bodies addressed minority issues throughout the period under review.

A. Concluding observations

31. The Human Rights Committee, at its 113th session, adopted its concluding observations on Croatia (CCPR/C/HRV/CO/3) and the Russian Federation (CCPR/C/RUS/CO/7). With regard to Croatia, the Committee expressed concern about the practice of ethnic profiling by law enforcement officials targeting certain ethnic minorities, particularly Roma, and about the continued reports of hate attacks against members of ethnic minority groups, particularly Roma and Serbs. With regard to the Russian Federation, the Committee recommended that the State party should strengthen its efforts to combat all acts of racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, including in political discourse and in mass media.

32. At its 114th session, the Committee adopted concluding observations on France (CCPR/C/FRA/CO/5), Spain (CCPR/C/ESP/CO/6), the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (CCPR/C/GBR/CO/7) and Uzbekistan (CCPR/C/UZB/CO/4). In the case of France, the Committee recommended that the State party should put an end to forced evictions of Roma migrants. Regarding Spain, it expressed concern at the practice of police checks based on racial and ethnic profiling against certain ethnic minorities, in particular Roma. With regard to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Committee noted a recent increase in the number of hate incidents and crimes on the basis of race, nationality or religion, and expressed concern about the prevalence in the media and on the Internet of racist and xenophobic expressions that may amount to incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. In the case of Uzbekistan, the Committee recommended that the State party should bring its legislation into conformity with article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including through the decriminalization of proselytism and other missionary activities. It should also investigate all acts of interference with the freedom of religion of independent Muslims, Christians and other minority religions practising their religion outside registered structures.

33. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, at its fifty-fourth session, adopted its concluding observations on Tajikistan (E/C.12/TJK/CO/2-3). The Committee expressed concern at the decreasing number of classes provided in the languages of ethnic minorities and of students attending schools where the teaching is given in the languages of ethnic minorities. At its fifty-fifth session, the Committee adopted its concluding observations on Ireland (E/C.12/IRL/CO/3) and Kyrgyzstan (E/C.12/KGZ/CO/2-3). It recommended that Ireland should expedite its efforts to give legal recognition to Travellers as an ethnic minority and to include them as an ethnic minority in anti-discrimination legislation. With regard to Kyrgyzstan, the Committee recommended that the State party should allocate specific budgetary resources to promote the cultural diversity of ethnic minorities, allow mother tongue education and minority language press, and enable all groups to express and develop their culture, language, traditions and customs.

34. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, at its sixtieth session, adopted its concluding observations on Denmark (CEDAW/C/DNK/CO/8). It

expressed concern that most women living with HIV/AIDS in Denmark were foreign-born women belonging to ethnic minorities. It recommended that additional targeted measures be taken to ensure that migrant women and girls have access to sexual and reproductive health services and education, especially for foreign-born women belonging to ethnic minorities, with a view to preventing and tackling HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. At its sixty-first session, the Committee adopted its concluding observations on Viet Nam (CEDAW/C/VNM/CO/7-8). It noted with concern that the maternal mortality rate in Viet Nam remained high among ethnic minority women, and recommended that the State party increase its efforts to reduce maternal mortality among women from ethnic minorities by improving their access to basic prenatal and antenatal care, and emergency obstetric care, and ensure the presence of skilled birth attendants at births.

35. At its eighty-sixth session, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination adopted its concluding observations on France (CERD/C/FRA/CO/20-21), Germany (CERD/C/DEU/CO/19-22) and the Sudan (CERD/C/SDN/CO/12-16). With regard to France, the Committee expressed its concern about reports regarding discrimination against Roma, such as repeated breaches of their right to housing, and encouraged the State party to continue its current efforts and to take the necessary steps to prevent and combat racial discrimination against the Roma in all its forms. With regard to Germany, the Committee expressed concern about the proliferation and dissemination of racist ideas by certain political parties and movements, and recommended that, in addressing issues that affect ethnic minorities, the State party should make clear its political will to promote understanding and tolerance between the majority population and the various ethnic groups in its discourse and its actions. In the case of the Sudan, the Committee expressed its concern about information that human rights defenders, particularly those belonging to minority groups, continued to be persecuted and were subject to harassment, arbitrary detention and ill-treatment by the police, and recommended that the State Party should widen the legal space for the exercise of political and civil rights, including by political opponents, many of whom belong to minority groups.

36. At its eighty-seventh session, the Committee adopted its concluding observations on Costa Rica (CERD/C/CRI/CO/19-22), the Czech Republic (CERD/C/CZE/CO/10-11), the Netherlands (CERD/C/NLD/CO/19-21), the Niger (CERD/C/NER/CO/15-21) and Norway (CERD/C/NOR/CO/21-22). With regard to Costa Rica, the Committee expressed its concern at the use of textbooks containing or that may contain elements that could be interpreted as presenting a stereotypical view of minorities, especially of indigenous and black populations, and recommended that the State party should take measures to ensure that the national education system fosters awareness and knowledge of cultural practices of the Afro-descendent and indigenous populations and their contributions to Costa Rican history and culture. With regard to the Czech Republic, the Committee expressed its concern at the continuing discrimination facing Roma in their enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, and recommended that the State party should take effective measures to facilitate the employment of Roma, to establish a comprehensive social housing system with a special focus on Roma and other ethnic minorities, and to expand the Roma health assistance programme. In the case of the Netherlands, the Committee expressed concern at the increase in discrimination, including racial profiling and stigmatization, faced by people of African descent, and recommended that the State party should recognize explicitly that people of African descent are a part of Dutch society, and develop and implement specific measures and affirmative action policies to eliminate racial profiling and discrimination. With regard to the Niger, the Committee recommended that the State party should continue to implement special measures, including with regard to the right to education, employment and housing, and to adopt a comprehensive strategy on the situation of persons belonging to minorities and those who identify themselves as indigenous peoples. With regard to Norway, the Committee expressed concern at the

increase in hate speech and xenophobic discourse by politicians, in the media and on other public platforms, that contribute to prejudice and the stigmatization of ethnic and national minorities and indigenous peoples, including Sami, non-western European migrants, Roma and asylum seekers, and recommended that the State party should take appropriate measures to condemn and distance itself from the said hate speech and xenophobic discourse.

37. At its fifty-fourth session, the Committee against Torture adopted its concluding observations on Romania (CAT/C/ROU/CO/2) and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. With regard to Romania, the Committee recommended that the State party should, inter alia, (a) combat impunity and prevent discriminatory police misconduct by ensuring that all cases of excessive use of force by law enforcement officials against members of the Roma community are promptly and effectively investigated and prosecuted; and (b) stop the targeted practice of “administratively conveying” Roma to police stations. In the case of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Committee expressed its concern at information regarding the excessive use of force by police officials against Roma. It recommended that the State party should, inter alia, combat and prevent discriminatory police misconduct by ensuring that all alleged cases of excessive use of force by law enforcement officials against members of Roma community are promptly and effectively addressed, and that training on human rights provided for law enforcement officials is improved. At its fifty-fifth session, the Committee adopted its concluding observations on Iraq (CAT/C/IRQ/CO/1 and Corr.1) and Slovakia (CAT/C/SVK/CO/3). With regard to Iraq, the Committee expressed concern at the fact that the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) had instituted a pattern of sexual violence, slavery, abduction and human trafficking targeted at women and girls belonging to religious and ethnic minorities, and recommended that the State party should take vigorous measures to promote the protection of women and to eliminate the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators. In the case of Slovakia, the Committee recommended that the State party investigate all allegations of involuntary sterilization of Roma women and provide victims with fair and adequate redress.

38. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, at its sixty-eighth session, adopted its concluding observations on Colombia (CRC/C/COL/CO/4-5), Iraq (CRC/C/IRQ/CO/2-4) and Turkmenistan (CRC/C/TKM/CO/2-4). With regard to Colombia, the Committee recommended that the State party, inter alia, increase its efforts and take affirmative measures to ensure that indigenous and Afro-Colombian children enjoy their rights in practice, in particular in the areas of health, education and access to justice. In the case of Iraq, the Committee expressed its deepest concern at the situation of children and families belonging to minority groups, who are systematically killed, tortured, raped, forced to convert to Islam and cut off from humanitarian assistance by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in a reported attempt by its members to suppress, permanently cleanse or expel, or in some instances destroy, these minority communities. The Committee urged the State party to, inter alia, take immediate measures and to provide all necessary protection to children belonging to minority groups. With regard to Turkmenistan, the Committee expressed its concern at, inter alia, the discriminatory practices towards children belonging to national minorities, particularly Kazakh and Uzbek children, who had limited access to language classes in their mother tongue. It recommended that the State party should guarantee for children belonging to national minorities the right to education in their mother tongue, and abolish restrictions in that regard.

39. The Committee, at its sixty-ninth session, adopted its concluding observations on Eritrea (CRC/C/ERI/CO/4) and Mexico (CRC/C/MEX/CO/4-5). With regard to Eritrea, the Committee expressed its concern at allegations that the traditional means of livelihood of some ethnic minority groups, including the Afar and the Kunama, were being destroyed, and that they were being displaced from their traditional territory. It urged the State party to

take all effective measures to reduce disparities in the enjoyment of rights by children belonging to minority groups, and to pay particular attention to standards of living, health and education, and the enjoyment of their own culture, religion and language. In the case of Mexico, the Committee was concerned that indigenous and Afro-Mexican children continued to face discrimination and violence, and remained the most affected by extreme poverty, malnutrition, maternal and child mortality, early marriages, adolescent pregnancies, environmental contamination and lack of access to quality education and civil registration services. The Committee recommended that the State party should adopt comprehensive measures to ensure that indigenous and Afro-Mexican children enjoyed all their rights in practice, in particular in the areas of health, education, nutrition and access to justice and civil registration services.

B. General comments and general recommendations

40. In its general recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice (CEDAW/C/GC/33), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted that discrimination against women was compounded by intersecting factors, including ethnicity/race, indigenous or minority status, colour, socioeconomic status and/or caste, language, religion or belief, political opinion, national origin, marital and/or maternal status, age, urban/rural location, health status, disability, property ownership and identity as a lesbian, bisexual, transgender woman or intersex person, and that these factors made it more difficult for women from those groups to gain access to justice. The Committee recommended that States parties should, *inter alia*, develop targeted outreach activities and distribute, through specific units or desks for women, information about the justice mechanisms, procedures and remedies available, in various formats and also in community languages. It also recommended that such activities and information should be appropriate for all ethnic and minority groups in the population and designed in close cooperation with women from these groups and, especially, women's and other relevant organizations.

V. Special procedures

41. In March 2015, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues presented her annual thematic report to the Human Rights Council at its twenty-eighth session, on the theme of hate speech and incitement to hatred against minorities in the media (A/HRC/28/64). In her report, the Special Rapporteur identified a number of factors that lead to hate speech and incitement to hatred in the media, and highlighted a number of positive measures and initiatives implemented by a broad range of actors, including international organizations, States, civil society and individuals, to contest hateful speech and incitement to hatred in the media.

42. Also in March 2015, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief presented his annual thematic report to the Human Rights Council, on the theme of violence committed in the name of religion (A/HRC/28/66). According to the Special Rapporteur, violence in the name of religion should not be perceived as a natural outbreak of collective acts of aggression supposedly reflecting long-standing sectarian hostilities; it rather originated from contemporary factors and actors, including political circumstances. The Special Rapporteur recommended concerted action by all stakeholders, including States, religious communities, interreligious dialogue initiatives, civil society organizations and media representatives, in order to contain and eventually eliminate the scourge of violence committed in the name of religion.

43. In March 2015, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar presented her report on human rights developments in Myanmar to the Human Rights

Council at its twenty-eighth session (A/HRC/28/72). IN her report, the Special Rapporteur expressed her concern at learning of the progress of a package of four bills relating to religious conversion, interfaith marriage, monogamy and population control. She urged the authorities of Myanmar to revise or withdraw the bills, which did not meet international human rights standards and risked entrenching discrimination against women and minorities.

44. In a statement delivered on 8 May 2015, at the end of his mission to Greece from 4 to 8 May 2015, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance noted that combating hate and prejudice was not just about financial resources and that, in times of economic crisis, blaming the most vulnerable members of society only contributed to reinforcing a climate of hostility and violence towards those groups and individuals. He added that more initiatives needed to be undertaken to effectively address hate speech and verbal abuse against vulnerable groups, including irregular migrants and minorities, such as Roma.

45. In June 2015, the Special Rapporteur presented to the Human Rights Council a report on racial and ethnic profiling (A/HRC/29/46). In his report, he examined the contexts that had led to the use of racial and ethnic profiling, and provided an overview of the different manifestations of the phenomenon by law enforcement agencies. He discussed the legal, policy and regulatory frameworks prohibiting racial and ethnic profiling, and the policies and laws adopted at the international, regional and national levels, and presented different examples of good practices initiated to counter and eliminate the use of racial and ethnic profiling.

46. In June 2015, the Special Rapporteur also presented to the Human Rights Council his report on combating the glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (A/HRC/29/47). In his report, the Special Rapporteur examined the main areas of concern in which further efforts and constant vigilance were required, including with regard to the protection of vulnerable groups of individuals against racist and xenophobic crimes and the promotion and consolidation of democracy and human rights in general. He also identified good practices developed by States and various stakeholders.

47. On 12 June 2015, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, together with the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, delivered a statement in which they expressed their grave concern at the ongoing threat to the safety of minority groups in the Syrian Arab Republic, including Alawites, Armenians, Assyrians, Druze, Ismailis and Kurds.

48. The Special Rapporteur on minority issues presented a report to the Human Rights Council, at its twenty-ninth session, containing a comprehensive study on the human rights situation of Roma worldwide, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of anti-Gypsyism (A/HRC/29/24). In the report, the Special Rapporteur found that, although the reasons for the marginalization of Roma were complex, the overarching factor was the deeply embedded social and structural discrimination that Roma face worldwide. She urged States to place the rights of Roma at the heart of all strategies and policies relating to human and minority rights, social inclusion and development, with explicit goals for Roma communities.

49. In September 2015, the Special Rapporteur also held a regional consultation in Brazil on the situation of Roma in the Americas. Roma leaders and activists from many regional States, including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, participated in the consultation.

50. On 30 June 2015, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance called upon Governments throughout the world to boost their efforts to stop the widespread practice of racial and ethnic profiling. He urged States to adopt international standards and to pass specific legislation to counter the practice.

51. In her statement delivered at the end of her mission to Myanmar, from 3 to 7 August 2015, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar regretted that her request to visit Rakhine State had been denied by the Government. The Special Rapporteur explained that it was her duty to continue to highlight the serious human rights violations committed in Rakhine State and to make principled but constructive recommendations. She added that more had to and could be done to address the legal status of the Rohingya and the institutionalized discrimination faced by that community.

52. The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief conducted a mission to Bangladesh from 31 August to 9 September 2015. At the end of the mission, on 9 September, the Special Rapporteur released a statement in which he pointed out that the Constitution of Bangladesh, which enshrined the principle of secularism while proclaiming Islam as the official State religion, gave rise to ambiguities that had a direct impact on human rights in the country, including the protection of religious minorities. He called upon the State authorities to bring the existing norms and practices into line with the right of everyone to freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression, as enshrined in the Constitution.

53. The Special Rapporteur on minority issues conducted a mission to Brazil from 14 to 24 September 2015. On September 24, the Special Rapporteur delivered a statement, in which affirmed that Brazil was on the right track in developing laws and policies to address discrimination, racism and injustice. Many legislative developments, while having an impact in the long term, did not meet the urgent demands that disadvantaged minorities often wanted and needed. She urged the Brazilian authorities to take immediate measures to overcome serious structural challenges.

VI. Universal periodic review

54. At the beginning of 2015, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues published the findings of her research on the recommendations made during the first cycle of the universal periodic review relevant to minorities.² The study revealed that 112 Member States had addressed 895 recommendations on national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities to 137 Member States. Minorities were the ninth-most discussed topic during the first cycle of the review process, and accounted for 4.2 per cent of the 21,353 recommendations made. Most recommendation on minorities were addressed to European States (43), followed by African States (28).

55. The Human Rights Council adopted the reports of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review on numerous States at its twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth and thirtieth sessions.

56. In the above-mentioned reports, several States made recommendations relating to (a) legislative and practical measures to ensure the promotion and protection of minority rights; (b) measures aimed at protecting minorities against discrimination, particularly in employment, housing, health, education and access to justice; (c) strengthening efforts to

² Available from www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/IEMinorities/MinoritiesIssues1stcycleUPRProcess.pdf.

promote the participation of minorities in decision-making processes; (d) the implementation and enforcement of provisions on freedom of religion and belief; and (e) measures to tackle prejudices and eradicate racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

57. Other recommendations were made on (a) promoting religious and ethnic tolerance, including through awareness-raising campaigns; (b) strengthening measures aimed at countering hate speech and hate crimes against minority groups; (c) increasing the number of law enforcement officials receiving training specific to human rights and minority groups; (d) strengthening efforts to protect the rights of minorities from discrimination, including discrimination based on multiple grounds; (e) allocating sufficient resources to improve the situation of minorities; (f) ceasing harassment and discrimination by law enforcement officials against minority groups; and (g) measures to ensure the preservation of cultures of minority groups.

VII. Conclusions

58. **When the United Nations Organization was established 70 years ago, Member States agreed to promote and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion. The rights of persons belonging to minorities continue to be undermined nonetheless, in some countries so severely that thousands of individuals belonging to minorities are forced to flee their homes in search of safety and dignity.**

59. **There is a need to redouble efforts, nationally and through strengthened international cooperation, to protect the rights of persons belonging to minorities. The High Commissioner has an important role to play in these efforts, as demonstrated in the initiatives outlined in the present report, ranging from monitoring human rights violations to empowering minority representatives to claim their rights. Real impact, however, requires concerted efforts. It can only be achieved if, through the United Nations network and other initiatives, the entire United Nations system and regional organizations treat the protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities as a core commitment. National, regional and local authorities, together with minority representatives and other partners, must develop more effective laws and policies that protect the rights of persons belonging to minorities, not through isolation, but through enhanced interaction within societies. Politicians and others will therefore have to muster the courage and commitment to speak out against discrimination, hate speech and other efforts made to undermine the human rights of persons belonging to minorities.**
