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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, 22/4 and 31/13 concerning the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to present an annual report to the Council. This report is to contain information on relevant developments in the field of minority rights worldwide, including the work of United Nations human rights bodies and mechanisms, as well as on the activities undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) at headquarters and in the field that contribute to the promotion of and respect for the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. The present report is being submitted pursuant to these resolutions.

During the 2016 reporting period, OHCHR continued to address the situation of minorities. The strategies and initiatives of OHCHR, in line with the guidance note of the Secretary-General on racial discrimination and protection of minorities, aim to promote the implementation of the Declaration. It supported Governments, civil society and minority representatives with expertise and capacity-building and led efforts to enhance system-wide

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action by the United Nations with a view to advancing the realization of the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

I. Introduction

1. In 2016, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported on several incidents of discrimination and violent attacks against minorities that affected minority women disproportionately. In countries where there are armed conflicts, ethnic and religious communities have become more vulnerable and have suffered from gross violations of their human rights on grounds of their actual or perceived religious and/or ethnic backgrounds.

2. In many parts of the world, there has been a resurgence of movements fuelled by racial, religious, national or ethnic hatred. Political voices echoing and even actively advocating xenophobia or demonizing and scapegoating vulnerable groups are increasingly common. Some States continue to deny access to citizenship and even education to members of certain national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, even though they have been resident for generations in the States in question.

3. During 2016, concerns that regulations privileging security protection interests over human rights continued to increase. Fear has led to the adoption by some States of measures that impinge on the enjoyment of freedoms and the protection of human rights. An us-versus-them mentality, which further marginalizes and alienates persons belonging to minority communities, is slowly emerging. Children are being shamed and shunned for their ethnic and religious origins, and entire communities, suspected of collusion with terrorists, are being smeared.

4. In 2016, the year of the first high-level political forum on sustainable development, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities have continued to be affected by deep inequalities. These inequalities create tension, threaten social cohesion, fuel radicalization and sometimes result in political unrest and violent conflict.

5. During the reporting period, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other OHCHR officials spoke out against a range of human rights violations targeting minorities and urged States and international actors to address them at an early stage.

6. It is against this backdrop that OHCHR has committed, as a matter of priority, to pursuing its work to protect the rights of persons belonging to minorities 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 United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at headquarters and in the field

7. OHCHR has undertaken several initiatives to promote minority rights standards and call for their implementation at the global, regional and national levels. Throughout the year, the High Commissioner has made public statements stressing the importance of advancing non-discrimination and the protection of minorities.

A. Regional and country engagement

8. In its 2016 reports on the protection of civilians, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) described how civilians of all backgrounds continue to suffer from the armed conflict, including through deliberate targeting by anti-government

elements. Although the issues of ethnicity and religion are deeply politicized, systematic discrimination against a particular group was not documented as part of the ongoing conflict. On 23 July 2016, discriminatory intent based upon religion was clearly a motive when Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (also known as ISIL or Da'esh) – Khorasan Province claimed responsibility for a suicide attack. The attack, which occurred in Kabul, during a peaceful demonstration by persons of Hazara background, nearly all of whom are members of the Shia Muslim minority, killed 85 and injured more than 400. Reports on the protection of civilians in Afghanistan in 2016 also documented ongoing abductions of Hazara civilians by anti-government elements. Although in many cases members of the Hazara community were specifically targeted, discriminatory intent based upon ethnicity or religion was not documented among the motives. UNAMA continues to facilitate ongoing dialogue between Hazara leaders and the Government of Afghanistan on this issue.

9. In June 2016, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic issued a report on the crimes committed by ISIL against the Yazidis. In its report, the Commission concluded that ISIL had committed and continued to commit the crime of genocide against the Yazidis, as well as crimes against humanity and war crimes. ISIL had sought to destroy the Yazidis through killings, sexual slavery, enslavement, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment, as well as forcible transfer causing serious bodily and mental harm. ISIL had pursued those objectives by subjecting Yazidis to conditions that lead to slow death; by imposing measures to prevent the birth of Yazidi children, including by forcing adults to convert, separating Yazidi men and women and causing mental trauma; and by removing Yazidi children from their own families and placing them with ISIL fighters, thereby cutting them off from the beliefs and practices of their own religious community and erasing their identity as Yazidis. The public statements and conduct of ISIL and its fighters clearly demonstrated that ISIL intended to destroy in whole or in part the Yazidis of Sinjar, who account for the majority of the world's Yazidi population.

10. The Human Rights Office of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and OHCHR, for their part, have monitored the situation of the Yazidis documenting their experiences since the attack on Sinjar by ISIL in August 2014. The August 2016 report entitled "A call for accountability and protection: Yazidi survivors of atrocities committed by ISIL", produced by the Human Rights Office of UNAMI and OHCHR, supported the conclusion that those crimes had been committed in a systematic and widespread manner, targeting and seeking to destroy the Yazidi group, in whole or in part. It was noted in the report that many of the crimes committed by ISIL may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and, possibly, genocide. The Government of Iraq was called on to take all actions necessary and make every effort, in strict compliance with applicable international humanitarian law and international human rights law, to put an end to human rights abuses perpetrated by ISIL and protect civilians from the effects of such abuses. Iraq was also urged to ensure that all allegations of serious abuses and crimes committed by ISIL members, as well as their superiors, were investigated promptly, independently, impartially and thoroughly, and that those responsible were brought to account.

11. Moreover, in the context of a joint project of the Human Rights Office and the Office for Political Affairs, both of UNAMI, the Human Rights Office has been working on a draft law on the rights of minorities with a view to ensuring compliance with international standards and coordinating advocacy efforts with civil society organizations. In addition, the Office is planning a follow-up meeting to the round table held in 2015, with a specially established committee tasked with developing recommendations for a national action plan to protect the ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural rights of minorities in Iraq. The aim of the meeting, which will involve the participation of representatives of minority groups, is

to discuss and adopt appropriate mechanisms for the implementation of the agreed recommendations before sharing them with the Government.

12. In March 2016, the OHCHR Regional Office for South-East Asia organized a workshop in Yala Province, southern Thailand, on how to document torture and ill-treatment. Twenty-five civil society representatives from the Malay-Muslim community attended the workshop. The topics covered included racial discrimination and profiling in the context of DNA collection. The Regional Office also continued to look closely into the situation of the Karen community in Kaeng Krachan National Park in Phetchaburi Province, urging Thai authorities to address outstanding land disputes before registering the park as a World Heritage Site. In addition, the Regional Office highlighted the need to hold comprehensive consultations with the affected communities, calling for the implementation of recommendations made by the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand in connection with this case.

13. In April, the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines and OHCHR organized a workshop to reinforce capacity in respect of the normative framework for the protection of the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples in Mindanao Province in the Philippines. The first workshop took place in Cotabato on 18 and 19 April and included government line agencies and regional commissions, civil society organizations and United Nations staff from the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. The second workshop took place in Davao on 21 and 22 April and included government line agencies, national commissions and civil society organizations. After the workshop, OHCHR was able to contribute to the revised draft national anti-discrimination legislation.

14. In June, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 29/21, the High Commissioner reported on the human rights violations and abuses against Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar (A/HRC/32/18). In the report, the High Commissioner highlighted in particular recent incidents of trafficking and forced displacement of Rohingya Muslims. He confirmed the urgent need to address the serious human rights violations affecting the Rohingya and other minorities. Much is expected of the new Government, which took office in April 2016, and there have been some early signs of acknowledgement that change is needed. The new Government has inherited laws and policies that deny fundamental rights to minorities, and decades of impunity for serious violations against these communities have encouraged ongoing violence against them. Considerable efforts to address violations against minorities must be made if the people of Myanmar are to be provided with a safe and peaceful environment and if Myanmar is to transition to sustainable development, democracy and peace.

15. On 14 and 15 June, the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission and OHCHR organized a workshop on the rights of minorities in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. Parliamentarians, representatives of the State, senior officials from various ministries, the Supreme Court and the Attorney-General's Office and members and staff of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission participated in the workshop, which sought to facilitate a discussion on international human rights standards and mechanisms that apply to minorities and identify ways to better protect the country's minorities.

16. In 2016, the National Commission for the State Language in Kyrgyzstan, with the support of the OHCHR Regional Office for Central Asia and the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, developed teaching and training materials for civil servants in the Kyrgyz language. This project is intended to support fluency in Kyrgyz in the light of the adoption of new legislation requiring that anyone wishing to obtain and keep a civil service position be fluent in the language by 2020. The main purpose was to prevent a decrease in the number of civil servants with a minority background. The Regional Office developed, introduced and piloted in two universities of southern Kyrgyzstan practical courses on intercultural education, covering minority rights, respect for diversity, the benefits of inter-

ethnic relations and non-discrimination. As a result, two universities introduced the course on intercultural education as an elective for the 2016/17 academic year. A third university in southern Kyrgyzstan will pilot the course in the 2016/17 academic year, pending its formal inclusion in the university curriculum. During the reporting period, the Regional Office worked extensively on encouraging the participation of ethnic minorities in the public and political life of Kyrgyzstan. It drafted a study on worldwide best practices to improve minority participation in political life — in the civil service in particular — and in consultative and elected bodies. The study, in which measures that could be applied in Kyrgyzstan are highlighted, was later used as core document for a national conference on minority participation.

17. In Serbia, OHCHR advised an expert working group on the development of a national Roma inclusion strategy 2016-2025 to ensure in particular employment and respect for human rights. OHCHR also participated in consultations on the adoption of a new national action plan on the rights of national minorities in Serbia. It created the methodology for the consultation process with the Roma community to ensure that the Roma people participated in and contributed to the development and implementation of the national action plan.

18. In Colombia, OHCHR focused on guaranteeing and protecting the rights of Afro-Colombians by increasing the use of national protection systems related to the principle of free, prior and informed consent. It supported the development of appropriate protocols for consultations involving people of African descent and third parties, thereby facilitating the inclusion of Afro-Colombians in the consultation process for the Departmental Growth Plan 2016-2019. In addition, OHCHR assisted Afro-Colombians in defending their right to traditional lands by providing advice, support and monitoring services. It also provided technical assistance to improve cooperation between Afro-Colombians and the Government at the local and national levels. This assistance focused on the inclusion of projects for ethnic minorities in local and national development plans and the incorporation of an ethnic dimension in the peace talks between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia — People's Army (FARC-EP). Finally, OHCHR supported the establishment, pursuant to decision T-576/14 of the Constitutional Court, of a national consultation space for the Afro-Colombian communities. The Office also attended the first session of the national consultation space, along with 220 representatives from Afro-Colombian communities and other organizations.

19. In cooperation with civil society, OHCHR in Tunisia has begun to assess and record cases of racial discrimination against black Tunisian minorities and foreigners residing in the country. The Office has set up a capacity-building programme, to benefit associations working to protect the minority rights of black Tunisians. At government level, after several discussions with the Ministry responsible for human rights, a working group on racial discrimination was established. A draft law to criminalize racism and racial discrimination, which will be considered by the Assembly of the Representatives of the People in the coming months, was submitted by a group of civil society associations.

20. OHCHR-Yemen has continued to document human rights violations, with a special focus on the rights of minority communities. Additionally, OHCHR has worked with United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors to establish a joint United Nations early warning system for the protection of civilians. A set of quantitative and qualitative indicators, including those on minorities, will be collected and will serve as a basis for an overview of the situation in Yemen. Minority communities have suffered the consequences of the ongoing conflict and have been especially vulnerable to arbitrary arrest. On 10 August 2016, 68 people, including women and 20 followers of the Baha'i faith, were arrested and held without charge in Sana'a prison, allegedly by the Yemeni National

Security Agency. Following a national campaign and efforts by OHCHR to press the Office of the President for their release, the majority were released.

B. Work to strengthen capacity

21. The eleventh anniversary of the annual Minorities Fellowship Programme, which was held from 7 to 25 November in Geneva, was celebrated in 2016. The Programme had two linguistic components, English and Russian, and the fellows came from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cameroon, Colombia, Egypt, India, Iraq, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Pakistan and Ukraine. The fellowship aims at providing human rights advocates from minority groups with in-depth knowledge of the United Nations human rights system in order to reinforce their advocacy skills and thereby enable more effective use of international human rights standards and mechanisms.

22. An evaluation of the Programme was conducted for an overview as to its impact on the professional progress of the fellows, as well as that of their organizations and communities. The evaluation indicated that following their training in Geneva, several fellows had organized local, national and regional capacity-building workshops on minority rights and others had aligned their organizations' activities with the work of treaty bodies and special procedures, thereby strengthening implementation, follow-up and monitoring of compliance with international human rights standards on the ground. For example, a former fellow from Colombia organized training in his organization for over 300 minority youth leaders on United Nations instruments and mechanisms specific to minorities.

23. A national component of the Fellowship Programme is run by OHCHR at its field presences. The fellowships run for between three and six months and are designed to provide on-the-job training for the fellows. This year, with a view to strengthening continuity of work on minority issues, two national fellows were posted to OHCHR country/field offices in Colombia and the Republic of Moldova and one to the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka. The fellow in Colombia was involved in efforts to support consultation with and engagement of people of African descent in the ongoing peace process. In Sri Lanka, the fellow was asked to support the preparation of the official country visit of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues in October 2017.

24. OHCHR held a capacity-building course on minority rights in the Republic of Moldova from 10 to 12 May 2016. The course was designed to help make the United Nations country team, representatives of national human rights institutions and civil society actors more effective advocates of the need for the State to improve its implementation of international and national standards in the field of minority rights. It was organized in furtherance of the guiding principles and recommendations established in the 2013 guidance note of the Secretary-General on racial discrimination and the protection of minorities.

25. Moreover, on 1 June, OHCHR participated in a European Parliament hearing in Brussels on linguistic diversity and language discrimination in the European Union. OHCHR was represented on two panels: one on the European and international norms on regional or minority language rights and another on better implementation of existing mechanisms.

26. On 24 November, OHCHR organized a side event on promoting and protecting minority rights through visual art during the Forum on Minority Issues to raise awareness of anti-discrimination and minority rights. Three cartoonists were chosen to produce compelling cartoons that portray the need to protect minority rights while sending the message that securing minority rights leads to stability and peace. The cartoonists were Ángel Boligán Corbo (Cuba), Godfrey Mwampembwa (Kenya) and Hani Abbas (Syrian

Arab Republic). The event was moderated by the cartoonist Patrick Chapatte (Switzerland). These cartoons served as the basis for a panel discussion on the role of visual art in the promotion and protection of minorities.

27. Efforts are being made by different parts of the United Nations and Governments to counter extremism and violence against minorities, and it must be acknowledged that every effort to promote understanding helps ensure that the situation does not worsen. It is clear, however, that much more needs to be done to protect minorities. Hence, conveying public messages anchored in our commonalities instead of our differences can serve to dilute prejudices and draw attention to the contributions of diversity.

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

28. In order to enhance the combined impact of the work of the United Nations system in this area, the Secretary-General, on 6 March 2012, established the United Nations network on racial discrimination and protection of minorities. A four-year action plan was developed in 2013 to support the network in achieving the full aims of the guidance note.

29. To take stock of the recent strategies deployed to use the action plan to achieve those aims, network members held a meeting in October 2016. Discussions also revolved around the end of the four-year implementation period in 2017. In addition, the meeting provided a forum for an update on and overview of the International Decade for People of African Descent.

30. In 2016, as coordinator of the United Nations network, OHCHR finalized the development of a guidance tool on descent-based discrimination that takes into consideration the key challenges and strategic approaches involved in combating caste-based and analogous forms of discrimination. A launch event, to be held to design strategies for strengthening advocacy efforts and thus to promote and protect rights, is planned for early 2017.

IV. Human Rights Council and its mechanisms

A. Special procedures

1. Thematic rapporteurs

31. In March 2016, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues presented her annual thematic report (A/HRC/31/56), which dealt with minorities and discrimination based on caste and analogous systems of inherited status, to the Human Rights Council at its thirty-first session.

32. The Special Rapporteur identified a number of areas of particular concern in relation to caste and analogous systems: the right to life and physical integrity, access to justice and policing, the right to political participation, freedom of religion or belief, the right to work, intersectionality between caste and contemporary forms of slavery, the right to housing and the right to water and sanitation, the right to health, the right to education and humanitarian assistance. In particular, she highlighted the situation of caste-affected women and girls, as caste is a factor that leads to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and women and girls from low castes are particularly vulnerable to violation and denial of their rights. The Special Rapporteur also recommended initiatives and good practices to address caste-based discrimination. They included the focus by the United Nations system, including human rights treaty bodies and special procedures, on caste-based and similar forms of

discrimination; the adoption of national legislation and special measures to enable States to take steps to protect caste-affected communities; and civil society efforts to advance the cause of caste-affected communities through advocacy, networking and specific programmes and campaigns.

33. In a statement delivered on 8 March and 2 August 2016, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide called for stronger measures to address the stigmatization, hatred, fear and dehumanization of Roma around the world.

34. On 8 March, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues also delivered a statement in relation to her official visit to Iraq from 27 February to 7 March 2016. In that statement, she noted that ethnic and religious minorities had been disproportionately affected by the violence and atrocities committed by ISIL.

35. On 15 April, with regard to Roma in Kosovo,¹ the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons called on the United Nations to implement the relevant opinion issued by the Human Rights Advisory Panel.

36. On 30 June, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues delivered a statement on her official visit to the Republic of Moldova from 20 to 29 June 2016. In that statement, she noted that minorities needed to participate more fully in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation affecting their rights and that the Government needed to increase its support for minority languages.

37. In June, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons presented his annual thematic report (A/HRC/32/35) to the Human Rights Council at its thirty-second session, held from 13 June to 1 July and on 8 July. In his report, the Special Rapporteur noted that ethnic, religious and other minorities were often overrepresented in internally displaced person populations and that their unique challenges and situations must be recognized.

38. In the same month, the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association presented his annual thematic report (A/HRC/32/36) to the Human Rights Council at its thirty-second session. In his report, the Special Rapporteur noted that States had a positive duty to protect the rights of religious minorities to peaceful assembly and association, as well as to protect them from attacks by non-State actors and ensure accountability when such attacks occur. He also expressed concern about restrictions on the right of minorities to practise their religions, use their languages and learn about their cultures and history.

39. The Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, presented her report (A/HRC/32/41) on the linkage between trafficking in persons and conflict to the Human Rights Council at its thirty-second session. In the report, she highlighted how sexual violence in conflict zones contributed to the forced internal displacement of ethnic minority women and girls and noted that such displacement exposed ethnic minority women and girls to a greater risk of trafficking. She emphasized that minorities in conflict-affected areas must be protected from trafficking and that further research on that issue and on the link between trafficking and xenophobia was required.

40. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, presented her report (A/HRC/32/42/Add.3) on her mission to Georgia to the Human Rights

¹ All references to Kosovo in the present document should be understood to be in compliance with Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

Council at its thirty-second session. She noted that child and/or forced marriages and selective abortions — if the unborn child is a girl — were more common among ethnic minority populations and that women belonging to minority groups were more vulnerable to violence. Language barriers, in particular the lack of interpretation services, could also prevent these women from reporting cases of violence. She recommended that support services for victims of violence be made available in all ethnic minority languages.

41. The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance presented his report (A/HRC/32/50) on the phenomenon of xenophobia to the Human Rights Council at its thirty-second session. In the report, the Special Rapporteur outlined key elements that must be considered to combat xenophobia, including forms of xenophobia targeting minorities. He argued that responses to xenophobia and discrimination must be conscious of the risk of facilitating further abuse or heightening existing vulnerability. In this respect, the Special Rapporteur gave examples of legislation that was designed to combat hate speech but that was instead used against the ethnic and religious minorities it had been intended to protect. He recommended the implementation of international standards at the national level to strengthen the rule of law, particularly those that recognize and protect the rights of minorities.

42. In September, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, presented her report (A/HRC/33/46) to the Human Rights Council at its thirty-third session. In that report, she focused specifically on the issue of debt bondage as a key form of contemporary slavery. She emphasized that debt bondage was a worldwide phenomenon, which disproportionately affected vulnerable people such as minorities, and that limited access to education as a result of discrimination against children belonging to minority groups increased their vulnerability to exploitation and therefore debt bondage.

2. Country rapporteurs

43. In March 2016, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran presented his report (A/HRC/31/69) to the Human Rights Council at its thirty-first session. In the report, he expressed serious concern about the situation of adherents to the Baha'i faith and about the treatment of Iranian Christians of Muslim background and other religious minorities.

44. In the same month, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar presented her report (A/HRC/31/71) to the Human Rights Council at its thirty-first session. In her report, she called upon the new Government to end the policies and practices that led to discrimination against the Rohingya and other Muslim communities in Rakhine State and to ensure that the right to health was upheld for the entire population in Rakhine. The Special Rapporteur also highlighted that most Rohingya and other non-citizen minorities did not have identity documents and that members of civil society and human rights defenders who advocated for the rights of minority groups were often harassed and threatened.

45. In September, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia presented her report (A/HRC/33/62) to the Human Rights Council at its thirty-third session. In that report, the Special Rapporteur noted that three cases were ongoing at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts, including the hearing of case No. 002/02 on charges that included the genocide of Cham and Vietnamese minorities. She also highlighted the multilingual education plan of action launched by the Government in 2016, which sought to build on earlier programmes of bilingual education for ethnic minority children. The Special Rapporteur noted that this plan of action should be encouraged and supported with adequate funding.

B. Forum on Minority Issues

46. The Forum on Minority Issues, established by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 6/15, and renewed in resolution 19/23, provides an annual platform for dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

47. The Forum's ninth session, on the topic of minorities in situations of humanitarian crisis, was held on 24 and 25 November 2016. Forum participants reflected on the specific needs of minorities and the disproportionate impact they dealt with during humanitarian crises such as conflict, disaster and pandemics. Participants also examined the challenges faced by minorities seeking to return to a situation of normality after a crisis had ended. The participants finalized a set of draft recommendations on minorities in situations of humanitarian crisis to be adopted by the Human Rights Council in March 2017.

48. The Forum on Minority Issues is an essential component in the efforts deployed by the United Nations to promote implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. The final recommendations made during each session are shaped from the diverse experiences of minorities, Governments and others. They are based on international human rights norms and offer action-oriented solutions of practical value to all stakeholders and that can be applied to a variety of national or minority-specific contexts.

C. Universal periodic review

49. The Human Rights Council adopted the reports of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review on numerous States at its thirty-first, thirty-second and thirty-third sessions.

50. In the above-mentioned reports, several States made recommendations relating to the following: (a) adopting measures to combat racism, discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance against minorities; (b) adopting specific strategies to ensure the rights of minorities to quality education, health, water, sanitation, land and other social and public services; (c) adopting legislative and public policy measures to ensure the protection and promotion of the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of minorities; (d) assisting and protecting minorities displaced due to natural disasters or conflict; and (e) taking necessary measures to tackle hate speech, violence and incitement to hatred against minorities and ensuring that these acts are appropriately investigated and sanctioned.

51. Other recommendations were made on: (a) promoting diverse cultural identities, tolerance, intercultural understanding and the practice of multiculturalism; (b) ensuring that minorities are not denied their right to full and equal citizenship; (c) conducting awareness-raising campaigns and activities on the rights of minorities; (d) implementing measures to register the birth of children belonging to minority groups; (e) ensuring the preservation and use of minority languages, including in education, textbooks, mass media and the press, and the right to use minority languages in court proceedings in order to secure due process; (f) implementing strategies to allow for the meaningful participation of representatives from minority communities in political decision-making processes at the local, regional and national levels; and (g) ensuring religious and cultural freedom in relation to ethnic and religious minorities.

V. Human rights treaty bodies

52. The United Nations treaty bodies prepared a joint submission for the 2016 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development held from 10 to 19 July in New York. The paper focused on the role of the human rights treaty bodies in supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. International human rights treaties are particularly relevant to the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind”, as they focus on the rights of persons who are often left behind, including national, ethnic and racial minorities. In addition, treaty bodies have noted that inequalities are increasingly stark and can take many forms, including gender inequality, inequality on the basis of age, racial inequality, inequality between minority and majority groups and income and wealth inequality, to name but a few.

A. Committee on the Rights of the Child

53. The concluding observations on the reports of Brunei Darussalam (CRC/C/BRN/CO/2-3), France (CRC/C/FRA/CO/5), Iran (Islamic Republic of) (CRC/C/IRN/CO/3-4), Ireland (CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4) and Peru (CRC/C/PER/CO/4-5), adopted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child at its seventy-first session, addressed issues affecting minorities.

54. The Committee recommended that Brunei Darussalam guarantee the right to freedom of religion for children and combat religious intolerance.

55. With regard to France, the Committee expressed concern over the persistence of racial discrimination, stigmatization and forced eviction of Roma children and recommended that the State party increase its budget allocation to Roma children.

56. In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Committee recommended that the State party put an end to discrimination, persecution, imprisonment and ill-treatment of religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities, in particular members of the Baha’i faith.

57. Ireland was called upon to ensure that children can opt out of religious classes and have access to appropriate alternatives to these classes. The State party was also urged to take measures to address the structural discrimination against Roma children.

58. In the case of Peru, the Committee recommended that the State party ensure that children have access to information in minority languages.

59. The concluding observations on the reports of Bulgaria (CRC/C/BGR/CO/3-5) and Nepal (CRC/C/NPL/CO/3-5), adopted by the Committee at its seventy-second session, dealt with minority issues.

60. Bulgaria was urged to address negative attitudes, prevent hate speech towards Roma and facilitate the access of Roma children to social protection measures and social integration programmes.

61. The Committee recommended that Nepal ensure that children belonging to minority groups are able to access water supplies, education and health-care and social services.

62. The concluding observations on the reports of Saudi Arabia (CRC/C/SAU/CO/3-4) and Suriname (CRC/C/SUR/CO/3-4), adopted by the Committee at its seventy-third session, addressed minority issues.

63. With regard to Saudi Arabia, the Committee expressed concern over children belonging to Shia families and other religious minorities who remain subject to persistent discrimination in the State party.

64. Suriname was invited to take measures to encourage the practice of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, with a particular focus on minority communities.

B. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

65. The concluding observations on the reports of Czechia (CEDAW/C/CZE/CO/6), Japan (CEDAW/C/JPN/CO/7-8) and Sweden (CEDAW/C/SWE/CO/8-9), adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at its sixty-third session, addressed issues affecting minorities.

66. The Committee called upon Czechia to adopt measures to prevent trafficking in Roma women. It also made several recommendations about Roma women and girls, in connection with politics and public administration, poverty, disaggregated data and education.

67. The Committee recommended that Japan eliminate discrimination against ethnic minority women and adopt measures to prohibit and sanction sexist speech and propaganda advocating racial superiority, hatred and attacks against women belonging to minority groups.

68. With regard to Sweden, the Committee expressed concern that women belonging to minority groups continue to face widespread discrimination in a myriad of areas.

69. The concluding observations on the reports of Albania (CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/4), France (CEDAW/C/FRA/CO/7-8), Myanmar (CEDAW/C/MMR/CO/4-5) and Turkey (CEDAW/C/TUR/CO/7), adopted by the Committee at its sixty-fourth session, dealt with the rights of minorities.

70. The Committee recommended that Albania reduce school dropout rates among Roma girls, provide access to education for all children belonging to minority groups and ensure equal access to the formal labour market for women belonging to linguistic and ethnic minorities.

71. France was encouraged to combat all forms of discrimination against minority women, including by improving employment opportunities and access to education.

72. The Committee made a number of recommendations to Myanmar about ethnic minority women, such as the Rohingya.

73. Turkey was called upon to ensure that Kurdish women and other minority women have access to sexual and reproductive health services.

C. Human Rights Committee

74. The concluding observations on the reports of Slovenia (CCPR/C/SVN/CO/3) and Sweden (CCPR/C/SWE/CO/7), adopted by the Human Rights Committee at its 116th session, addressed minority issues.

75. The Committee expressed concern about the use of racist and xenophobic rhetoric by Slovene political figures and recommended that Slovenia strengthen its efforts to prevent and eradicate all forms of racism and xenophobia.

76. Sweden was asked to redouble its efforts to combat racist and xenophobic violence, hate speech and attacks against religious minorities, as well as negative stereotyping of ethnic and religious minorities.

D. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

77. The concluding observations on the reports of Slovakia (CRPD/C/SVK/CO/1) and Thailand (CRPD/C/THA/CO/1), adopted by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at its fifteenth session, covered issues affecting minorities.

78. In the case of Slovakia, the Committee recommended that the State party promote the rights of Roma with disabilities and ensure their full participation in the development and implementation of disability-relevant legislation and policies.

79. With regard to Thailand, the Committee expressed concern about persons with disabilities living in situations of poverty, particularly those belonging to ethnic minority groups, and recommended that the State party adopt a strategy for guaranteeing their full protection against discrimination.

E. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

80. The concluding observations on the reports of Azerbaijan (CERD/C/AZE/CO/7-9), Georgia (CERD/C/GEO/CO/6-8), Namibia (CERD/C/NAM/CO/13-15) and Spain (CERD/C/ESP/CO/21-23), adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination at its eighty-ninth session, addressed the rights of minorities.

81. Azerbaijan was called upon to accelerate the adoption of a law on minorities to guarantee their rights and freedoms and collect disaggregated data on the situation of ethnic minorities in relation to inequality and discrimination.

82. With regard to Georgia, the Committee expressed concern about physical attacks against ethnic and religious minorities and the lack of disaggregated data.

83. The Committee recommended that Namibia strengthen its education outreach programmes for ethnic minorities.

84. Spain was called upon to take steps to combat negative stereotypes, incitement to hatred and racial discrimination of minority groups in the media.

85. The concluding observations on the reports of Greece (CERD/C/GRC/CO/20-22), Pakistan (CERD/C/PAK/CO/21-23), Sri Lanka (CERD/C/LKA/CO/10-17) and Ukraine (CERD/C/UKR/CO/22-23), adopted by the Committee at its ninetieth session, touched on issues affecting minorities.

86. Greece was advised to collect disaggregated data on religious minorities and consider recognizing groups that may qualify as ethnic or religious minorities.

87. It was recommended to Pakistan that it end violence against minority groups, combat the segregation of members of these communities, broaden its definition of minorities and collect disaggregated data on minority groups.

88. Sri Lanka was called upon to ensure that the places of worship of ethnic religious minorities were safe, protect the rights of such minorities without discrimination and address underlying tensions and discriminatory attitudes.

89. The Committee recommended that Ukraine combat discriminatory acts, find solutions for internally displaced persons and implement national strategies on the situation of Roma.

F. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

90. The concluding observations on the reports of Angola (E/C.12/AGO/CO/4-5), France (E/C.12/FRA/CO/4), Sweden (E/C.12/SWE/CO/6), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (E/C.12/MKD/CO/2-4) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (E/C.12/GBR/CO/6), adopted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its fifty-eighth session, addressed minority issues.

91. The Committee recommended that Angola implement measures to promote and preserve minority languages.

92. In the case of France, the Committee recommended that the State party officially recognize the need to protect the cultural rights of minority groups, collect disaggregated data on ethnic minorities and recognize and promote the rights of peoples belonging to linguistic minorities.

93. The Committee recommended that Sweden continue public awareness-raising campaigns on violence against women belonging to ethnic minorities and that it ensure that children belonging to minority groups can develop skills in their mother tongue through bilingual education.

94. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was called upon to intensify its efforts to eradicate structural discrimination against Roma and improve their socioeconomic status.

95. With regard to the United Kingdom, the Committee expressed concern that minorities are still affected by unemployment, poverty and educational inequalities. The Committee recommended that the State party ensure that undocumented Roma have access to health-care services and culturally appropriate accommodation provided without discrimination.

96. The concluding observations on the reports of Cyprus (E/C.12/CYP/CO/6), Lebanon (E/C.12/LBN/CO/2) and Poland (E/C.12/POL/CO/6), adopted by the Committee at its fifty-ninth session, dealt with the rights of minorities.

97. With regard to Cyprus, the Committee expressed concern about the persistent discrimination against members of ethnic minorities, in particular Roma.

98. In the case of Lebanon, the Committee recommended that the State party ensure that its legal framework on the rights of ethnic minorities complies with international standards. It also recommended that the State party protect and promote the cultural rights of all ethnic minorities, including the Dom and Bedouins, without discrimination.

99. Poland was encouraged to intensify its efforts to preserve the cultural heritage and cultural identity of national and ethnic minorities.

VI. Conclusions

100. **The year 2016 was marked by an increase in reported incidents of discrimination, bigotry and xenophobia in many countries, sometimes leading to violent extremism, and the commission of international crimes by State and non-State actors. Violent extremism is challenging shared values of peace, justice and human dignity and making it harder to protect minorities from killings and atrocities, particularly in some parts of the world.**

101. **At the same time, discrimination and the exclusion of minorities must not be allowed to undermine development opportunities and progress. Efforts to tackle development challenges, reduce poverty and implement the 2030 Agenda for**

Sustainable Development must benefit all people, including minorities, without discrimination. As the 2030 Agenda advances, it is vital for OHCHR to continue influencing action by both United Nations partners and States with regard to the rights of national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities so as to ensure that no one is left behind and that minorities, whose voices are frequently excluded from policy dialogue on minority issues, participate fully and effectively in public life.

102. OHCHR continues to provide support to States, national human rights institutions and civil society, including by helping strengthen the capacity at the national level to tackle the exclusion and lack of participation of minorities. The Minorities Fellowship Programme is as a prime example in this regard, as it serves as an important catalyst for strengthening the capacity of minorities to engage in key processes. However, it is vital for these steps to be taken in concert. States must do more, including by moving towards a major and comprehensive effort to address the entrenched discrimination against minorities, especially those who have suffered as a result of impunity for serious violations of their rights. Minority issues are complex and must be addressed through contextualized measures. Practices that work at the national level tend also to involve legislative and policy measures that take into consideration the circumstances on the ground and encourage inter-ethnic and interreligious interaction and dialogue, while protecting distinct identities.

103. Overall, efforts to improve protection and prevent tension must involve society at large — majorities and minorities and the dominant and non-dominant sectors of society — while ensuring the participation of minority women.
