



GLOBAL MINORITY RIGHTS NEWSLETTER

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SPECIAL RAPPOORTEUR ON MINORITY ISSUES

Special Rapporteur Publishes Report on Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities

On 11 March, 2020, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Fernand de Varennes, presented a report on his activities to the UN Human Rights Council. In addition to detailing his activities over the last year, the report focuses on one of the main thematic focuses of the Special Rapporteur's mandate: education, language and the human rights of minorities. It discusses the three regional forums convened on this issue in 2019, the growing visibility of language in education as a human rights issue, interpretation of this issue by United Nations treaty bodies, as well as human rights obligations and the

use of minority languages in education.

According to the Special Rapporteur, "education in a minority's mother tongue, combined with quality teaching of the official language, is more cost-effective in the long term; reduces dropout rates; leads to noticeably better academic results, particularly for girls; improves levels of literacy and fluency in both the mother tongue and the official or majority language; and leads to greater family and community involvement."

More information about the report can be found on the [website of the OHCHR](#). The full report is available [here](#).

Special Rapporteur Issues Statement on COVID-19 and Minorities

The Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Fernand de Varennes, issued a statement on the situation of minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. De Varennes emphasized that “COVID-19 is not just a health issue, it can also be a virus that exacerbates xenophobia, hate and exclusion,” and condemned the fact that the pandemic is being used to exclude minorities and deny medical care to migrants in various parts of the world.

According to the Special Rapporteur, “the world’s most vulnerable are often the last in line for support. The international community and States must therefore work closely together to inform, help, and protect them. That includes communicating with them in their own languages where possible to effectively transmit vital public health

information and care, as well as enforcing measures for their protection against physical abuse and hate speech.”

In addition to this statement, the Special Rapporteur also joined other UN experts to affirm that everyone has the right to life-saving interventions. The experts noted that “the COVID-19 crisis cannot be solved with public health and emergency measures only; all other human rights must be addressed too.”

“States must take additional social protection measures so that their support reaches those who are at most risk of being disproportionately affected by the crisis,” stated the experts.

The full statements can be found on the [website of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues](#).

Special Rapporteur Honors the Victims of the Holocaust

January 27 marks the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Since 2005, the UN commemorates the 6 million Jewish and 11 million other victims of the Holocaust on this day, which coincides with the anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. In a joint statement on this occasion, the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Fernand de Varennes, and other UN human rights experts emphasized that antisemitic hatred and violence is again on the rise around the world, and that states must ensure effective education, training and awareness-raising programs to combat antisemitic stereotypes and prejudices at all levels of society.

“With profound sadness and outrage, we, as United Nations human rights experts, mark 75 years since the liberation of the notorious Nazi death camp, Auschwitz, with alarm. On this solemn commemoration, designated as International Holocaust Remembrance Day, States around the world are failing to sufficiently counter antisemitic violence, discrimination, and hostility within their societies or to ensure that their populations are appropriately educated about the Holocaust.

Driven by recognition of the need to repudiate the ‘disregard and contempt for human rights’ that occurred during the Holocaust, ‘We the peoples’ demanded and the young United Nations itself proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Since then, all

Member States have committed themselves to ensure that all members of society are able to enjoy their human rights, including by protecting members of minority communities against hate crimes and discrimination.

The legal framework affirming and protecting the human rights of all is a key legacy of the Holocaust’s victims -- including the 6 million Jews who, alongside members of other targeted groups, were murdered in a uniquely brutal, systematic and state-sanctioned campaign of antisemitic dehumanization and persecution.”

Other high-ranking UN officials addressed the International Holocaust Remembrance Day in speeches and statements, including UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, who stated that “there is a global crisis of antisemitic hatred; a constant stream of attacks targeting Jews, their institutions and property”. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet emphasized: “We must stand together against this normalization of hatred. We must push back against this slowly rising tide of antisemitism, xenophobia and other attempts to deprive specific categories of people of their humanity and rights.” The United Nations Holocaust Remembrance Ceremony took place in New York.

The Special Rapporteurs full statement is available [on the OHCHR’s webpage](#).



Special Rapporteur Publishes New Report on the Situation in Spain

During the recent session of the Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur presented a report on his visit to Spain in 2019. During his visit, he met with members of minorities, civil society organizations and government officials in Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, Santiago de Compostela, Seville and Vitoria-Gasteiz. The report on this visit describes the legal and institutional framework for the protection of minority rights. The Special Rapporteur highlights several positive measures carried out by Spain, including the Roma Integration Strategy for 2012-2020 and the implementation of a course on “Education for citizenship and human rights” in its educational system. He also analyzes several areas of concern and discusses specific issues, such as discrimination against Roma, language rights, participation in public life, and the situation of the deaf community.

The reports can be found [on the website of the OHCHR](#). A related press release can be found [here](#).

Special Rapporteur and Other UN Experts Urge Myanmar to End Internet Shutdown and Violence

In February 2020, the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues and other UN experts expressed their concern over the situation in Myanmar. On 3 February, 2020, authorities suspended mobile internet services in several regions of the country. Since 4 February, 2020 experts received information that severe military activities were carried out in these regions. Reports indicate that up to 1,100 people have been displaced.

“Civilians, including children, continue to bear the brunt of this escalating conflict. We are especially fearful for them as violence has increased in the areas where an internet shutdown was recently re-imposed. It is well known that human rights violations and abuses occur during security operations in Myanmar.

We are gravely concerned that children are being killed and injured, and that reports suggest weapons are being used indiscriminately, and precautions are not being taken to protect civilians and civilian objects such as schools and monasteries, in violation of international humanitarian law. We note that the International Court of Justice ordered the provisional measures in relation to the Rohingya minority and they must be followed,” stated the experts.

More information is available [on the OHCHR’s website](#).



“Propagation of hate against minorities online must be stopped”, Special Rapporteur Says

On 27 February, 2020, the Special Rapporteur published a statement regarding the dangers caused by online hate speech in modern societies. “The last decade has seen minorities around the world facing new and growing threats, fueled by hate and bigotry being spewed through social media platforms. This has contributed to the rise of violent extremist groups and to a dramatic increase in many countries of hate crimes targeting religious, ethnic and other minorities, including migrants.

International Women’s Day 2020

The United Nations designated 8 March as International Women’s Day. In a joint statement commemorating this day, the Special Rapporteur and other UN experts underlined the importance of fighting for women’s equality. They called for an intersectional approach to understand and effectively work against the discrimination experienced by women on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability status, and other grounds.

“Women’s and girls’ activism and autonomous movements have been the driving forces behind the advancement of women’s human rights and gender equality, and remain ever essential. Women and girls have been at the forefront of movements for change around the world. But 25 years on from the Beijing Platform of Action, responsibility for progress cannot continue to lie solely on the shoulders of women. While women continue to lead the struggle for equality, men are now more than ever called upon to be a part of movements for gender equality and become women’s human rights defenders.

Men and boys need to stand with women and girls as allies in the fight for gender equality and demand an end to impunity and accountability for violations of women’s rights and access to justice. Discrimination against women and girls is a human rights violation which must not be tolerated and States must be held accountable for implementing international standards guaranteeing women’s and girls’ human rights and achieving substantive gender equality. Structural causes for inequality and deeply entrenched discriminatory attitudes and practices

The more hate speech is widespread, the more it becomes part of the mainstream and creates a permissive and toxic environment where calls for violence against the ‘hated’ group, usually a minority, become normalized. This propagation of hate against minorities online must be stopped”, stated the Special Rapporteur.

More information can be found [on the homepage of the OHCHR](#).

must be tackled in order to achieve gender equality and a sustainable future for all.

On the occasion of International Women’s Day, we call for immediate actions for ending discrimination against women and girls. The time to act is now. International Women’s Day has been observed for over a century in different parts of the world. Since the United Nations’ proclamation of 8 March as the Day for Women’s Rights and World Peace in 1977, much has been accomplished, by the international community collectively and by countries individually. An important groundbreaking international human rights treaty, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, was adopted in 1979, imposing legal obligations on States to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in all areas of life.

The World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 declared for the first time that women’s rights are human rights. The United Nations convened its Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace in 1995 and adopted a comprehensive plan to advance women’s right to equality – the Beijing Platform for Action. Gender equality is included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015, both as a stand-alone goal and mainstreamed throughout all goals. Many constitutional and legal reforms to integrate women’s human rights fully into domestic law have occurred and many countries have eliminated discriminatory laws”, stated the experts.

More information about International Women’s Day is available [on the website of the OHCHR](#).

OTHER

UNITED NATIONS

NEWS

“Minorities, Indigenous People, Migrants, Refugees, the LGBTI Community are Vilified as the ‘Other’ and Tormented by Acts of Hate”, UN Secretary-General Says

In February 2020, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, emphasized the role of minority rights in a statement to the UN Human Rights Council. “Over the decades, the efforts of many have ushered in massive human rights gains on all continents. Colonial rule and apartheid were overcome. Dictatorships have fallen. Democracy has spread. Landmark covenants spell out the full range of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. A robust treaty-based system is in place, along with special procedures and accountability mechanisms. One billion people have been lifted out of poverty in a generation. We have seen big advances in access to drinking water – and big declines in child mortality. And all our societies have benefitted from human rights movements led by women, young people, minorities, indigenous peoples and others.

Yet, human rights today face growing challenges. No country is immune. We see civilians trapped in war-torn enclaves, starved and bombarded in clear violation of international law. Human trafficking affecting every region in the world, preying on vulnerability and despair. Women and girls enslaved, exploited and abused, denied the ability to make the most of their potential. Civil society activists tossed in jail, and religious and ethnic minorities



groups detained, under overly broad definitions of national security. Journalists killed or harassed for seeking only to do their jobs. Minorities, indigenous people, migrants, refugees, the LGBTI community vilified as the ‘other’ and tormented by acts of hate,” he said.

The statement is available [on the Secretary-General’s website](#).



United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Publishes Report on Minority Rights

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights presented its 2019 report on the human rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities during the 43rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council. The report discusses the relationship between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the rights of minority communities, and how the principle of leaving no one behind aims to eradicate discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, language or religion, among other things.

The report also summarizes the activities of the OHCHR in relation to the promotion of minority rights. It addresses the situation in India and of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar, as well as the horrific attacks on minority communities in Mali and other minority rights violations in Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. The report pointed out that it was remarkable that no attacks against Roma settlements in Ukraine were reported in 2019, while 5 such attacks occurred in 2018. The OHCHR also carried out activities related to issues such as combatting non-discrimination and hate speech, religious minorities, empowerment and participation, minority youth, Roma communities and other minority rights issues.

The Report can be accessed [through the UN Official Document System](#).

The UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance Calls on States to Take Action against COVID-19-related Xenophobia and Racial Discrimination

On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial discrimination, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, *E. Tendayi Achiume*, published a statement about current developments connected with the *COVID-19 pandemic*, which has led to a rise in xenophobic and racist remarks by politicians and state officials, as well as to an increase in online hate speech.

“It’s dismaying to witness State officials—including the President of the United States—adopting alternative names for the COVID-19 coronavirus. Instead of using the internationally recognized name of the virus, these officials have adopted names with geographic references, typically referring to its emergence in China.

This sort of calculated use of a geographic-based name for this virus is rooted in and fosters racism and xenophobia. In this case, it serves to isolate and stigmatize individuals who are or are perceived to be of Chinese or other East Asian descent.

COVID-19-related expressions of racism and xenophobia online have included harassment, hate speech, proliferation of discriminatory stereotypes, and conspiracy theories. Not surprisingly, leaders who are attempting to attribute COVID-19 to certain national or ethnic groups are the very same nationalist populist leaders who have made racist and xenophobic rhetoric central to their political platforms.

Political responses to the COVID-19 outbreak that stigmatize, exclude, and make certain populations more vulnerable to violence are inexcusable, unconscionable, and inconsistent with States' international human rights law obligations.

Furthermore, political rhetoric and policy that stokes fear and diminish the equality of all people is counterproductive. To treat and combat the spread of COVID-19 effectively, individuals must have access to accurate health advice and sufficient healthcare without fear of discrimination", the Special Rapporteur stated.

The statement of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance is available online on the [website of the OHCHR](#).

New International Labour Organization Report on Indigenous Peoples

The International Labour Organization published a new report titled "Implementing the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169 - Towards an inclusive, sustainable and just future". This comprehensive study analyzes the working conditions of members of the world's indigenous populations and the effects of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention. It is comprised of five sections:

1. Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and the Quest for Social Justice;
2. Overcoming Invisibility;
3. Unpacking Inequalities;
4. Building Institutional Responses;
5. Towards an Inclusive, Sustainable and Just Future.

The authors emphasize that 63.3% of indigenous peoples are employed (compared to 59.1% of non-indigenous people). However, the conditions of their employment are often poor, and they are more likely to be part of the

informal economy. The wage gap between indigenous and non-indigenous persons is highest in Latin America and the Caribbean (31.2 %) and lowest in Northern America (7.9 % compared to a global average of 18.5 %). 55% of the indigenous population works in agriculture, and over 50% are self-employed.

The report is available [on the homepage of the International Labor Organization](#).

UN Report on Ethnic Violence in Congo Published

The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo recently published a report documenting high levels of violence in Congo's Ituri province between December 2017 and September 2019. The two ethnic groups of the Ituri province, the Lendu and the Hema, have been in conflict for many years now. The investigation found that at least 701 people have been killed since the conflict flared up again. The majority of the victims belong to the Hema ethnic group, but members of other ethnic groups have also been affected. According to the experts, these incidents may amount to crimes against humanity.

"The barbarity that characterizes these attacks, including the beheading of women and children with machetes, the dismemberment and removal of body parts of the victims as trophies of war, reflects the desire of the attackers to inflict lasting trauma to the Hema communities and to force them to flee and not return to their villages," the report said.

Such a strategy has already been partly successful, as 57,000 people have taken refuge in neighboring Uganda, and more than 556,000 have fled the territories of Djugu and Mahagi. The report calls upon the Congolese authorities to promote the reconciliation process and carry out further investigations.

More information is available [on the website of the OHCHR](#).



Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent Visits Peru

The UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent visited Peru from 25 February to 4 March, 2020. The Working Group visited Lima, Yapatara, Piura, Chiclayo, Chincha, and Ica and met with civil society and minority representatives, as well as with government officials. On 4 March, the Working Group presented its preliminary findings and recommendations. They addressed the severe discrimination faced by the Afro-Peruvian community. According to a survey carried out in 2017, 60% of Peruvians have perceived racial discrimination against Afro-Peruvian people, while only 8% of Peruvians perceive themselves to be racist. The Afro-Peruvian community suffers from unequal access to health care, education and housing.

Ahmed Reid, chair of the Working Group, presented their statement at the end of the mission. “The Peruvian Government should fully implement its anti-discrimination regulatory framework that will promote social inclusion and reduce the high levels of inequality and poverty experienced by Afro-Peruvians. We welcome the many good practices and positive steps taken by the Government to guarantee the human rights of people of African descent in Peru. We also applaud the efforts made to promote the rights of Afro-Peruvians by the Afro-Peruvian civil society, human rights defenders, lawyers and academics whom we met,” he said.

A report about the visit will be presented in September 2020. More information is available on [the OHCHR’s website](#).

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Commemorates Midterm Review of the International Decade for People of African Descent

On 13 March, 2020, during the 43rd session of the Human Rights Council, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michele Bachelet, made a statement commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the midterm review of the International Decade for People of African Descent.

“Throughout the world—and regardless of whether they are descendants of victims of enslavement, or recent migrants—people of African descent endure intolerable discrimination and constitute some of the poorest and most marginalized groups. Acknowledging this [...] the General Assembly established the International Decade for People of African Descent. The midterm review, which the General Assembly will convene this year, will be an opportunity for Member States to assess the Decade’s progress, share good practices, and decide on further actions.”

Bachelet called upon states to establish a Permanent Forum on people of African descent, which would work to develop a UN declaration on the human rights of people of African descent. In addition, she highlighted regional initiatives aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of people of African descent, such as the African Union’s International Decade for Africa, the Organization of American States’ Plan of Action for the Decade, and the resolution on the Fundamental Rights of People of African Descent adopted by the European Parliament.

The High Commissioner’s full statement is available on the [website of the OHCHR](#).

“Bachelet called upon states to establish a Permanent Forum on people of African descent, which would work to develop a UN declaration on the human rights of people of African descent.”

UN Expert on Indigenous Peoples' Rights Visits Greenland and Denmark

From March 10 to 19, 2020 UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, visited Greenland and Denmark. She analyzed the situation of Greenlanders in Denmark and Greenland's system of self-government, while also collecting information about the administration of justice, the situation of children and youth, housing, access to health services including mental health, climate change and the right to development and natural resources. The Special Rapporteur met with various different stakeholders, including indigenous rights activists, state officials, academics and UN staff members.

"Despite progress, important challenges have been brought to my attention, including in relation to the protection of the rights of children. I look forward to meeting first-hand with Greenlanders to understand these challenges as well as the measures taken to address them," Tauli-Corpuz said before her departure. A report about her visit will be published in September 2020.

More information is available on [the OHCHR's website](#).

Call for Applications: OHCHR Fellowship Programme for People of African Descent

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has released a call for applications for its Fellowship Programme for People of African Descent. The aim of the programme is to strengthen the skills of participants to protect and promote the rights of people of African descent in their home countries. The programme will provide participants with an opportunity to learn about and engage with the international and UN human rights system, and to meet a wide-range of stakeholders working for the human rights of people of African descent. The fellowship will be held from 23 November to 11 December, 2020 in Geneva, Switzerland. The deadline for applications is 30 April, 2020. More information can be found on the [website of the OHCHR](#).



Call for Submissions: Race, Borders, and Digital Technologies

In her 2020 report, UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Ms. E. Tendayi Achiume, will address the relationship between the use of technology at border controls, racism and human rights. She is therefore seeking input from institutions and individuals that possess expertise on border technology. The mandate will receive written submissions through 15 May, 2020. Submissions will be used by her and her team to draft the report. Although submissions can be made in all UN languages, the Special Rapporteur encourages submissions in English.

More information can be found [on the OHCHR's website](#).

Minority Rights Defenders Share a Call for Inclusion during the COVID-19 Pandemic

On the occasion of the International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the informal network of OHCHR Minority Fellows released a video calling upon governments to ensure COVID-19 responses that are inclusive of all people, and urging members of society to stay at home to prevent the spread of the virus and to fight racism.

"The virus doesn't care which language we speak, what is our religion or ethnicity, but states must ensure that, during the outbreak response, no one is left behind," states Marina Shupac, a former OHCHR Minority Fellow, in the video.

The call for inclusion is accessible on [YouTube](#).

REGIONAL

NEWS

“We remember because it is our duty to ensure that such things can happen never again”, Says Council of Europe Secretary General

On the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić and other high-level Council of Europe officials gave speeches underlining the importance of keeping memory alive. Speakers also included Rik Daems, the newly-elected President of the Parliamentary Assembly, whose own grandfather died in a concentration camp.

“Yesterday marked 75 years since the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau: An event that brought to the world’s attention the atrocities, suffering and mass murder committed in camps and communities throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. This awareness underpinned the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the establishment of the Council of Europe itself,” stated the Secretary General.

The speech is available [on the Council of Europe’s website](#).

Committee of Ministers Adopts New Action Plan for Roma and Traveler Inclusion

The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted the Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion 2020-2025 on 22 January, 2020. It focuses on three main priorities:

1. Combating antigypsyism and discrimination in its diverse forms by raising awareness of the organization’s standards and instruments, fostering their application and implementation and supporting access to justice;
2. ensuring the effective participation of Roma and Travelers in decision-making processes; and
3. improving implementation of national and local level Roma inclusion strategies in the areas of inclusive education and local policies (including effective public services).

The plan recognizes that it is extremely important to raise Roma self-esteem through the promotion of Roma arts, culture, history and language and that the education of young Roma is critical for their future. The implementation of the plan will be overseen by an intergovernmental structure and the Committee of Ministers will be regularly informed about progress made.

The plan is available [on the Council of Europe’s website](#).

“The Declaration emphasizes the importance of remembering the Roma Holocaust and warns that, once again, antisemitism is on the rise.”

International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Adopts New Ministerial Declaration

On 19 January, 2020, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) published a new ministerial declaration on the occasion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. IHRA is an international organization currently comprised of 34 member states whose aim is to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, research and remembrance.

In the Ministerial Declaration, IHRA member states honor victims of the Holocaust, as well as all those who

resisted the National Socialist regime. The Declaration emphasizes the importance of remembering the Roma Holocaust and warns that, once again, antisemitism is on the rise. The member states also reiterate their acceptance of the responsibility to continue to carry out joint work to counter Holocaust denial and distortion, antisemitism, and all forms of racism and discrimination.

The declaration is available [on IHRA's homepage](#).

OSCE Publishes Report on Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities

The OSCE's mission to Kosovo published a new report about Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo. According to the latest official data, 8,824 Roma, 15,436 Ashkali and 11,524 Egyptians live in Kosovo. The three groups suffer from harsh living conditions, and are subject to discrimination and exclusion. However, OSCE monitoring data shows that their situation is improving.

The report covers 24 out of 38 municipalities, which

have a notable concentration of one of the three groups. It describes the situation of all 24 communities, and contains information related to housing conditions, infrastructure and education for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians. Issues related to representation in decision-making, employment, and healthcare were also analyzed.

The report is available [on the OSCE's website](#).

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Visits Moldova

From 28 to 31 January, 2020, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Lamberto Zannier visited Moldova. The visit was organized with the support of the OSCE Mission to Moldova. The OSCE carries out various activities in the country to promote human rights and minority rights, for example by supporting bilingual education or funding programs for teaching civil servants the state language.

During meetings with various state representatives and representatives of ethnic communities, the High

Commissioner addressed issues related to language and education. He visited a Romanian language school in Comrat, as well as the Bulgarian community in the region of Taraclia. In particular, he discussed the implementation of the National Strategy for the Consolidation of Interethnic Relations 2017-2017 and its related Action Plan, and expressed support for the process of political dialogue.

More information is available [on the website of the OSCE](#).

Role of National Minorities Discussed in an OSCE Conference in Albania

On 21 and 22 January, 2020, the OSCE organized a conference on the participation of women, national minorities and persons with disabilities in all stages of the electoral process in Tirana, Albania. This conference was organized by the OSCE Presence in Albania and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights as part of the OSCE program “Support to Elections in the Western Balkans”. It was attended by 50 participants, including members of civil society organizations, academics, journalists, as well as representatives of various Albanian authorities.

“As a representative of civil society, I hope that the electoral reform in Albania is successfully completed, without wasting time, and taking into account all the recommendations given over the years by various civil society actors and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). As a feminist, I think that electoral reform should allow equal electoral opportunities for women and men and provide for full representation of young people, minorities and persons with disabilities. Its timely approval would enable all actors to take necessary measures to ensure elections in the service of Albanian citizens,” stated Mirela Arqimandriti, Chair of the Board of the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections and for Sustainable Democracy, an Albanian non-profit organization.

Further information about the conference is available [on the homepage of the OSCE](#).

OSCE Holds Multilingual Education Conference in Ukraine

In February 2020, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Lamberto Zannier, organized a conference about multilingual education in Kyiv, Ukraine. Over 60 stakeholders participated in the event, and shared experiences and best practices. The High Commissioner recommends preserving minority languages by ensuring multilingual education that enables members of minority groups to both learn their minority language and achieve proficiency in the state language.

More information about the conference can be found [on the website of the OSCE](#).

Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities Publishes Opinions on Poland, Portugal and Denmark

The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities held its 67th plenary meeting from 17 to 21 February, 2020. During this session, it approved draft opinions on Bulgaria, Hungary and Spain. In January 2020, the Committee also published its opinions on Poland, Portugal and Denmark.

In its 4th Opinion on Poland, the Committee recognized that the new Programme for the Integration of the Roma Community in Poland for 2014-2020 helped to improve the situation of Roma. Scholarships were granted to enable Roma students to attend higher education institutions or teacher trainings. The state also provided preschool financing, didactic aid and covered travel and school meal expenses. However, hate speech remains a massive problem in Polish society. Members of several minority communities have reported that Polish memory politics have created problems for them, as they have been targeted by extremist groups due to their association with neighbouring kin states.

The Committee’s 4th Opinion on Portugal points out that there is no formal recognition of minorities in Portugal. However, since the last monitoring cycle, the situation of minorities in Portugal has improved in some regards thanks to the extension of the National Roma Communities Integration Strategy until 2022, amendments to the Criminal Code offering protection against hate crimes, and to the adoption of a new anti-discrimination law. The latter introduced the concepts of discrimination based on ancestry, place of origin and association, as well as the concept of multiple discrimination into Portuguese law. The Committee emphasized that many members of the Roma community continue to live in very poor housing conditions, have a lower life expectancy than the rest of the population, and are subject to direct and indirect discrimination.

In its 5th Opinion on Denmark, the Committee lauded Denmark for having established a consistent policy of support for the German minority in South Jutland. Financial support for the German daily newspaper, Der

Nordschleswiger, was deemed satisfactory, and the German-language school system in Denmark was praised for its quality. The Committee warned, however, that intolerance is on the rise in Denmark. The Jewish community has been faced with severe security issues, while antigypsyism is widespread. Moreover, these phenomena have been intensified by the media.

The Opinions are available [on the Council of Europe's website](#).

Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages Issues Appeal during COVID-19 Pandemic

The Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages has issued a statement emphasizing the importance of communication in regional and minority languages during global medical crises, including the current COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee spoke out against the fact that governments are not systematically providing information about measures to combat the COVID-19 virus in all languages traditionally spoken on their territories. The Committee noted that “national minorities are an integral part of [society] and in order for the adopted measures to have full effect, they should be made available and easily accessible to the whole population.” The Committee called upon Member States to “strongly consider addressing their nationals in all the languages traditionally spoken in their countries.”

The full text of the statement is available in English and French on the [website of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages](#). The statement has also been translated into Russian and Hungarian by the Tom Lantos Institute, and is available on [Minority Forum Info](#).

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance Publishes Annual Report

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance published its annual report in March 2020. The report gives a comprehensive overview over of the Commission's activities in 2019. It also identifies several key trends related to racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance in Europe.

A rise in xenophobic populism was observed in Europe, including ongoing racism against black people, antigypsyism, and antisemitism. Ultranationalist parties have been successful in elections at both the national and European regional levels, in many instances, using campaigns that have included hate speech. Hateful rhetoric against Muslim, black, and Jewish communities is widespread. Criticism of Israeli politics is used to stir up hatred against all Jews, and often makes reference to theories of a global-level “Jewish conspiracy”. In many countries, the situation of Roma has not substantially improved. The report notes that special attention must be paid to the impact of artificial intelligence on racism. The development and use of such technologies often lack transparency and mechanisms to prevent discrimination.

The Commission also continued its country-based approach and published country reports on Finland, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Romania, the Russian Federation and Slovenia. It participated in several events organized by civil society, and held national roundtables in Serbia and North Macedonia, as well as other events in other member states. In order to mark its 25th anniversary, the Commission held a high-level conference, “On the Road to Effective Equality – New responses to racism and intolerance needed?”. It also cooperated with other international institutions and Council of Europe bodies.

Ms. Maria Daniella Marouda, Chair of the Commission, held an exchange of views with the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers in which she summarized the content of the report. “The xenophobic mass shootings in Hanau in Germany last week demonstrate once again that we not only need to speak urgently about racism and intolerance, but that we also need to be proactive,” she stated, emphasizing that it is the primary responsibility of governments to combat racism and intolerance.

More information can be found [on the Council of Europe's website](#).





European Commission against Racism and Intolerance Publishes 6th Report on Germany, Belgium and Switzerland and Conclusions on Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland and Luxembourg

On 19 March, 2020, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) published its 6th reports on Switzerland, Germany, and Belgium, as well as its conclusions on four other countries. ECRI recognized progress that has been made since the last reviews of the three countries. In Switzerland, it noted the importance of the Cantonal Integration Programmes and the newly-established working group on “Improving conditions for the nomadic way of life and promoting the culture of Yenish, Sinti/Manouche and Roma in Switzerland”. With regard to Germany, ECRI praised the efforts that have been made to combat hate speech. Chancellor Angela Merkel has spoken out against hate speech on social networks, while the 2018 Network Enforcement Act obliges social media companies to remove manifestations of hate speech within 24 hours. ECRI also noted the strong efforts of Belgium to implement proactive measures to combat hate

speech and hate-motivated violence. At the same time, ECRI called upon the countries to make improvements in certain areas. In both Belgium and Germany, ECRI recognized the need for greater protections and assistance for Roma, Sinti, and Travelers. Meanwhile, it noted the sharp rise in intolerance in relation to Muslims, as well as in institutional and structural racism among the police in Switzerland.

ECRI also issued conclusions on Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland and Luxembourg. ECRI conclusions are part of its follow-up procedure to country reviews. In its conclusions, ECRI reviews the implementation of two specific recommendations made in corresponding country reports.

The reports of [Switzerland](#), [Germany](#), and [Belgium](#) are available on ECRI’s website. The conclusions for the four countries are also available [here](#).

New Report about Reparations for ISIS Victims in Iraq

In January 2020, Minority Rights Group International and the Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, two international NGOs, published a report titled “Mosul after the Battle – Reparations for civilian harm and the future of Ninewa”. Drawing on in-depth interviews, the report addresses national and international reparation mechanisms for the victims of ISIS in Iraq’s Ninewa directorate. .

The first part of the report provides an overview of the living conditions of various ethnic groups in the Ninewa directorate before and during the ISIS occupation. The biggest ethnic and religious minority groups there include Christians, Shabaks, Turmen and Yazidis. These groups were all victims of horrible crimes, which, in some cases, were carried out in order to completely eradicate the communities.

The second part of the report analyzes the legal framework that provides victims with support to rebuild their cities and communities. As early as 2009, Iraq enacted a law

to compensate populations for losses suffered during the various armed conflicts in Iraq. However, it can be difficult to gain access to reparations, particularly for members of the Sunni community in Mosul. “There is a categorization of victim – you start with Yazidis, Christians, Shi’a.... But Sunnis? There is immediately a question. It is no longer just being second-class citizens, the question is now are you a victim or not?” stated a former resident of Mosul.

The third part of the report suggests how the reparations system could be improved. It recalls Iraq’s obligations under international law to implement an effective reparations system, including rehabilitation and guarantees of non-repetition. The report states that, in particular, Iraq should ensure that victims have access to mental health care, provide rehabilitation and support for former child soldiers, and address cases of torture and forced disappearances.

The report is available [on MRG’s homepage](#).

International Court Orders Myanmar to Protect Rohingya

As discussed in the previous issue of the Global Minority Rights Newsletter, the International Court of Justice opened proceedings in relation to the situation of the Rohingya Minority in Myanmar. On 23 January, 2020, the court imposed provisional measures against Myanmar, which was ordered to take all measures within its power to protect the Rohingya. Myanmar must also submit a report to the Court on all measures taken to give effect to this order within four months. The provisional measures are a preliminary decision to prevent real and imminent risk before the court makes its final decision.

The International Court noted the Report of the International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, according to which “since October 2016, the Rohingya in Myanmar have

been subjected to acts which are capable of affecting their right of existence as a protected group under the Genocide Convention, such as mass killings, widespread rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as beatings, the destruction of villages and homes, denial of access to food, shelter and other essentials of life.” After hearing the statements of both parties during oral proceedings, the court found that there is a real and imminent risk of irreparable prejudice.

In a statement, UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, welcomed the decision, which is legally binding, and underlined his support for the use of peaceful means to settle international disputes.

The decision was published [on the homepage of the International Court of Justice](#).

“Since October 2016, the Rohingya in Myanmar have been subjected to acts which are capable of affecting their right of existence as a protected group under the Genocide Convention.”

“It was a year of repression, but also of resistance”: Amnesty International Publishes Report on Human Rights in the Asia-Pacific Region

On 29 January, 2020 Amnesty International published its 2019 Human Rights Review on the Asia-Pacific region. In this report, the organization provides an overview of the human rights situation in 25 countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Amnesty emphasizes the importance of minority rights and expresses concerns over the fact that India and China, the two largest and most powerful states in the region, perceive minorities as a threat to their national security.

The report recalls the situation in Kashmir, a Muslim-majority state in India, which has recently lost its autonomy status and endured a political crisis that has led to the detainment of hundreds of political activists. In the nominally autonomous Chinese province

of Xinjiang, massive violations of the human rights of the Muslim Uyghur minority in so-called re-education-camps have been reported. Amnesty’s report also notes that, in Pakistan, the freedom of expression of religious minorities is undermined by strict blasphemy laws, and that many defenders of minority rights in the country have been victims of enforced disappearances. In Malaysia, the government pledged to protect indigenous rights and initiated court proceedings against the Kelantan state government for not adequately protecting the land rights of indigenous communities. Nevertheless, indigenous people in the country continue to be marginalized.

The report is available on line [on the website of Amnesty International](#).

Call for Papers: African Human Rights Yearbook

The African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child have released a call for papers for the Fourth Volume of the African Human Rights Yearbook. The call for papers invites academic-style submissions that will contribute to the human rights discourse in Africa. Multidisciplinary and empirical approaches are particularly encouraged. Three categories of submissions are sought: (1) articles focused on aspects of the African human rights system/Africa Union human rights standards; (2) articles related to the theme of the Year 2020 “Silencing the guns: Creating conducive conditions for Africa’s development”; and (3) case commentaries. Contributions may be submitted in Arabic, English, French or Portuguese. The deadline for submissions is 15 April, 2020. The full call for papers is accessible at [this link](#).

Ecuador Ratifies Inter-American Convention against Racism, Discrimination and Intolerance

The Inter-American Convention against Racism, Discrimination and Intolerance was adopted by the Organization of American States General Assembly in 2013. It provides a legal framework for combating racism, racial discrimination and related forms of intolerance. Thus far, three countries, Antigua and Barbuda, Costa Rica, and Uruguay, had ratified the Convention. In January 2020, Ecuador became the fourth country to ratify the Convention since its adoption.

During the ratification ceremony, Secretary General of the OAS, Luis Almagro, stated “the ratification clearly shows the adherence of Ecuador to the international regulations that seek to guarantee the right to non-discrimination. We take this opportunity to invite OAS member states to ratify this Convention, and to put in motion the cooperation forum for the exchange of policies and regulations, which requires a total of ten states party.”

More information about the Convention and Ecuador’s ratification can be found on the [website of the OAS](#).

The Tom Lantos Institute (TLI) is an independent human and minority rights organisation with a particular focus on Jewish and Roma communities, and on Hungarian and other ethnic or national, linguistic and religious minorities. It is a Budapest-based organisation with a multi-party Board of Trustees, an international Executive Committee, and Advisory Board. TLI operates internationally in terms of scope, funding, staff and partners. As a research and education platform, TLI aims to bridge the gaps between research and policy, norms and practice. TLI focuses on human rights and identity issues in general, and also works on three specific issue areas. These include: Jewish life and antisemitism; Roma rights and citizenship; and Hungarian minorities.

ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER

The Global Minority Rights Newsletter is a publication of the Tom Lantos Institute that gathers recent information about normative developments, events, and other opportunities related to the institutional frameworks and mechanisms for the protection of the human rights of minorities. The Newsletter is based on research and data collection by the Tom Lantos Institute, as well as on the submissions and input of colleagues and partners around the world. The Newsletter is published quarterly and is available in electronic format. The Tom Lantos Institute welcomes submissions from organizations and experts working in the field. For more information, or to provide submissions or feedback, please contact Marcus Oda at marcus.oda@tomlantosinstitute.hu.

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