



Bulletin 2014/I

Summary of the work of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues, between January-June 2014

Dear Reader!

The first half of 2014 has been a busy period for me and my team. I have been travelling on country visits, drafting reports and letters extensively, my mandate was extended and renamed and I participated in many exciting events, including university lectures and conferences. I am very aware of the importance of regular information-sharing and have, therefore, established my own [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts. But I also had to realize my limited capacities in keeping you updated on all these and other developments. So I have decided to publish this Bulletin to provide an overview of the activities that have been carried out in the past six months and alert you about my upcoming priorities so that you can get in touch with me or my colleagues if you have anything to advise us about or share. I truly hope that NGO representatives, members of international organizations and academia, minority representatives, government employees and all those interested in minority rights and related issues can find useful information here.

You can find my website [here](#).

You can contact us at minorityissues@ohchr.org.

Happy reading!

IZSÁK Rita
UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues

Renewed mandate with a new title

On 11 April 2014, pursuant to Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution [25/5](#), the mandate was extended as Special Rapporteur (replacing the previous title of “Independent Expert”) on minority issues for a period of three years. This will not cause any change in the method of work or activities to be carried out but is in line with the Human Rights Council’s institution-building package, which in paragraph 59 said the following: “It should be considered desirable to have a uniform nomenclature of mandate-holders, titles of mandates as well as a selection and appointment process, to make the whole system more understandable.” The mandate also received more support in the form a new assistant: Ms Maria Margarita Lema Tome has joined Mr Graham Fox to support the work of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues. They are reachable on the above e-mail address. Ms Federica Morway joined our team as a consultant to assist in the organization of the Minority Forum. Her e-mail is spbconsultant@ohchr.org.

Minorities in the post-2015 development agenda



As we are approaching 2015, it will be essential to learn from the failures of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in reaching the development targets and ensuring the inclusion of disadvantaged minorities in all stages of planning and implementation of the new sustainable goals. As Special Rapporteur, I therefore decided to focus on this important topic in my annual thematic report to the Human Rights Council introduced on 19 March 2014 (read [here](#)¹). The report analyses the situation of minorities in the context of the eleven areas which were used for global consultations on people’s vision for the post-2015 development agenda: inequalities, education, health, growth and employment, food security and nutrition, conflict, environmental sustainability, governance, energy, water, and population dynamics.

In the report I stress that greater attention should be given to disadvantaged minorities since inequality, discrimination and poverty disproportionately impact persons belonging to minorities who constitute hundreds of millions of the most economically and socially disadvantaged globally. Worldwide they are trapped in a cycle of discrimination, exclusion, poverty and underdevelopment from which they cannot break free without targeted attention being given to their situations. Even in cases where minorities were mentioned in the MDGs and strategies to achieve them, there was a lack of discussion about the causes of why minorities are experiencing a disproportionately high level of poverty which was highlighted in a previous report of the former mandate holder, Ms Gay McDougall. Future goals must be sensitive to who benefits and at whose expense, and must go beyond blunt, aggregate targets that allow us to pick the “low-hanging fruit” and neglect more difficult challenges, I suggest in the report.

You can read a feature story with more details [here](#).

¹ If direct links fail to open, please go to my website [here](#) and check section “Documents”

Presentation of the report of the country visit to Cameroon to the HRC

In my official UN capacity I conducted a country visit to Cameroon between 2-11 September 2013 and presented my report to the Human Rights Council on 19 March 2014 (report available [here](#)). I explained that in Cameroon, there are more than 250 ethnic groups speaking many different languages and representing different faith groups. Cameroon is rightly proud of its record of stability and peaceful coexistence of such diverse communities. Its numerous development and social policies, general respect for minority rights and emphasis on national unity in diversity are important factors in ensuring that stability. In many respects, Cameroon is a positive example of how a highly diverse society in the region can be managed. While many challenges remain, the Government is open to discuss them and to involve minorities in shaping effective solutions. As an important measure to achieve such solutions, I urged the Government to fully record and gather regular disaggregated social and economic data, including in the census, which will clearly map the country's diversity and help to reveal challenges faced by certain population groups. My report discussed in detail the situation of Pygmy and Mbororo pastoralist communities who require dedicated attention if their situation is to be improved. I expressed concern over the decline in use of some of the country's many mother-tongue languages and highlighted that initiatives to record and maintain these languages alongside French and English are positive. While I believe that freedom of religion and harmonious coexistence of religious groups are generally evident, Pentecostal church leaders complained to me about the closure of some churches and about discriminatory registration processes and I called for clearer criteria and adequate registration timeframes to be established and respected.



Listening to Mbororo pastoralists in Bamenda, Cameroon

Presentation of the recommendations of the 6th UN Forum on Minority Issues to the HRC

On 19 March 2014, I also presented the recommendations emanating from the 6th UN Forum on Minority Issues which, under my guidance as Special Rapporteur, discussed the theme of “guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities”. The Forum successfully conducted its sixth annual session on 26 and 27 November 2013 and was chaired by Ms Hedina Sijercic from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The participation in the Forum was outstanding, with over 500 participants from across the globe, including delegates from over 80 States, representatives from United Nations mechanisms, treaty bodies and specialized agencies, intergovernmental and regional organizations, national human rights institutions, academics and experts on minority issues, and over 120 non-governmental organizations. The Forum once again sought to identify not only challenges, but positive practices from all regions that seek to ensure that those belonging to religious minorities fully enjoy all their rights. Many examples were provided and demonstrate how States, national human rights institutions, civil society, religious leaders, women and young people can take practical steps from the smallest community based activities to important changes to national law and policy. You can find all the documents, summary of the discussion, oral interventions and the final recommendations [here](#).

Country visits

My team has been excited to finally travel to Nigeria for a country visit after it had been requested and planned for several years. The visit took place between 17-28 February 2014. With over 250 ethnic groups and even more languages spoken in the country, I acknowledged the complex ethnic, religious and linguistic make-up of Nigeria and that, for the most part, minority and majority communities coexist in harmony in many regions of the country. However, I warned that the exclusion of some groups, partisan politics, corruption, and the reality or the perception of bias and favouritism along ethnic or religious lines, fuel distrust, suspicion and anger that sometimes spills over into violence. I urged political parties to play their role in reaching across ethnic or religious divides and called on the Nigerian Government to strengthen measures to fully implement the constitutional guarantees of equality, unity and belonging, in order to protect minority rights. The final press release is [here](#), the detailed statement of the Abuja press conference [here](#). The final report will be presented to the 28th session of the Human Rights Council next March.

After the sudden deterioration of stability in the eastern and southern part of Ukraine, I requested to conduct a country visit to Ukraine and would like to thank the Government for its cooperation and all those who managed to organize my visit within a short timeframe including the staff of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Ukraine and Geneva. The visit took place between 7 and 14 April 2014. My team and I visited Kyiv, Uzhgorod, Odesa and Donetsk and had the opportunity to consult widely with hundreds of stakeholders.

In my preliminary findings [here](#) and in my longer press statement [here](#), I stated that recent developments in the country have increased animosity against certain groups and created an environment of uncertainty and distrust that may create fractures along national, ethnic and linguistic lines and threaten peaceful coexistence if not adequately and quickly resolved. I proposed a number of concrete measures to strengthen minority rights protection and promotion, including in the field of education and ensuring inclusive participation in decision-making processes. I referred to the need to strengthen the institutional attention to minorities and welcomed proposals to establish new high-level bodies and authorities responsible for minority issues. My final report will be presented to the 28th session of the Human Rights Council next March.

Participation in side-events

As Special Rapporteur I was honored to participate in several important side-events during the 25th and 26th session of the Human Rights Council. I sent a video message to the Roundtable of the International Development Law Organization titled “Promoting and Protecting the Universal Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief Through Law: Current Dilemmas and Lessons Learned” on 10 March 2014. At the invitation of the International Association for the Defense of Religious Liberty, I attended a debate dedicated to “Religious liberty and religious minorities: Dialogue five - Developing a holistic framework” on 10 June, in Geneva. I spoke at a side-event organized by the International Dalit Solidarity Network on 17 June 2014 called “Caste-based violence against women” which aimed to discuss the role of the United Nations in combatting caste-based discrimination and violence. On 18 June, I participated in a discussion on “Preventative tools of human rights mechanisms in Geneva - Part I: Special Procedure Mandate Holders” organized by the Responsibility to Protect Core Group addressing how Special Procedures mandate holders can help preventing human rights violations, particularly mass atrocity crimes, by identifying situations at risk and recommending possible actions.

Conferences/meetings/lectures

On 16 and 17 January 2014, I attended and provided a keynote presentation at the 2nd international policy-making colloquium titled “Roma Segregated Housing as a Human Rights Challenge”, organised by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Regional Office for Europe, in cooperation with the Government of Spain, in Madrid.

On 17 January, I spoke at the Complutense University of Madrid on an international conference-symposium on ‘Religious Liberty and Religious Minorities’ organized by the International Association for the Defense of Religious Liberty about the rights and security of religious minorities.

On 5 February, I was invited as a guest lecturer to the Central European University in Budapest to the course on "Peoples' Rights & Minority Rights" where I provided introduction of the UN's work on minorities and highlighted the controversies and challenges through case studies.

I also participated in the first international meeting of the Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes (GAAMAC) that took place in San José, Costa Rica, 4-6 March 2014. I spoke about the importance to take urgent and coordinated action in case of early warning signs of mass atrocity crimes and brought concrete examples of possible community actions in preventing inter-communal violence.



On 26 March, I gave a lecture at the Hungarian National Public Service University on the rights and challenges on Roma, possible policy responses and the role of the media.

On 12 May, I had the privilege to deliver the 2014 annual Sabhal Mòr Ostaig Lecture in the Isle of Skye, Scotland. The Sabhal Mòr Ostaig Lecture began in 1990, and since its inception, a string of high-profile guests have travelled to this famous Gaelic College to deliver the lecture, including Irish President Mary Robinson and Gordon Brown MP (the then-Chancellor). I spoke about the general UN framework on minority rights protection, brought concrete case examples from my own work and highlighted major trends and concerns for minorities, with a special attention to linguistic minorities.



Communications and press releases

I have continued issuing communications (including both urgent appeal letters to prevent human rights violations and letters of allegation in the case of already committed violations), as well as press releases when disturbing and urgent news of minority rights violations have reached my office. As communications remain confidential until they are reported to the Human Rights Council, at present only the ones sent until 20 February 2014 are publicly available (see all communications sent [here](#)).

These were the following:

28 January 2014: Alleged arrest, threats and harassment against members of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) in Hue and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. [VNM 2/2014](#)

31 January 2014: Alleged persecution of several Jehovah's Witnesses for alleged illegal missionary activity in Kazakhstan. [KAZ 1/2014](#)

I have issued public press statements in the following cases:

- [Viet Nam land grabbing case](#): on 26 March 2014, with a group of United Nations independent human rights experts, we called on the Vietnamese Government to intervene urgently in a case of forced eviction of the last remaining residents of Con Dau, a small village located on the outskirts of Da Nang city in central Viet Nam.
- [Alarm on Rakhine State, Myanmar](#): on 7 April 2014, with a group of United Nations mandate-holders, we pressed the alarm bell on the further deterioration of the human rights situation in Rakhine State.
- On [International Roma Day](#), 8 April, I called on all European States and institutions to fully include Roma people in the decision-making process in Europe at all levels and warned that Europe cannot stand for exclusion. With national elections taking place or due in several European countries and with the European Parliament elections taking place in 2014, it is timely to call on governments and international organisations to step-up their efforts and attention to ensuring the full integration of their Roma populations.
- [Cameroon: UN experts on minorities and indigenous peoples concerned about destruction of pastoralist homes](#): On 10 April 2014, together with my colleague, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, we called on the Government and the Catholic University in Bamenda, Cameroon, to urgently review the evictions and demolition of houses of a Mbororo pastoralist community. An estimated 300 people have reportedly been made homeless and evicted from their ancestral lands in the locality of Banjah, Bamenda.
- [CAR: Evacuation of internally displaced populations should be used as a last resort](#): On 25 April 2014, together with my colleague, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, we warned that evacuation to protect the lives of religious minorities under threat in the Central African Republic must be a measure of last resort and implemented in full consultation with them and in accordance with international standards.
- [Urgent appeal to the Iranian Government: Halt the scheduled execution of Ahwazi Arab men](#): On 21 May 2014, with a group of United Nations human rights experts, we urged the Iranian authorities to halt the scheduled execution for Thursday 22 May of two Ahwazi Arab farmers and cultural rights activists, after their death sentences were reportedly upheld by the Iranian Supreme Court.

The Special Rapporteur in the media

As Special Rapporteur on minority issues I have been interviewed several times on various issues. Some of them are now publicly available.

At the end of my country visit to Nigeria, on 28 February, I provided an interview to Frontline which you can find on [YouTube](#).

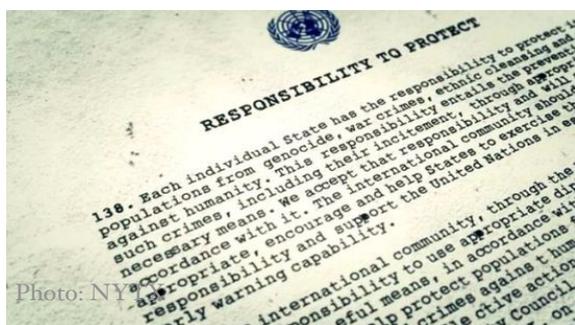
In April 2014, I was interviewed on the situation in Ukraine by the US National Public Radio, you can listen to it [here](#).



What's next? Where to keep an eye?

For this and next year, I have an agreement with the governments of Botswana, Brazil and the Russian Federation to conduct an official country visit and will be setting the dates for those visits soon.

My forthcoming thematic report to the General Assembly to be presented in October 2014 will look at various forms of violence against persons belonging minorities and will discuss how minority rights protection can help preventing atrocities. It will build on existing reports and discussions on the responsibility to protect and on the need to manage diversity constructively. It will stress the importance of forging stronger collaboration between various UN bodies and mechanisms for a more effective prevention of mass atrocity crimes.



The next 7th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues will similarly focus on preventing and addressing violence and atrocities against minorities by promoting stronger minority rights protection systems with a dedicated attention to minority groups and issues. It will consider necessary involvement on all levels (local, national, regional and international) and the role that various institutions can play in this process of preventing and resolving violence and conflict affecting minorities. The Forum will take place in Geneva during 25-26 November 2014 and as always, interested stakeholders should be sending their participation request online (ECOSOC status NOT required). All relevant information will be posted [here](#).

On 20 June 2014, in an initiative sponsored by the Russian Federation, a resolution on “Protection of Roma” was adopted by the Human Rights Council. This document, inter alia, condemns the persistent manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance against Roma, including violence, stigmatization and social exclusion. It recognized the need to carry out a comprehensive study of the human rights situation of Roma worldwide, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of anti-Gypsyism and invited the Special Rapporteur on minority issues to prepare this study with concrete recommendations in consultation with States, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, regional arrangements, and relevant special procedures and treaty bodies, and to submit it to the Human Rights Council at its twenty-ninth session. I will start holding consultations on this important topic throughout the year and depending on available resources, I hope to convene an expert meeting in Geneva too. Those interested in contributing to this study, should contact the team via e-mail.