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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**VIDEO MESSAGE TO OPENING SESSION OF THE FIFTH SESSION  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES  
New York, 27 November 2012**

Madam President of the Human Rights Council,  
Excellencies,  
Madam Chair of the fifth session of the Forum on Minority Issues,  
Madam Independent Expert on minority issues,  
The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to greet the Forum on Minority Issues -- and to join you in celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the landmark United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

The Declaration sets out essential human rights standards for the many millions of people across the world who belong to minority groups.

It underscores the responsibility of States to protect the rights of minorities to enjoy their cultures, use their languages and practice their religions.

This anniversary is an opportunity to review the Declaration's impact on national legislation, policy and practices.

It is also a chance to reaffirm our commitment to this cause.

Twenty years on, many challenges remain. Too many minorities face discrimination, stereotyping, hatred and violence, solely for being who they are.

And at this time of economic distress, minorities often bear the brunt of societal tensions.

The United Nations has a crucial role to play in minority protection.

I am strongly committed to ensuring that concerns of minorities are reflected in our work.

That effort will be helped by the establishment, earlier this year, of the United Nations Network on Racial Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities, coordinated by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

This Forum, together with the Independent Expert on minority issues, are crucially important actors, including as platforms for dialogue on implementation of the Declaration.

It is said that societies are judged by how they treat their most vulnerable members.

Let us embrace this challenge – and let us work together to make the Declaration's principles a reality for minorities everywhere.

I wish you a productive session. Thank you.