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As the High Commissioner for Human Rights stated in her opening remarks, OHCHR has used the 20th anniversary of the Declaration to promote more attention and action around the principles of the Declaration.

Supporting this Forum session and important work of the Independent Expert on Minority Issues is, of course, an important part of this engagement of the Office, but let me highlight some additional examples of activities and initiatives through which we have aimed, during this anniversary year, to advance the principles of the Declaration, and thereby also promote the implementation of Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other relevant binding human rights standards.

At the outset, I would like to underline that OHCHR never works in isolation and that all our work around the anniversary have involved close cooperation with a range of UN partners, Governments, minority representative and non-governmental organizations. We have also benefitted from active engagement of the Independent Expert on Minority Issues as well as from contributions of by regional organisations, which, as was stressed by the Chair of this session, can play a key role advancing the principles of the Declaration. Many of our key partners are in this room today, and I would like to thank you all for your excellent contributions.

The anniversary events have included important activities in Geneva, including a successful Human Rights Council panel in March 2012 with a focus on achievements, best practices and challenges in the implementation of the Declaration. The anniversary has also inspired enlarged engagement and cooperation in the UN system, notably through the launch of the new UN Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, coordinated by OHCHR and mentioned by Secretary General in his video message this morning.

But for the Declaration to have an impact, we need to make sure that it is known and invoked not only here in Geneva but also in the regions, countries, and towns where minorities live; and that minorities and majorities alike are familiar with its principles. We have therefore bolstered our outreach and awareness raising efforts, including through our field presences and through a special web section dedicated to the anniversary, which contains promotional and other materials, available in several languages. We would like to encourage you all to visit the web site and put the anniversary material to use in your work, including at the country level. The forthcoming actual adoption date, 18 December, could be used as an occasion to mark the anniversary and highlight the importance of the Declaration at the national level.

During this year, we have also aimed to make sure that our anniversary activities go beyond sharing and recalling the principles of the Declaration and highlighting the importance of the commentary on it. We have aimed to couple these messages with contextualized, substantive dialogue on the key minority rights challenges of the day.

With this aim in mind, we organized four regional anniversary activities, focusing on some of the most urgent and topical minority rights themes, and explored ways to use the principles of the Declaration to address them.

We started these regional activities in Vienna in May with a seminar, organized in cooperation with the government of the Austria, examining the protection of religious minorities, a major challenge in many parts of the world. Participants agreed that while principles of non-discrimination and freedom of religion are central to the protection of religious minorities, the Declaration and other minority rights standards provide important complementary provisions, and that this potential has not been fully exploited in human rights discourse. Participants made a number of concrete proposals, aimed to enhance the work of national human rights institutions, regional organisations, the UN and others to address the critical human rights problems that many religious minorities face.

The Vienna seminar was followed by a regional consultation held in Bangkok in September on the role of the United Nations, and other human rights and development actors in advancing the participation of minorities in poverty reduction and development strategies in South East Asia. At the Bangkok consultation, representatives of UN entities, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations examined specific challenges that minorities face in participation in, and benefitting from, efforts to achieve in Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Comments and proposals made at the consultation can be useful also in the on-going and future work on the post-2015 MDG agenda, and in the inclusion of equality concerns in this process.

In our regional expert workshop organized in Bishkek in October, OHCHR focused on effective participation of persons belonging to minorities in law enforcement and in building an inclusive and responsive police force and judiciary. Building on country experiences, participants formulated a list of recommendations, including calls for concrete measurable action to facilitate minority participation in the judiciary and law-enforcement aiming to ensure that their composition will reflect the linguistic and other diversity present in every society.

Our most recent regional consultation took place last week in Doha, with a focus on how to reflect diversity in the process of constitutional reforms. At Doha consultations, experts in the fields of human rights and constitutional law examined rapid constitutional developments, notably in the Middle East and North Africa, and their impact on human rights and minorities. Participants explored ways and means for the UN and other actors to support national efforts to ensure inclusive constitution making processes and to promote constitutional texts that reflect human rights standards and diversity of the countries in question.

This is only a sample of the anniversary activities of OHCHR; there are many other initiatives underway, ranging from a specific google hang-out on minority rights next week to incorporating the Declaration more firmly in our minority fellowship programme.

Finally, I would like to stress that the anniversary should not represent an isolated peak in the level of attention paid to the Declaration. Therefore, we look forward to working together with all of you to make sure that the anniversary represents a catalyst for redoubled efforts and sustained attention to the principles of the Declaration in our work at all levels, to the benefit of persons belonging to minorities, during this anniversary and in the years to come.

Thank you.