Dear Reader!

The first bulletin that I issued in June 2014 (you can read it here) has been welcomed by readers from various sectors. Government officials, NGOs, members of international organizations and academia, and various community representatives informed me that they found it useful to read all the developments related to the mandate in one comprehensive document. Therefore, I decided to continue with this practice and it is my pleasure to provide here the second edition of this bulletin summarizing my work during July-December 2014. You can continue reaching me on my social media sites (Facebook and Twitter account) or at the official e-mail address (minorityissues@ohchr.org). You can find my website here.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank all those who contributed to the work of my mandate during 2014, including my colleagues at the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and to wish all of us a happy 2015 with strengthened dedication and continued joint efforts to make it better for the millions of disadvantaged minorities.

Happy reading!

IZSÁK Rita
Special Rapporteur on minority issues
A resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2013 (68/172) invites me, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues (then Independent Expert) to report to the General Assembly annually. On 24 October 2014, I presented my report to the Third Committee on violence and mass atrocity crimes targeted against minorities.

In my report, I highlight that persons belonging to minorities are frequently the victims of violence and atrocities. Violence can take the form of attacks on individuals, their homes, shops or places of worship, or wider acts of aggression against communities with different national, ethnic or religious identities. In the worst cases, violence constitutes mass atrocities, crimes against humanity, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and even genocide, often perpetrated with impunity. Sometimes violence is committed by non-State actors, including those belonging to the majority, or larger, more powerful groups, extremist groups, or even business actors. Sometimes it is perpetrated by State actors.

A primary objective of the United Nations and most States in the area of peace and stability is to prevent violence before it breaks out. The tragic experiences of past violence and atrocities have helped to better understand the causes of violence and the fact that minorities are frequently targets, and to produce indicators to predict violent incidents and provide early warning. While violence can be difficult to predict, States too often fail to translate clear early warnings into adequate, appropriate and timely measures to prevent or stop violence. In order to save lives and ensure peaceful societies, a high priority of stakeholders at all levels must be to improve prevention mechanisms and turn early warning into early action.

Essential elements of strategies to better prevent and address violence against minorities consist of the adoption of measures to foster unity among different population groups, the comprehensive implementation of minority rights and the establishment or strengthening of institutional and policy frameworks for the protection of minority rights. At the national level, good and inclusive governance, which includes minorities and measures to ensure equality, are key prevention prerequisites. The international community must also improve its ability to engage and assist States in efforts to prevent and resolve violence and to effectively intervene where States fail in their responsibility to protect minorities.

My next report to the Human Rights Council to be presented in March 2015 at its 28th session discusses “Hate speech and incitement to hatred against minorities in the media”. I describe that media in its diverse forms is an essential component of today's societies providing huge benefits and possibilities, including in the field of minority issues. Nevertheless, it can also be misused as a platform for discrimination, exclusion and the incitement of hostility and violence against particular individuals and groups, through hate speech as well as xenophobic discourses. I identify and analyse factors that influence and perpetuate hate speech in the media. The report is listed as A/HRC/28/64 under documents to be reviewed by the 28th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2015.

I visited Nigeria between 17 and 28 February 2014. With over 350 ethnic groups and even more languages spoken, in most of the country harmonious and peaceful inter-ethnic relations prevail. However, violent inter-communal clashes have affected the North and Middle Belt regions. Underlying causes of violence include poverty, good governance deficits, impunity and polarization of ethnic and religious characteristics. Minority communities in the Niger Delta suffer from dire environmental degradation due to frequent oil spills, have been deprived of their traditional livelihoods and face difficulties to access basic services. Language issues include the decline of numerous mother-tongue languages. The report is listed as A/HRC/28/64/Add.2 under documents reviewed by the 28th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2015.

I visited Ukraine between 7 and 14 April 2014. Representatives of communities described a history of harmonious inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations and a legislative, policy and social environment generally conducive to the protection of their rights, including cultural and linguistic rights. Nevertheless, minority issues have become highly politicized as the situation of political and social unrest increased in 2014, particularly in the East, creating and widening fractures along national, ethnic and linguistic lines and resulting in conflict. While challenges relating to minority issues include a lack of institutional attention to minority rights, I noted that minority rights have been inappropriately used to justify or support violent actions. The report is listed as A/HRC/28/64/Add.1 under documents reviewed by the 28th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2015.

I would like to thank Botswana, Brazil, and the Russian Federation for agreeing to visits during 2015. I also thank the Government of Belarus for extending an invitation to conduct an official visit.
UN Forum on Minority Issues

My mandate is tasked to guide the work of the Forum on Minority Issues, prepare its annual meetings and report its recommendations to the Human Rights Council. On 25 and 26 November 2014, the seventh annual session took place in Geneva with a thematic focus on preventing and addressing violence and atrocity crimes targeted against minorities, chaired by Professor Patrick Thornberry.

Over 500 participants attended the Forum representing Member States from all regions, United Nations mechanisms, treaty bodies and specialized agencies, intergovernmental organizations, regional organizations, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations and including academics and experts on minority issues. Issues addressed included: understanding the root causes of violence; improving prevention of violence and atrocity crimes; essential measures for resolution, protection and security once violence has broken out; and avoiding renewed violence - building the peace and managing diversity. Interventions identified challenges involving minorities as well as solutions and effective practices for prevention and addressing violence. All related documents are available at [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Minority/Pages/Session7.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Minority/Pages/Session7.aspx). You can watch my statement [here](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Minority/Pages/Session7.aspx). Three side events were organized in the margins of the Forum on related themes. I would like to thank everyone who participated and contributed to the Forum. Recommendations emanating from the Forum are listed as A/HRC/28/77 under documents reviewed by the 28th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2015.

Side events/conferences/meetings/lectures

On 31 July – 1 August 2014, I participated in an international expert conference in Krakow, Poland, organized by TernYpe International Roma Youth Network commemorating and marking the 70th anniversary of the Roma Holocaust Day that is remembered on 2 August each year. The event brought together 70 experts, stakeholders and educational multipliers of Roma and non-Roma organizations in order to discuss strategies for Holocaust memorial days, to review educational approaches and materials and to share successful practices and educational tools. The aim of the conference was to raise awareness about the Roma Holocaust and to strengthen the educational value and real meaning of memorial events. More about the event and related programs here: [http://2august.eu](http://2august.eu).

On 2 September 2014, I attended the meeting of the Human Rights Working Group of the European Union (COHOM) and briefed EU Members States and the European Commission about my mandate in general and upcoming priorities. We discussed current global minority rights concerns, such as developments in Ukraine and in Iraq and the situation of Roma across Europe. With the assistance of the OHCHR Regional
Office in Brussels, whom I thank for their overall support, I also held other bilateral meetings with the Directorate-General for Justice and the Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation of the European Commission.

On 3 September 2014, I participated as a guest speaker in a seminar on "Incitement to hatred, xenophobia and related intolerance in the cyberspace", held in Minsk, Belarus, organized by OHCHR, at the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus and with the support of the United Nations Office in Belarus. The meeting aimed to identify efficient national approaches for combating racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in the cyberspace, to discuss relevant laws, practices and examples of international cooperation of law enforcement agencies and media representatives.

On 12 September 2014, the EU Delegation to the UN and other international organisations in Geneva organized a side-event at the 27th session of the UN Human Rights Council on the protection of Roma titled “Effective strategies and policies to advance the rights of Roma persons worldwide”, to which I contributed to through a video message. You can view it here: http://youtu.be/nV8mpWXh4ZU.

On 18 September 2014, the UN Human Rights Council, pursuant to resolution 24/16, organized a panel discussion titled “The role of prevention in the promotion and protection of human rights”. The meeting aimed to contribute to developing further the concept of prevention of human rights violations and to raising awareness of prevention in order to encourage its reflection in relevant policies and strategies at the national, regional and international levels. The outcomes of this discussion will be part of the OHCHR study requested by the Human Rights Council on the prevention of human rights violations and its practical implementation and will be presented to the thirtieth session of the Human Rights Council. You can watch the entire discussion here: http://webtv.un.org/watch/panel-discussion-on-the-role-of-prevention-in-human-rights-23rd-meeting-27th-regular-session-of-human-rights-council/3792241772001.

On 24 September 2014, I attended and spoke at an expert meeting and roundtable discussion in Geneva titled “Persons with albinism: violence, discrimination and way forward” organized by the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie and OHCHR. Various experts and people with albinism shared their views on the global phenomenon of structural discrimination against and marginalization and social exclusion of persons with albinism. We discussed effective ways to overcome difficulties in getting appropriate health care, in accessing education, employment, legal protection and redress and to tackle the deeply entrenched societal prejudices against and stereotypes of persons with albinism.

On 23 October 2014, the NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief organized a discussion at the Bahá’í International Community’s New York Office with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Mr Heiner Bielefeld and myself on religious minorities and prevention of extremism and hatred. We shared views on how the UN and its Member States must make greater efforts to ensure that the rights of minorities, national, ethnic, linguistic or religious, are protected at all levels and expressed


Public press releases

I have issued public press statements in the following cases (all to be found on my website under “Latest News”):

Stop the promotion of hatred and faith-based violence – UN rights experts urge Sri Lanka: On 2 July 2014, with the Special Rapporteurs on freedom of religion or belief and summary executions, we called on Sri Lanka to adopt urgent measures to stop the promotion of racial and faith-based hatred, and violence against Muslim and Christian communities by Buddhist groups with extremist views, and bring perpetrators of this violence to justice. More than 350 violent attacks against Muslims and over 150 attacks against Christians have been reported in Sri Lanka in the last two years. Muslim and Christian communities are reportedly subjected to hate speech, discrimination, attacks and acts of violence throughout Sri Lanka frequently.

A forgotten tragedy – UN experts call for a stronger response to internal displacement in Nigeria: On 23 July 2014, together with the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, we called on the Government of Nigeria and the international community for a swift and
stronger response to the plight of some 3.3 million people displaced in the country due to violence since 2010, many of them being persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, one of the highest numbers of internally displaced persons in the world. We drew special attention to the urgent need to restore livelihoods, services and governance capacity needs in order to allow IDPs to find durable solutions in the near future.

**Iraq: Impact of conflict on minorities “devastating”:** On 25 July 2014, with the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, we stated that ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq are bearing the brunt of the conflict that is once again engulfing the country. We stressed that if protection measures are not taken urgently, the impact of the conflict on minorities could be devastating and irreversible. We called for those responsible of committing human rights violations to be held accountable and urged the Iraqi Government and the international community to do their utmost to protect vulnerable civilians and minorities.

**Ensuring the right to remembrance and dignity for the Roma people - Roma Holocaust 70th anniversary commemoration - Saturday 2 August 2014:** On 2 August 2014, together with the Special Adviser of the United Nations Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr Adama Dieng, we called for stronger measures and initiatives to keep the memory of the Roma Holocaust alive and enable survivors, Roma communities and others to mark it in a recognized and dignified manner. We reminded that violence against Roma is not only a matter of history but is a sad reality also today and called on European governments and democratic political parties to step up their efforts to establish necessary integration policies and platforms to ensure that all populations, including the Roma are considered and treated equally, can live in security and raise their children without fear.

**Iraq: “Immediate action needed to protect human rights of Yazidis in grave danger”:** On 12 August 2014, with the rapporteurs on internal displacement, summary executions, freedom of religion and violence against women and discrimination against women, we expressed our grave concern at the imminent danger of massacre faced by the Yazidi population forced to flee Sinjar in northern Iraq and other minority communities currently exposed to attacks by members of the ‘Islamic State’. We called for immediate action to protect the human rights of Yazidis and other affected communities, including the fundamental right to life. I urged that all possible measures must be taken urgently to avoid a mass atrocity and potential genocide within days or hours. I cautioned that civilians need to be protected on the ground and escorted out of situations of extreme peril and reminded that the responsibility to protect populations at risk of atrocity crimes falls both on the Iraqi Government and the international community.
Sri Lanka: UN experts alarmed at deportations of Pakistani asylum seekers without assessment: On 14 August 2014, with the Special Rapporteur on the freedom of religion and belief, we expressed grave concern at the situation of Pakistani asylum seekers in Sri Lanka who have been detained and forcefully deported to Pakistan without an adequate assessment of their asylum claims. Most asylum seekers from Pakistan belong to religious minorities, including Ahmadiyya Muslim, Christian and Shia, groups that are often subjected to persecution, discrimination and violence in Pakistan. We called on the Government of Sri Lanka to comply with the principle of non-refoulement (no-forced-returns) when there is a credible potential threat against an individual and to stop the deportations immediately in order to allow the completion of the entire asylum claim process.

Legitimate concerns over outcome of Michael Brown and Eric Garner cases: On 5 December 2014, with a group of rapporteurs, we expressed "legitimate concerns" over the decision not to bring to trial the cases of Michael Brown and Eric Garner in the United States. We voiced deep concern over the broader pattern reflected in the decision of the Staten Island grand jury not to bring to trial the case of Eric Garner, an African-American who died after a police officer put him in a chokehold. I stated that I was concerned by the grand juries’ decisions and the apparent conflicting evidence that exists relating to both incidents and that a trial process would ensure that all the evidence is considered in detail and that justice can take its proper course. I added that the decisions leave many with legitimate concerns relating to a pattern of impunity when the victims of excessive use of force come from African-American or other minority communities.

Communications (letters of allegations and urgent appeals)

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 31 May 2014 are publicly available (see all communications sent here). Please note that since the latest bulletin, there are 8 new communications, out of which 2 were responded to by the concerned Member State (this constitutes 25%). The mandate since the beginning until 31 May 2014 sent out 159 communications in total with a response rate of 56%.

21 March 2014 - Viet Nam: An alleged forced eviction took place of the residents of the Con Dau village, near Da Nang city, in Central Viet Nam. According to the information received, in 2007, the local government of Da Nang city announced a plan to expropriate the Con Dau village. The land was leased to a private company to build an eco-resort. Compensation was poor and the request of the parishioners to be resettled near their church was rejected twice. By 2013, hundreds of residents had moved under
threats and harassment or after their homes had been forcefully demolished. The company stopped its project and began selling its land use rights by lots to private buyers. On 7 March 2014, the local government of Da Nang city gave a deadline to a remaining hundred households to give up their land and move out by 15 April 2014. Concerns were expressed that the forced eviction of the residents of Con Dau violated international human rights standards and seriously disrupted the cultural and religious life of the community. Full letter here: VNM 3/2014.

28 March 2014 - Malaysia: Alleged arbitrary arrest and persecution of several members of the Shi’a Muslim minority community took place in Malaysia for their religious belief. According to information received, on 8 March 2014, Mr. Mohd Kamilzuhairi Abd Aziz, a local leader of Malaysian Shi’a Muslims, together with 113 other individuals, including Messrs’ Abdullah Hassan, Mohammad Ridzuan, Abdul Manap Abdul Hamid, Idris Mat Desa, Abu Bakar Ahmad, Abdullah Isa and Ms. Nur Azah Binti Abdul Halim, and other women and children, were arrested by the Perak’s Islamic Religious Affairs Department and the police, while they attended the commemoration of a religious celebration. Serious concern was expressed that the arrests may be part of a crackdown on, and persecution of members of the Shi’a Muslim community in Malaysia, which has been allegedly ongoing since adoption of a 1996 fatwa by the Fatwa Committee of the National Council for Islamic Affairs that describes Shi’ism as a “deviant ideology”. Full letter here: MYS 2/2014.

5 May 2014 - Pakistan: Allegedly at least 132 children died in the Thar desert, Tharparkar district, Sindh province as a result of malnutrition. According to the information received, severe and chronic food and water shortages due to drought and extreme poverty are the principal causes of death. The majority of victims reportedly belong to the minority Dalit community. Reports suggest that the crisis has been exacerbated by insufficient investment in healthcare facilities with long standing vacancies in Government run hospitals and health centres, as well as a lack of female doctors, limiting the provision of adequate medical services. Undue delays on the part of the authorities to react to the crisis have reportedly resulted in the Sindh provincial Government being accused by the Supreme Court of failing to fully report the facts, highlighting its failure to distribute sixty thousand bags of wheat flour allocated to the region in December 2013. Full letter here: PAK 6/2014.

8 May 2014 - Islamic Republic of Iran: We received allegations of imminent risk of desecration of an old Bahá’í cemetery in Shiraz, Iran. According to the information received, at the end of April 2014, a land plot in Shiraz, where an old Bahá’í cemetery is located, was turned into a construction site, possibly leading to the destruction of the cemetery. Reportedly, the cemetery is of religious and cultural value for local Bahá’ís, and although it can no longer be used for burials, it remains a site for praying and for paying respect to the memory of the deceased. Numerous requests were made by the local Bahá’í community to spare the parts of the plot of land where the cemetery is located, either through letters or repeated visits to various authorities, to no avail. An administrative order to halt the construction work was issued by the local department on Planning of Town and Public Spaces, but it was ignored and construction work nevertheless began. Concerns were raised at a series of actions by the Iranian authorities, which appeared to be motivated by religious discrimination against the Bahá’í community through restricting their fundamental human rights to freedom of observance and practice of religion or belief. Full letter here: IRN 8/2014.

16 May 2014 - Myanmar: Alleged deleterious consequences of the Government’s order directed at Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) to suspend all of its activities in Myanmar,
and of the attacks on humanitarian organizations resulting in termination of their operations in Myanmar’s Rakhine State. According to the information received, MSF was ordered to cease all of its activities on 26 February 2014, which will have devastating consequences on the enjoyment of the right to health, both by the ethnic Rakhine population and Rohingya communities. Following intimidation, violence and attacks targeting humanitarian organizations in Myanmar on 26 and 27 March, more than 300 humanitarian and development staff were reportedly evacuated from Rakhine State. Despite claims by the Government that additional medical professionals would be dispatched to fill the vacuum in health services in Rakhine State, health provision still falls markedly short of needs. Full letter here: MMR 3/2014.

22 May 2014 - Ethiopia: We received allegations of excessive and indiscriminate use of force against peaceful protestors, including women and children, in the regional state of Oromia. According to the information received, security forces and Agazi military special forces violently cracked down on peaceful protests taking place in various cities of Oromia. Reportedly, at least 35 people were killed, including at least eight children and one woman; at least 18 peaceful protestors were injured, including at least five children; and at least 143 peaceful protestors and bystanders were arrested, including at least 20 children and three women. In addition, two members of the Oromo Federalist Congress were arrested for speaking to the press about the wave of killings and detentions. It was reported that the majority of those arrested remained in incommunicado detention and have been subjected to torture. Grave concerns were expressed at the excessive and indiscriminate use of force against, and arrest and incommunicado detention of, peaceful protestors, including women and children. Full letter here: ETH 5/2014.

30 May 2014 - Pakistan: We expressed concern over the alleged killing and systematic persecution of Ahmadiyya Muslim minorities and referred to the cases of Khalil Ahmad, Ghulam Ahmad, Israr Ahmad and Mubashir Ahmad who were arrested by police on blasphemy charges in Sharaqpur, Pakistan, in May 2014. While three of these individuals were released on bail, Mr. Khalil Ahmad was kept in detention, where he was shot dead by a visiting minor. On 26 May 2014, Mr. Mehdi Ali Qamar, a doctor on a humanitarian visit to Pakistan, was murdered in Rabwah, Pakistan by two unknown men on motorbikes. Full letter: PAK 8/2014.

23 May 2014 – Colombia: Damage has been caused by the dumping of sediment accumulated in the reservoir of river Anchicayá inhabited by Afro-descendants. Allegedly, these sediments caused the extinction of the fauna of the river Anchicayá and its pollution, which was the only source of drinking water and therefore limited access to adequate food, drinking water and electricity of the neighbouring communities. Full letter: COL 4/2013. You can read the Government's detailed response here: 30/05/2014.

The Special Rapporteur in the media

As scheduled at the moment, my annual reporting to the Human Rights Council will take place on 18 March. Side events related to minority issues are expected to be organized during the same week.

I am currently working on two further research. An analysis of recommendations of the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review will provide an overview of the nearly 900 recommendations made to Member States during the 1st cycle that are dealing with minority issues. A second research is looking at practical measures to implement the linguistic rights of linguistic minorities and will summarize them in a practical handbook. They are expected to be finalized and made public by March 2015.

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.