

UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues

Categories of Minorities

Call for Submissions by 31 May 2020

In accordance with his mandate pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 34/6 and decision 43/115, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Dr. Fernand de Varennes, will present a thematic report at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, which will provide a detailed analysis and highlight the **significance and scope of the four categories of minorities (national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities)**. In his first report at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly setting out his vision and thematic priorities, the Special Rapporteur raised the difficulty resulting from continued misunderstanding and conflicting views on the use of the term “minority” within the UN, and identified the need, in order to effectively progress with his mandate’s priorities, to address in a study the scope and meaning of the term minority as contained in the 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and Article 27 of the International Covenant and Civil and Political Rights. In this regard, his previous report at the 74th session of the General Assembly presented a study on, and proposed a formulation of, the concept of a minority for the purposes of his mandate as follows: “An ethnic, religious or linguistic minority is any group of persons which constitutes less than half of the population in the entire territory of a State whose members share common characteristics of culture, religion or language, or a combination of any of these. A person can freely belong to an ethnic, religious or linguistic minority without any requirement of citizenship, residence, official recognition or any other status” (see report [A/74/160](#)).

While this is an important clarification, it only addresses one dimension of the human rights of minorities as formulated in the 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, and other UN treaty provisions such as Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Articles 17 and 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The human rights of minorities are thus defined for specific categories of minorities, as acknowledged in the title of the 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. The 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education for its part refers only to national minorities. In Europe, a number of human rights and other treaties also refer mainly to national minorities

On this basis, and for the purpose of the report of the Special Rapporteur to the General Assembly in October 2020, Dr. de Varennes will examine the significance and scope of the **four categories of minorities (national or ethnic, religious and linguistic) who are the beneficiaries of various rights in the UN system**.

This second, complementary study of the Special Rapporteur will consider the views and interpretations of UN entities which have for decades been issuing conclusions, general comments or other guidelines on these categories of beneficiaries of rights in the UN system.

The Special Rapporteur intends to **examine and clarify the distinctions and significance of all four categories of minorities (national or ethnic, religious and linguistic), and how these are understood as applicable within the UN system**.

Call for submissions

In accordance with the established practice of thematic mandate-holders, the Special Rapporteur welcomes inputs by States, UN agencies, regional and international organizations, national human rights institutions, civil society, scholars and research institutions, and others who may wish to submit for this purpose. Such submissions may include, for instance, recommendations, evidence and case studies.

The Special Rapporteur is interested in collecting information concerning the UN, State and civil society's understanding of the significance and scope of the four categories of minorities (national or ethnic, religious and linguistic) in UN instruments.

This call for submissions does not address the diversity of approaches nationally or regionally. Its focus is strictly on the four distinct categories of beneficiaries of human rights protection for minorities recognized in the UN system.

The following questions are intended to guide submissions:

1. Please provide information on the significance of and the distinction used for the four categories of minorities (national or ethnic, religious and linguistic) by your Government or Organisation. Please provide examples of national legislation or policies on the matter, if any.
2. Please identify your understanding of the scope of rights of persons belonging to minorities from the four categories of beneficiaries under UN instruments, and particularly the scope and nature of rights each category can claim. Please, also provide any statement made to UN bodies or other information on how your Government or Organisation understands the United Nations' approach(es) to the four categories of minorities under the UN human rights system.
3. Are "new" minorities or indigenous peoples considered in one of the four categories of minorities (national or ethnic, religious and linguistic) by your Government or Organisation? And if so-which ones?
4. Please provide examples of consultations with minorities on their approach and views as to these distinctions in your country, as well as to the laws and policies that address their rights from the perspective of that distinction.
5. Please provide (legal and non-legal) examples of good practices in the protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities from these four categories of beneficiaries. Are these practices different for each category?

Submissions and inputs on the above-mentioned areas can be submitted in English, French or Spanish and addressed to the Special Rapporteur by email to minorityissues@ohchr.org by 31 May 2020.

Submissions and inputs will be considered public records unless expressed otherwise and will be published on the website of the Special Rapporteur.