



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council: Rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities  
Geneva, 14 March 2012

Madam President,

The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities invites the international community to examine, with a more critical eye, the situation of minorities in the world, as the Report of the Independent Expert on Minority issues has rightly emphasized. The awareness of their own rights has greatly increased among the persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, but, at the same time, the violations of these rights, on the part of States or of groups in society, have not ceased. Such problems are due, either to indifference or to the political will to marginalize or to suppress, or even to eliminate, communities with a different ethnic or religious or linguistic identity. If a just participation by all is fostered in the governance of a State, all persons enjoying citizenship in its territory should have a right to be included. On the basis of such participation, peaceful coexistence, social development and prevention of conflicts will be the outcome.

Madam President,

The foundation upon which all existing communities in a State can cooperate constructively for the common good is well articulated in the Declaration, which affirms the *“inherent dignity and worth of the human person...[and] the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small..., without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion”*<sup>1</sup>

Distinct ethnic, religious or linguistic groups within a State can enrich its cultural and social life. The success of such contribution, however, is linked to the ability and duty of each respective group to be open to dialogue as *“individuals do not exist for themselves alone, but achieve their full identity in relation to others. The same can be said about groups of people. They indeed have a right to a collective identity that must be safeguarded, in accordance with the dignity of each member.”*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, PP2 and PP1.

<sup>2</sup> Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1989.

The Special Rapporteur might consider the usefulness of abolishing the concepts of “majority” and “minority” populations. Such development would be in accord with the foundational human rights principle that everyone is equal in rights and duties while also maintaining his right to associate with others in the preservation and development of cultural, religious and political identities and activities. This basic belief becomes the appropriate foundation of citizenship A State in which all are partners through common citizenship, and which maintains laws and institutions that are at the service of everyone, can effectively carry out its responsibility to guarantee peace and promote the constructive contribution of all citizens. The selection of sectarian or ethnic or religious affiliation as criteria for belonging to a State runs contrary to the universality of human rights and lends itself to manipulation and abuses.

In a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect, educational programs that support a culture of dialogue, peace-building, democracy and pluralism can encourage a new start, in line with on-going political, social and cultural changes in some regions of the world, and can open the way to a more peaceful future when the dignity of every person will be respected without such classifications as “majority” and “minority” but by virtue of our common God-given humanity.

Thank you, Madam President.