

Mot de bienvenue Forum européen

Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities

Merci Anna-Maria.

Madame la Vice-présidente, Monsieur le Haut Commissaire de l'OSCE, Messieurs dames les députés, Monsieur le Commissaire d'Irlande, distingués experts, collègues et invités, Mesdames, Messieurs.

Bonjour et bienvenue au premier forum régional sur l'éducation, la langue et les droits humains des minorités.

language plays in human existence, development and dignity. Through language we're able to form concepts; to structure and order the world around us. Language serves a bridge, not a wall: it crosses the gap between isolation and community, brings together the past and the present, and is the holder of memory, history and culture, central for many if not most of us central to

our identity.

In other words, language is the key to inclusion, not forcing assimilation or integration that denies or disrespects the reality of our linguistic diversity. It is in recognizing the primary importance that people place on their own language that we're more likely to foster and achieve true and effective participation and engagement in society as equal human beings.

And central to all of this is language in education, teaching of a minority language, yes of course, but also education in a minority language wherever and to the degree possible, in response to the context and needs of members of a linguistic minority.

To put it bluntly and paraphrasing saying attributed to a French historian: *On tue une langue qu'on enseigne pas*, one kills a language if it is not taught.

Despite everything I have just mentioned, it was not until just under two years ago and that the United Nations mandate of Special Rapporteur on minority issues drafted for the first time a practical guide on the language rights of minorities, and where we dealt with in a general way with the issue of what could involve the human rights of minorities in education.

As a matter of fact, in the almost 12 years of existence of this UN mandate has the annual UN Forum on Minority Issues ever focussed on the theme of language, even though this mandate is supposed to address specifically the rights of ethnic, religious AND linguistic minorities.

Since we haven't focused on language rights in previous forums, we have not of course addressed as a thematic the matter of the language of education for minorities, and its importance.

And it is important, as the work of the OSCE High

Commissioner, the Council of Europe treaty bodies dealing with the protection of national minorities and regional or minority languages show and other initiatives, by civil society organisations and I think in particular to many manifestations of the significance of language emanating from civil society, such as the Minority SafePack Initiative which garnered one million signatures on minority rights in the EU, sponsored by FUEN, but also increasingly the European Union institutions just in the last year including with the resolution of 7 February 2018 on protection and non-discrimination with regard to minorities in the EU Member States, and the resolution of 13 November 2018 on minimum standards for minorities in the EU.

Along the same lines, I announced last November at the UN Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva that it was time we did more to recognise the human rights of minorities, and be more responsive to the regional needs and contexts in different parts of the world to clarify how and why language matters so much

and education, and what it means in terms of any human rights obligations in this regard.

Because it does matter: it matters hugely. Language and education is a matter of interest, concern and in some cases grievances that is too often neglected, forgotten or denied it comes up with individuals and communities in all parts of the world, including many countries, in Asia, Africa and of course Europe,

Ladies and Gentlemen, our challenge today and tomorrow is to correct this situation, and as indicated in the concept note our aim is to provide regional insights for recommendations, as you'll be hearing soon, that will provide for better understanding of the themes of the conference, and the development of a set of guidelines eventually focusing on education in, and teaching of, minority languages. These will also inform the recommendations of the 12th session of the UN Minority Forum in 2019, and eventually hopefully next year the

first ever UN practical guide on the human rights of minorities in the area of education and their languages.

Ladies and Gentlemen, mesdames et messieurs, bons succès dans vos discussions et échanges, good luck in your discussions and deliberations in this first ever regional Forum on education, language and minorities.

We will in a few minutes be beginning the first panel.

Merci.