

Statement of His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin at the UN High-level Meeting to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities

New York, 21 September 2022

Mr. President,

The Holy See is pleased to participate in this High-level Meeting marking the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

When using the terms ‘minority’ and ‘majority’, we should remember that these descriptive labels must not erode the principle on which fundamental human rights and freedoms are based: everyone is equal in dignity and therefore has equal rights. It is therefore crucial to “reject the discriminatory use of the term ‘minorities’ which engenders feelings of isolation and inferiority.” [1] At the same time, the opposite stance of promoting assimilation risks erasing unique national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic characteristics and values, “blurring what is distinctive about origins and backgrounds and turning [people] into a new line of malleable goods.” [2]

Throughout the world, national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities share the aspiration to affirm their identity and to live peacefully with others. Therefore, their protection cannot be achieved without respecting certain key principles, namely protection of existence, non-exclusion, non-discrimination, and non-assimilation[3] – such that integration does not become assimilation.

As for religious minorities, the Holy See notes with grave concern that, Christians continue to be the most persecuted group in the world, and not only in countries where they are a minority group. It is estimated that around 360 million Christians across 76 countries face discrimination, violence and persecution because of their faith. Needless to say, other religious minorities suffer similar treatment. This is a clear violation of the fundamental right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. [4] This also threatens related rights, such as the right to practice religion in public and private, both individually and collectively; the right to own, build, maintain and use religious buildings and property; the right of churches and religious communities to organize themselves according to their own institutional structures; and the right to train, choose and nominate their own clergy.

Mr. President,

The protection and promotion of the fundamental human rights of people belonging to national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities should be founded on the “adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard.” [5] Identity and dialogue are not unreconcilable poles. Our own identity “is strengthened and enriched as a result of dialogue with those unlike ourselves. Nor is our authentic identity preserved by an impoverished isolation.” [6]

Thank you, Mr. President.

[1] Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together.

[2] Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Christus Vivit, 186.

[3] Commentary of the Working Group on Minorities to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

[4] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18.

[5] A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together.

[6] Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Querida Amazonia, 37.

Nota: se reprodujo íntegramente la declaración del Secretario de Estado.

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