Assistant Secretary-General, Ms Ilze Brands-Kehris, at the UN Forum on Minority Issues

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Excellencies, colleagues and friends, the focus of this year's Forum on equality, social inclusion and socio-economic participation may seem not new but it is both vital and timely.

The cohesion of our societies depends on the recognition of the richness of their diversity and the valued contribution of diversity starts with inclusion and effective participation.

This has already been recognized since 1992 in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, which affirms their right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life.

The Beirut Declaration on **Faith for rights** adds to this the commitment of equal participation and full protection of their freedom of religion or belief.

Fundamental to the realization of the full range of minority rights, in addition to effective participation in all areas of life, is ensuring equal opportunities by effective anti-discrimination measures.

According to our assessment, approximately two thirds of countries in the world do not have a comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that would allow to put into reality the promise of equality in dignity and rights made seventy-five years ago in the Universal declaration of human rights.

A significant number of those countries lacking a comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation do have a rich canvas of minorities within their respective societies.

But instead of harnessing the value of this diversity it is all too often portrayed as a problem.

One of our office's current strategic priorities is addressing inequality, not only is equal treatment a right in itself, but upholding human rights will greatly reduce inequalities of all kinds.

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Mounting economic and social inequalities fueled by **human rights blind economic models** and entrenched under-funding of public services underscore the urgent need to curb discrimination and expand fiscal space to increase investment in essential social services.

In our work we advocate for human rights to be at the center of economic policymaking and we focus on protecting and increasing the meaningful participation of marginalized groups, including minorities, strengthening the fulfillment of economic and social rights and creating conditions in which inequalities can be reduced.

The Secretary General's report Our common agenda stresses that destabilizing inequalities must be overcome to realize humanity's hope of breaking through to a greener, better, safer future.

Our economies must also deliver better for human rights, including for the rights of vulnerable groups such as minorities. This is why the High Commissioner for Human Rights earlier this year launched the vision of a human rights economy, which will also be one of the priorities for discussion at the human rights 75 high-level event in Geneva on eleventh and twelfth December 2023.

Economic policies are not neutral in their effect on population groups, states' human rights obligations should inform these policies guiding considerations of tradeoffs.

It is time to ground economic choices in human rights principles, norms and obligations, and work together towards human rights economies.

Essentially a human rights economy centers on people and the planet. In a human rights economy, all economic and social decision-making and policies are guided by and invest in human rights.

It intentionally aims at eliminating discrimination and dismantling structural barriers and other impediments to equality, justice, wellbeing, sustainable growth and shared prosperity.

It fosters active, free and meaningful participation and empowers groups subject to discrimination.

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Human rights economies measure success not by the size or annual growth of the GDP but by the wellbeing of all people.

In a human rights economy, the socio-economic inclusion of minorities is not an afterthought, but a *raison d'être* for the economy.

A human rights economy which prioritizes the protection and promotion of individual and group rights is essential for building and sustaining social cohesion.

When minority groups are excluded from economic opportunities or face discrimination, this exclusion can create marginalization and a feeling of injustice which may lead to social unrest and, in extreme cases, conflict.

By ensuring that minorities are economically included, and their rights are respected we can create more stable and harmonious societies where grievances are addressed through peaceful means.

When minorities have access to education, employment and business opportunities, they are less likely to face **disenfranchisement**, exclusion, and a feeling of not being seen.

We must overcome any invisibility of minorities and move towards genuine indivisibility of all human rights for everyone, including minorities.

A human rights economy is closely linked to sustainable development, which is essential for long-term peace and stability.

When minorities are economically included, and their rights are respected it contributes to the overall development of a country.

Sustainable development that addresses the root causes of conflict, such as poverty inequality and discrimination fosters an environment where all members of society can thrive and benefit society as a whole.

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It is also crucial to emphasize the significance of inclusive, participatory and transparent decision making in devising and implementing economic policies.

When economic policies are crafted with the active involvement of representatives of minority communities and other stakeholders, it generates a sense of **agency** and ownership among those affected.

This in turn fosters trust in the economic system. Inclusive decision-making also empowers minority communities to have a say in policies that directly affect their socioeconomic well-being.

This **agency** not only ensures that their specific needs and concerns are addressed, but also makes them active participants in the economic development process.

As we mark the seventy fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I encourage states and other stakeholders to make concrete and innovative pledges to advance human rights.

And in the spirit of today's discussion, we hope that you can join us by pledging to strengthen realization of all minority rights, including their effective protection against discrimination.

Equality and trust, mutual and in institutions, foster cohesion and peace and can only be achieved when everyone's voices are heard and have an impact on decisions, especially those most at risk are being left behind.

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