

## Chair concluding remarks

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have had an extremely busy and packed agenda over the last two days. First I want to thank you all for your understanding and your patience. We have attempted to enable everyone to have a voice in this Forum, which is quite a challenge when so many want to share their views and issues. Please remember to send the secretariat your written interventions so that they can be posted on the website and we can consider your recommendations closely.

Thank you to all for your useful and constructive comments and for providing such a wealth of experience and perspectives. I have found these two days extremely inspiring and I hope you will agree with me that we have all learned a great deal. I want to thank you all for your participation - the many UN member States who have attended from all regions and taken the floor to tell us about your experiences and practices, the laws that you have passed and the policies and programmes that you are implementing every day in your countries.

Also at the very heart of this Forum has been the voices of minorities themselves and I thank you all, Non-governmental organizations, faith-based organization, religious leaders, academics and others, for being here and for your valuable contributions. We have benefitted immensely from your experiences and perspectives and they will greatly inform our work ahead. You have addressed many problems, but you have also proposed constructive solutions to help resolve them.

We have seen that despite the many problems, good practices are certainly taking place in all regions – in such areas as legislation, institutional attention to minority issues, projects targeted to address the problems facing religious minorities or key concerns, and local level initiatives that are so important. All of these demonstrate the attention that governments and other stakeholders are giving to religious minority issues.

We have heard about many issues and challenges in regard to the right to freely worship and practice religion and belief, but also in the wider sphere of minority rights, in education, participation in economic life, as well as issues affecting religious minorities who are also ethnic or linguistic minorities. I have also been pleased to see the particular attention given to the situation of women and girls, their issues are too often neglected.

All of your comments and ideas to strengthen the recommendations will be given close consideration and will result in a final document which I hope will truly reflect all of your views. They will be presented to the Human Rights Council in March 2014 and made available to you all.

I would just conclude by thanking the Independent Expert, Rita Izsak, for her leadership in making this Forum such a success and for her dedication to promoting the rights of minorities. I also thank the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and its staff for their hard work in preparing the Forum, without whom it could not take place. Last but not least I thank our interpreters for their excellent and difficult work over the last days.

As we bring this session to a close I can say with confidence that this Forum has truly fulfilled our desire for it to raise awareness of the challenges facing religious minorities, but also to provide suggestions for implementation of the rights of religious minorities in every region. I thank you all and wish you well for your travel home and for your future work.