

**Forum:** Special Conference on International Development

**Issue:** Protecting regional cultures in Less Economically Developed Countries

**Student Officer:** Mehmet Deniz Gençer

**Position:** Deputy President

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## Introduction

Minorities, which can also be referred to as regional cultures, are at greater risk of assimilation and unprotection in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs). These countries generally do not have sufficient legislation to protect the rights and interests of these regional groups. The lack of economic stability and cases of religious extremism prevalent in these countries forestall much of the efforts for heritage protection.

In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, for example, there is a significant wealth gap between ethnic minorities and the majority Lao-Tai ethnic group. Such disparities are generally attributed to a myriad of factors, such as the amount of land ownership, level of education, source(s) of income, and access to basic amenities and infrastructure.

In some cases, governments may deliberately deviate investments to the regions where minorities form the majority population. In other cases, the government may be unable to provide basic amenities to all of its citizens due to high economic instability or civil unrest. In each case, such perilous conditions cause people, especially those at greater risk like minorities, to disperse and migrate to other areas. Minorities are frequently subjected to hate speech and are used as scapegoats by governments, as governance problems are often attributed to these groups. The dispersal of these minority groups imposes a risk on the sustainability of regional cultures in the long term.

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights established a set of guidelines for Member States to implement laws to preserve minority rights better. The document is called "Protecting Minority Rights: A Practical Guide to Developing Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation" and touches upon necessary measures to put forward and implement legislation to protect minority rights. When writing resolutions, delegates are encouraged to refer to this guidance, which is also linked in the document section.

Delegates should pay attention to the root causes of cultural assimilation and corrosion, which may come in as socioeconomic, political, or religious factors. In Less Economically Developed Countries, passing appropriate legislation may prove to be challenging due to a lot of entrenched issues in these states. The theme of RCIMUN '25, "Enhancing Cooperation: Mending the Cracks in the Rules-Based

International Order”, touches upon the necessity to adhere to international law and treaties through multifaceted cooperation, and delegates should come up with solutions in line with this principle.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Anti-Discrimination Laws:** Laws actively opposing unfair treatment, discrimination, or prejudice against people or groups on the basis of sexual orientation, gender, color, ethnicity, religion, handicap, or any other legally protected trait. They entail advancing justice and equity in all spheres of life, such as public accommodations, work, education, and housing.

**Cultural Autonomy:** Cultural autonomy is the ability of a distinct cultural group to control and manage its own cultural practices, beliefs, and identity without interference from outside authority. This concept is frequently linked to the broader concept of self-determination, and it can emphasize tensions between local cultures and national governments, especially in the context of varied communities confronting challenges to their sovereignty.

**Marginalization:** When an individual or group of people is unable to perform tasks or gain access to basic services or opportunities. It can also be referred to as social exclusion.

**Political Representation:** The method or process of allowing citizens, or some of them, to influence legislation and government policy through deputies elected by them.

**[Ethnicity] Wage Gap:** An ethnicity wage gap is the difference in average compensation across ethnic groups within an organization or the labor market as a whole over time, regardless of job or seniority.

## General Overview

In many Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), civil unrest, improper legislation, government persecution, religious extremism, and lack of resources contribute to the dwindling of regional cultural life. For a culture to endure, governments need to enable many practices. Government agencies need to be funded to ensure language education and other institutions need to be supported for cultural exhibitions, celebrations, and documentation of cultural heritage. In LEDCs, regional minority cultures are at risk of disappearing as these implementations cannot be undertaken easily. This report will examine the underlying causes of cultural disappearance by breaking down cases in different LEDCs.

**Afghanistan** is a country composed primarily of Iranian and Turkic ethnic groups. The majority of the population is Pashtun, while there are also Iranic Tajik, Baloch, Nuristani, and Turkic Uzbek and Turkmen minorities. Among the most prominent minorities are the Hazaras, who are of mixed ancestry.

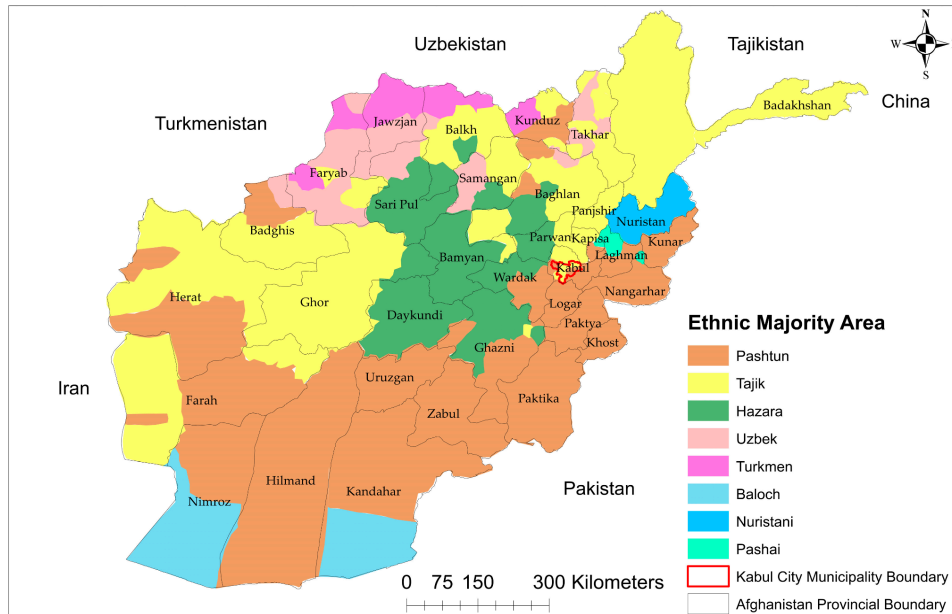


Image 1: Map of Afghanistan and its ethnic groups

The Hazaras, Afghanistan's Shi'a religious minority, are located in the heart of Afghanistan, and thus, their location is of geocultural significance. Since the Taliban reclaimed power in 2021, they have waged a systematic campaign against human rights in Afghanistan, affecting all groups but particularly women, Hazaras, and religious and ethnic minorities. The Hazaras are the foremost ethnic group persecuted by the Sunni extremist Taliban regime. They have been subjected to persistent persecution, genocidal massacres, bombings of mosques and schools, and attacks on maternity facilities, including mass murders of Hazara mothers, babies, and schoolchildren.

The Hazara people have been pushed from their ancestral lands through systematic deportation, which is a crime against humanity. Other ethnicities, like the Uzbeks, have been forced to leave Afghanistan, altering the country's demographics. Hazaras are completely excluded from the Taliban government. The Taliban's judicial system is the most systematic source of prejudice against Hazaras. The Taliban have eliminated Hazaras from all courts across the country, including those where they are the majority, violating their right to representation. Today, not a single Hazara serves as a judge or clerk in any court. Taliban courts routinely discriminate against Hazaras.

The Taliban have diverted humanitarian aid intended for Hazara communities to reward Taliban sympathizers in other districts, leaving Hazaras without food or medicines supplied by the UN and other international agencies. The humanitarian catastrophes that have occurred since 2021 have had terrible implications for millions of Afghans, particularly marginalized communities such as the Hazaras, who are now subject to poverty, displacement, and instability. There is thus a staunch disparity between the rights, wages, and political representation of the Pashtuns and Hazaras, with the latter facing constant persecution and an early onset of genocide.

**In Ethiopia**, Tigrayans, a minority ethnic group that forms the majority population in some areas of Northern Ethiopia, face rampant ethnic cleansing that was reinforced by the Tigray War. A variety of Ethiopian security forces, including the Amhara regional police, also known as the "Amhara Liyu," militia groups known as the "Fano," and occasionally Ethiopian and Eritrean federal forces, have been systematically apprehending thousands of ethnic Tigrayans since the start of the armed conflict in northern Ethiopia in November 2020.

Throughout the Western Tigray Zone, the security forces held people for extended periods of time without charging them in military camps, police stations, jails, and other illegal locations like schools and warehouses. Alongside these ethnically-motivated arrests, hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans were gradually driven toward central Tigray by security forces and temporary administrations. This ethnic cleansing campaign against Tigrayans has been prolonged since the truce deal on November 2, 2022 by the local officials and Amhara forces in northern Ethiopia's Western Tigray Zone.

The Tigrayan culture is vitalized by the diaspora communities; however, in their native Tigray region, the humanitarian situation is still vile. Many Tigrayans have dispersed from the region, seeking refuge in countries like Sudan, further risking the disappearance of the culture from its native Tigray region.

**In Laos**, the Lao-Tai people form the majority of the population, while at least 49 other ethnic groups inhabit the country. Although these groups are recognized by the Lao government, they are not classified as indigenous groups, which limits their land ownership rights. The majority of Laos are Buddhist, and Buddhism is the unofficial state religion because many state officials are Buddhist, and Buddhism is becoming more prominent in public functions. While many religions are generally free to practice under government control, Protestant Christians, the majority of whom are ethnic minorities, particularly Khmou, Brou, and Hmong, have been targeted: arrests, detentions, church destruction, and forced renunciations are common.

The persecution of Lao Christians is rooted in the ideological structure of the government. The Communist administration strictly monitors religious practices, and Christians and their churches do not receive sufficient support through legislation or law enforcement. Most of the churches of the Christian community are unprotected.

**In Myanmar**, the persecution of minorities is most apparent through what is referred to collectively as the Rohingya genocide. According to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, deliberately targeting members of an ethnic group in an attempt to eliminate in part or whole the said ethnic group constitutes genocide. The Rohingya have experienced decades of prejudice and repression from successive Myanmar governments. Although Rohingya people have lived in Rakhine State for generations, Myanmar's officials have not acknowledged them as an established ethnic group. Instead, many in the Burmese authorities falsely refer to the Rohingya as "Bengalis" and claim that they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The Rohingya are among the world's largest stateless ethnic groups, having been effectively refused citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Law.

Approximately one million Rohingya are currently residing in overcrowded camps in Bangladesh, the majority of whom fled Myanmar in 2017 to avoid the military's crimes against humanity and genocide. The estimated 600,000 Rohingya who remain in Rakhine State face persecution and violence, are confined to camps and villages with no freedom of movement, and lack access to appropriate food, health care, education, and employment opportunities.



Image 2: Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

Prior to 2021, the Burmese government formed commissions to investigate the violence and encourage reconciliation between the Rohingya and those who targeted them. However, these inquiries were unsuccessful and lacking in fairness. Both before and after the February 2021 coup, Myanmar's leaders did little to ease the Rohingya's condition. Instead, they have imposed laws and policies designed to make life challenging for them. Conditions in Burma remain too unsafe for Rohingya who have fled their homes to return safely. Rohingya who return to Burma, as well as those who remain in the country, are still at risk of genocide, which in turn puts the Rohingya culture that has been established in the Rakhine State over centuries at the verge of extinction.

**Sudan's** ongoing civil war has intensified the ethnic cleansing of the communities of the Darfur region. For several years in the early 2000s, soldiers of the military-led government in Sudan and their proxy militia, known as Janjaweed, fought rebel groups in Darfur region of Sudan. Between 2003 and 2005, an estimated 200,000 citizens from Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit minority groups died from violence, sickness, and malnutrition as a result of the conflict. Throughout the Darfur genocide, the government supported Janjaweed militias in their systematic attacks against civilians who shared ethnic groups with rebel forces, mainly the Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit; bombed civilians from airplanes; and committed widespread violations of human rights, such as rape, murder, and persecution on the basis of race, ethnicity, and religion.

The UN Security Council sent the Sudan case to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in March 2005 so that war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide could be investigated. Luis

Moreno-Ocampo, an ICC prosecutor, asked the court to issue an arrest warrant for Sudanese President al-Bashir in July 2008. Because of the government's involvement in planning the bloodshed in Darfur, the ICC accused al-Bashir of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The list of charges was expanded to include three counts of genocide in 2010. However, due to the absence of international actors' enforcement, ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda declared in 2014 that the case against al-Bashir would be discontinued.

In April 2023, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) targeted Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) outposts in Khartoum and strategic military sites. The attacks triggered another wave of violence. Since the commencement of fighting between the SAF and the RSF, civilians in Sudan, especially the Darfur region, have faced ongoing mass crimes on an alarming magnitude. Both the SAF and the RSF have been accused of atrocities against civilians.

Lastly, **Syria's** change of government has put the religious minorities at fatal risk across the country. Syria is home to diverse people pertaining to different religions, ethnicities, and religious sects. In terms of ethnic groups, Arabs form the majority population, while the Kurds, Assyrians, Druze, Turkmen, and Armenians are the prominent minority groups.

Arabs are internally divided into three major groups based on their religious beliefs: Sunni Arab Muslims, who are the majority, Alawite Arab Muslims, and Christian Arabs. Kurds and Turkmen are mainly Sunni Muslims. The Druze have their own faith called the Druze religion, which is regarded as an Abrahamic religion. Finally, the Armenians and Assyrians are mostly affiliated with the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Assyrian Oriental Orthodox Church, respectively.

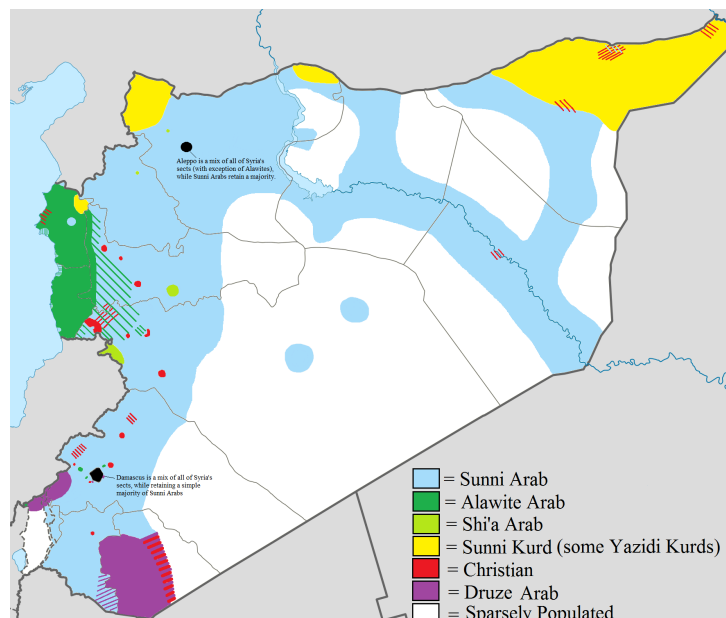


Image 3: Ethnoreligious groups in Syria

The Sunni-Alawite divide in Syria started to be most apparent during Alawite Syrian Bashar Assad's



rule. Alawites are Syria's second-largest religious group, after Sunni Muslims. Their religion is an extension of Shi'ite Islam. The Assad regime actively recruited from the Alawite community for its army and security forces. This put many Alawites on the front lines of the civil war that started in response to protests against Assad's regime in 2011. The fight became sectarian as Sunni Muslim rebel groups sought to depose the Assad regime, which was supported by Shi'ite Islamist Iran, Lebanon's Shi'ite Muslim Hezbollah, and others.

After the toppling of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024, a transitional government under the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) militant group was established, and Ahmed al-Sharaa has been the president until today. This led to many international organizations raising concerns over the future of Syria's ethnoreligious groups since the HTS, as well as Sharaa himself, have ties with the Al-Qaeda Islamic terrorist group. The concerns were mostly for the Alawite community, which was expected to be the target of a "de-Alawization" process after the toppling of the Assad regime. Most feared that the Alawites would be subjected to collective punishment, regardless of whether they were Assad supporters or not.

These concerns were proven to be true when the first violence against minority groups began. In Aleppo, militants with ties to the HTS regime burned down a Christmas tree erected by the local Christian community. During the same time period, on December 25, 2024, an Alawite shrine was destroyed by militants affiliated with the HTS regime, sparking protests.

The violence reached its apex point when vigilante militants, again affiliated to HTS, started arbitrary killings of Alawites throughout the coastal cities of Syria on March 6th, 2025, under the pretext of "targeting the remnants of the Assad regime". Several videos and reports have emerged of fighters representing the newly-installed General Security of the Syrian Transitional Government, as well as armed groups affiliated with HTS and the Syrian National Army (SNA), killing dozens of unarmed civilians, including women, children, the elderly, and infants. Along with indiscriminate killings and the torture of civilians, there have been reports of property damage and looting in a violent display of sectarianism. The Military Operations Administration extensively bombed areas along the shore from the ground and air, instilling fear and terror in inhabitants. Chechen forces under HTS have also issued a social media statement stating, "We are cleaning further." These killings, due to their nature of destroying in part or whole an ethnic group, have been described as genocide. The United Nations Security Council has condemned the killings, but concrete action is yet to be taken.

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

### Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, the Hazara minority, a Shi'a Muslim population, is brutally persecuted, especially after the return of the Taliban to power in 2021. Hazaras are targeted systematically by genocidal massacres, mosque and school bombings, and forced deportations. Hazaras have been excluded from the judiciary, which means they no longer have political representation, and humanitarian aid

meant for them has been diverted to Taliban sympathizers. This ongoing persecution led to bulk displacement, poverty, and instability, which threatened the Hazara community with severe genocide.

### **Ethiopia**

In Ethiopia, the Tigrayan minority group has been subjected to ethnic cleansing, notably between and after November 2020, during the Tigray War. The Ethiopian security forces, the Amhara regional police, and militia groups arrested thousands of Tigrayans on suspicion and forcibly displaced them from the Western Tigray Zone at gunpoint. In November 2022, the persecution continued, with the Tigrayans fleeing to Sudan. The humanitarian crisis in Tigray remains severe, threatening the very survival of Tigrayan culture in its own homeland.

### **Myanmar**

In Myanmar, the Rohingya Muslim minority have been oppressed for generations, building to what is now unanimously agreed as genocide. Despite living in Rakhine State for centuries, the Rohingya are denied citizenship by Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law and are misrepresented as illegal immigrants. In 2017, Myanmar's army unleashed brutal assaults on the Rohingya, forcing some one million into crowded refugee camps in Bangladesh. The remaining 600,000 Rohingya in Myanmar continue to face drastic restrictions of movement, lack of access to essential services, and continuing violence, putting their survival and culture at risk.

### **Sudan**

In Sudan, the ethnic minorities in Darfur, particularly the Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit people, have been ethnically cleansed and genocidally targeted in a systematic manner. In the early 2000s, the government-backed Janjaweed militia carried out mass killings, rapes, and destruction of villages. In 2005, the International Criminal Court (ICC) indicted former President Omar al-Bashir for war crimes, but its enforcement was not effective. The ongoing civil war within the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has re-sparked atrocities on a large scale, as both are accused of targeting civilians, worsening the humanitarian situation, and continuing the cycle of violence against ethnic minorities in Darfur.

### **Syria**

In Syria, the fall of the Assad government in December 2024 triggered indiscriminate violence against the Alawite minority. The interim government led by the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) militant organization has targeted Alawites based on eliminating Assad loyalists from the country. Alawite shrines have been destroyed, their communities targeted, and civilians arbitrarily killed. Extremist organizations affiliated with HTS and the SNA have instituted mass killings in the coastal towns, as well as widespread lootings and attacks on Alawite property. The terror campaign has been termed as genocide against Alawites, instilling fear in Alawite regions.



## Timeline of Events

<b>July 2008</b>	ICC prosecutor requested an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for war crimes and crimes against humanity
<b>November 2020</b>	The start of the armed conflict in northern Ethiopia, leading to mass arrests and ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans
<b>May 1, 2021</b>	The Taliban takes over Afghanistan
<b>November 2, 2022</b>	A truce deal was signed to end the Tigray War, though ethnic cleansing in the Western Tigray Zone continued
<b>December 8, 2024</b>	The Assad regime in Syria was toppled, leading to fears of sectarian retribution against Alawites
<b>December 25, 2024</b>	An Alawite shrine was destroyed by militants affiliated with the HTS regime, sparking protests
<b>March 6, 2025</b>	Armed groups affiliated with HTS and the Syrian National Army carried out mass killings of Alawites in Syria's coastal cities

## UN Involvement

### Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Minority rights are an integral part of the United Nations' work for the promotion and protection of human rights, sustainable human development, peace and security. OHCHR has a leading role within the UN system in this respect.

OHCHR's current Management Plan 2024-2027 commits the organization to supporting States to enact comprehensive anti-discrimination laws and develop independent equality bodies; to repeal or

reform laws, policies and practices that are discriminatory, notably with respect to minorities, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTIQ+ people, and people on the move; and to expand our human rights-based guidance on combating hate speech in line with international human rights law.

OHCHR supports the participation of minorities in its flagship Minorities Fellowship Programme and its senior fellowship programme. We also support minority artists human rights defenders through a variety of programming, including an annual art contest. OHCHR's efforts also include work to support memorialization of dark chapters of minority history, and their impact on the present. We also run particular programming on the countering religious hatred.

OHCHR is co-chair of the UN Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. "The Network", created in 2012, brings together more than 20 UN departments, agencies, programmes and funds, enhancing cooperation and dialogue on minorities across the UN system. Through this work, OHCHR addresses issues of racial discrimination and the protection of national or ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities, including issues of multiple, aggravated and intersecting forms of discrimination, by promoting the mainstreaming and integration of minority rights across all pillars and activities of the United Nations.

In addition, we work to further the rights of minorities worldwide through the implementation of strategic activities, and by providing support to the Forum on Minority Issues and to the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues.

## Relevant UN Documents

[Protecting Minority Rights – A Practical Guide to Developing Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation:](#)

This document prepared by the UN OHCHR touches upon the means Member States may pursue to protect the rights of regional cultures and minorities.

[Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities](#)

This document includes the General Assembly resolution (47/135) on protection of the rights of national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, adopted on December 18, 1992.

[Compilation of Recommendations of the First Four Sessions of the UN Forum on Minority Issues, 2008 to 2011](#)

This document prepared by the UN OHCHR suggests various recommendations on supporting minorities' rights to proper education, political participation, and economic involvement.

[Mandate of Special Rapporteur on minority issues](#)

This document is a resolution (52/5) adopted by the Human Rights Council on April 3, 2023, which aims to raise awareness on the issue of minorities among UN bodies, member states, regional and international organizations as well as the general public.

## Treaties and Events

**Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage:** Signed in 2003, the Convention aims to protect aspects of cultural heritage that weren't covered by the UNESCO World Heritage lists. This Convention also provides the necessary resources for LEDCs to create and monitor their own projects regarding cultural heritage.

**International Fund for Cultural Diversity:** Established under Article 18 of the UNESCO 2005 **Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions**, the IFCD provides monetary and technical support to entrepreneurs and arts and cultural bodies across the globe, with a focus on the developing world.

**UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity:** Adopted during the 31st annual session of UNESCO unanimously, this declaration recognizes the need for cultural diversity and the protection of local cultures. It provides that linguistic rights are cultural rights, and must be protected by all member states of UNESCO.

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Efforts to protect regional cultures in LEDCs have often been neglected as they have been secondary to broader economic or environmental agendas. In 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was signed. This was one of the most significant international agreements aimed at protecting non-material aspects of culture, such as languages, traditions, rituals, and oral histories. However, since there was no enforcement mechanism, it largely stayed as symbolic. Another major attempt to solve the issue was the establishment of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII). The UNPFII has served as a platform for indigenous peoples to raise concerns, including cultural erosion due to external development pressures. However, since the forum had no binding outcome it fell short.

## Possible Solutions

A voluntary system of international oversight may be created by UNESCO in order to track each member states' commitments on the resolutions passed by UNESCO regarding the protection of cultural heritage.

Member states may be encouraged to pass legislation that allows for education in a citizen's mother tongue in order to protect linguistic rights. Furthermore, governments may also grant more rights for artistic freedom, and fund such artisans through government grants.

Promotion of sustainable tourism that respects the culture and the nature (an integral part of culture) of the country could be vital to highlight and materially support specific traditions. Ethical trade frameworks should be encouraged in order to protect small artisans and ensure fair prices.

Local governance structures (such as regional bodies and town halls) could be strengthened and given more autonomy over their decisions regarding the protection of cultural heritage within their legal regions.

Support from international organizations could be strengthened. Programs like the IFCD could be expanded and funded more vastly specifically for projects and artists based in the developing world. Cultural exchange programs led by international organizations could allow more marginalized communities to share their cultural heritage to a more mainstream audience.

## Notes from the Chair

### Useful Links:

UN on Minorities and Vulnerable Groups

<https://www.un.org/en/fight-racism/vulnerable-groups/minorities>

OHCHR on the Right to Development and Least Developed Countries

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/development/right-development-and-least-developed-countries>

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