



*Royal Model United Nations*  
*2026*

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*Royal Model United Nations 2026*

## LETTER FROM THE SECRETARIAT

Dearest participants of ROYMUN'26,

It is the greatest honor to welcome you to the first edition of Royal Model United Nations 2026 and our OHCHR committee.

While shaping the ideas from the very beginning, our main goal was to ensure an extensive experience with both academic and organisational perfection.

In this prestigious committee, you will be raising impeccable ideas, debating about the current and the upcoming process, building new structures and turning the non-integrated actions and solutions to a masterpiece. Your board members will be guiding you to reach perfection in any situation.

While preparing, you will be discovering every single step about your topic and you may even find yourself in the middle of this sequence of events. It will be clear that you embrace your role in the committee.

Keep in mind that every speech you deliver, every motion you give, every question that you ask will gain a new perspective for everyone. The key point is to remain active and work confidentially while shaping the decision-making process with your colleagues.

As the Secretary-General, I am impatiently waiting to see your intelligent work and looking forward to sharing this royal experience with you.

Sincerely,

İmge Belgin

Secretary-General of ROYMUN'26



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# LETTER FROM THE CHAIRBOARD

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## **Introduction to the Committee: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**

### **Overview and Historical Context.**

The United Nations Office of the Human Rights (OHCHR) is responsible for promoting and protecting fundamental human rights under international law, making it the primary entity within the organization. The UN General Assembly formally established it on 20 January World Conference on Human Rights. The resolution made certain that the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action were implemented. Geneva, Switzerland serves as the headquarters of The Office for Human Rights and Human rights in the United Nations system. It is also responsible for overseeing all human rights initiatives across this body since its founding.

### **Mandate and Legal Framework.**

Based on the UN Charter, UDHR, and various international human rights treaties, the OHCHR has a comprehensive mandate that is widely recognized. All human rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural equality are guaranteed to all individuals by the Office's responsibility to ensure equal treatment. Its foundation is based on the idea that human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent. Therefore, the OHCHR monitors rights developments, ensures that Member States uphold these standards and work together internationally to strengthen national legal systems.

### **Mechanisms and Institutional Structure.**

Within the larger multilateral framework, the OHCHR acts as the secretariat for various essential human rights mechanisms. Specifically, it offers substantial and executive assistance to the Human Rights Council, the primary intergovernmental organization charged with resolving violations and creating global standards. Additionally, the Office supports Treaty Bodies in their role of overseeing the compliance of State Parties with essential treaties. Additionally, it supports the implementation of the Special Procedures, which includes independent experts and working groups assigned to investigate and report on particular thematic or regional matters.



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## **Committee in simulation.**

Delegates working within the OHCHR framework should approach global challenges with norm-setting, technical cooperation and consensus-building in mind for this simulation. Despite the Office's ability to publish reports on complex issues, its primary objective is to engage in constructive dialogue with Member States to build capacity and integrate human rights into wider humanitarian/development operations. Delegates are advised to prioritize diplomatic dialogue, reinforce treaty commitments, and create actionable frameworks to address systemic issues.

### **2.1. Committee Overview**

The UN human rights framework's institutional backbone is the OHCHR. The OHCHR is a department within the UN Secretariat, which distinguishes it from intergovernmental bodies made up of elected Member States like the Human Rights Council. Directly under the Secretary-General is the Under-Secretary-General, who in this case is also the High Commissioner for Human Rights. As an independent and authoritative human rights advocate, the High Commissioner's primary responsibility is to integrate these principles into all aspects of the UN peace, security, and development efforts. This is her main task.



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The operational framework of the OHCHR consists of two aspects:

1. Through regional offices, human rights advisors in UN peacekeeping missions and specialized envoys, the Office ensures an extensive global presence and strengthen its capacity. Additionally, there are also permanent headquarters for international operations. By means of these deployments, the OHCHR interacts directly with national governments and civil society, as well as national human rights institutions (NHRIs). The primary aim is to furnish technical knowledge, support the alignment of local regulations with global standards and strengthen institutional capacity to enable Member States to fulfill their obligations under treaties.

In Geneva, the OHCHR functions as the expert secretariat that supports and strengthens the UN's independent oversight system. By combining intricate data, attending to complaints about human rights violations, and offering crucial legal/operational support to the Human Rights Council. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a crucial tool that evaluates the human rights records of all UN countries through collaborating mechanisms. This mechanism is essential.

Integral to the operation of the OHCHR is a principle of neutrality, objectivity and non-selectiveness. The Office frequently utilizes the High Commissioner's "good offices" to initiate private diplomatic dialogue in a complex geopolitical context, with the goal of resolving issues through cooperation rather than public criticism. To delegates, comprehending the OHCHR involves acknowledging its multifaceted nature as an autonomous international watchdog, a facilitator of global law, and collaborating with Member States in fixing systemic problems.



## **Introduction to the Agenda Item: Governing State Neutrality with the Protection of Minority Cultural Practices**

State Neutrality and Minority Cultural Practices: An Introduction to the Agenda item

Maintaining a balance between **state neutrality** and the **preservation of cultural practices** in minority communities remains an ongoing issue in international human rights discussions. Harmonizing these two principles can lead to friction between a sovereign nation's right to preserve civic unity and its international obligation to safeguard the unique identities of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities. To navigate this dynamic, it is essential to adopt a subtle approach that ensures cultural rights are not compromised while striving for unified and impartial public spheres.

### **The Nuances of State Neutrality**

The traditional approach to ensure equality before the law involves state neutrality, which means that the government apparatus doesn't officially endorse or favor any particular religious or cultural concept. The ultimate goal of neutrality is to create a welcoming and inclusive public arena. There has been a growing concern that rigid definitions of state neutrality may facilitate systemic assimilation. Minority communities who intersect with the public domain often face disproportionate marginalization due to domestic policies that enforce absolute uniformity in public institutions, such as mandating standardized linguistic practices or banning visible cultural and religious symbols.

### **International Legal Frameworks**

Minority cultural practices are protected by international human rights law. In contrast to state neutrality, which promotes "**formal equality**" (meaning that all people are treated equally), international systems prioritize "**substantive equality**," which requires the government to take proactive steps to protect those who are marginalized. According to **Article 27 of the ICCPR**, individuals who are part of minority groups are entitled to enjoy their own culture, profession of religion, or use their language without restriction. This is further backed up by the 1992 release **Rights of National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities: UN Declaration**.



### **Focus of the Committee.**

The agenda point requires delegates to critically assess the boundaries of state neutrality and create comprehensive guidelines to ensure that civic integration policies do not diminish minority rights. It is hoped that the committee would consider ways to achieve "reasonable accommodation", develop guidelines that assist states in transitioning from formal to substantive equality, and establish normative standards that permit Member States to celebrate cultural diversity while maintaining peaceful and united societies.

### **3.1. Towards A Neutrality Paradox: The Case of Universal Legal Framework, Inc. Forced Assimilation.**

State neutrality is based on the principle of equal treatment for justice and public services. The "neutrality paradox" is a major controversy that arises from the inadequacy of universal regulations in impeding cultural norms of most people. The norm is commonly depicted as deviations from minority practices, as the dominant demographic invariably defines what is considered "normal." Administrative measures aimed at deterring discrimination can result in systemic exclusion.

Despite the fact that direct discrimination is forbidden by universal legal systems, they may complicate the issue by demanding complete "formal equality," which means treating everyone equally regardless of their language or culture. When states implement broad civic plans, they may facilitate de facto forced assimilation through this logic. Policies that require a single language in administrative procedures, allow school curricula to be uniformed to exclude indigenous stories, or restrict religious icons from use in public life demonstrate this. Despite being justified by the sovereign's duty to promote national unity, these actions gradually weaken the independence of smaller factions.

International human rights jurisprudence suggests that this requires moving away from formal equality and towards substantive equality. The UN Human Rights Committee has emphasized the importance of equal treatment and guarantees that results from certain actions are not invariant. It can be discriminatory if broad policies are implemented without providing adequate accommodations for a particular minority.' Whether universal frameworks can be restored to ensure cohesion and impartiality among nations without cultural damage is up in the hands of the members.



### **3.2. Secularism and Civic Nationalism, Regulation of the Public Sphere.**

Secularism and civic nationalism are commonly utilized by Member States worldwide to promote internal cohesion and ensure the fair functioning of state institutions. These strategies have broad appeal. The concept of civic nationalism is based on the idea that shared citizenship and political participation contributes to creating a unified identity, rather than identifying with any particular ethnicity or religion. Meanwhile, secularism seeks to separate government institutions from religious doctrine in order to preserve freedom of thought while ensuring that the state does not support any particular group. This is known as "free speech". If we apply rigid paradigms to control public life, pursuing a single civic identity can unintentionally suppress minority expression.

Balancing state impartiality with minority rights is a common issue in public spaces, such as education and the civil service, as well as the judiciary and civic squares. The administrative policies that maintain a high degree of neutrality in public appearances, such as blanket bans on religious symbols or traditional attire inside official buildings, are now causing concern among some. Despite being commonly supported by the preservation of public order or institutional neutrality in Member States, these laws disproportionately impact minority communities where their cultural obligations overlap with everyday public life.

Important international human rights law guidelines are provided to manage this overlap. Religious and cultural freedom are not necessarily restricted by law, but there may be limitations. According to Article 18 of the ICCPR, there are certain laws that restrict public displays of religion or culture as they are necessary for maintaining public morals and safety or order. The "inclusive secularism" frameworks must be examined by delegates on this sub-topic, where state institutions can maintain neutrality while also accommodating diverse cultural practices. This is of great importance. This aspect is relevant to delegates.



### **3.3. Minority identity changes are disproportionately affected by "colorblind" laws.**

"Identity-blind" legislative frameworks are commonly used by governments due to the ideological belief that ignoring ethnic or cultural backgrounds is the most effective way to eliminate prejudice. Established on the principles of formal parity, these techniques aim to ensure that the law is applied equally to all individuals. The simplicity of bureaucratic procedures and the reduction of social divisions along religious or linguistic lines are among the many reasons why many governments seem to be drawn to this philosophy. Yet this policy is consistently denounced by legal scholars, civil society organizations and human rights campaigners as a major structural flaw. These types of structures largely overlook past contexts, generational prejudice, and deeply ingrained systemic wrongs. In the absence of formal explanations to explain demographic differences in public policy formulation, legislative bodies may be constrained in their capacity to create institutionalized socio-economic imbalances. Societies tend to have laws that are "neutral" and influenced by the dominant population, leading to systemic disadvantages within institutions that aim to protect marginalized groups.

The implementation of strict colorblind policies often results in indirect discrimination due to their strictness. Any unintended consequence resulting from a neutral practice or policy, regardless of its intended purpose, is considered negative. One of the key operational challenges of this philosophy is the general reluctance to collect comprehensive demographic data, and even strict legal restrictions in some jurisdictions. Neither domestic agencies nor international observers have empirical statistics that categorize race, religion, or language, leading to a significant informational gap. In major public sectors it is extremely difficult to measure, monitor and correct structural inequalities. The legal cover-up of state-targeted actions is hindere, which includes inadequate demographic figures, educational disparities, bias in the criminal justice system, or unequal access to municipal healthcare.



Although the concept that identity-based discrimination results in a just society is not supported by the international human rights framework, it is also challenged. International Treaties like the Intergovernmental Panel on Racial Discrimination (ICERD) differentiate between cases of substantial and demonstrable bias in favor of necessary measures to correct them. Article 1(4) of the International Code on Education and Rights (ICERD) has made discrimination illegal, citing temporary special measures such as affirmative action, targeted community funding, or quota systems. Nonetheless, the primary issue is that these programs cannot establish permanent rights for different groups and must be abandoned once their original egalitarian objectives are achieved. This is particularly problematic. The legal standard underscores a fundamental principle of international law, which is that substantive equality necessitates actively acknowledging minority identities rather than retreating to performative neutrality.

The committees must consider the concrete consequences of identity-free laws and devise multilateral strategies to bridge the persistent gap between abstract legal rights and practical outcomes. Under the OHCHR framework, Member States are encouraged to address the difficult issues of collecting demographic data. Officials must suggest arrangements that enable countries to gather and utilize disaggregated data in a secure and ethical manner. This requires ensuring that privacy laws are strictly enforced, prohibit state-sponsored suppression of some information, and allow culturally sensitive policymaking without interference. Moreover, the task of reaching a consensus on maintaining national unity through shared civic values is encountering different levels of difficulty. The legal recognition that recognizing demographic diversity is essential for safeguarding minority rights must be given to the committee.

### **3.4. Turning the Horizon: Imposed Harmony to Inclusive Pluralism.**

Historically, the imposition of uniformity was a crucial aspect of the state-building model. This is an example. A highly homogeneous population was considered the most crucial factor for national security and socio-political stability. The conventional wisdom regarded cultural, linguistic, and religious distinctions as fundamentally harmful to civic engagement. Still, a number of academics maintain that these viewpoints are incorrect. Even so, the current international system of human rights firmly denies the idea that cultural destruction is necessary for civil peace. International law advocates for inclusive pluralism, which posits that a state's resilience isn't dependent on its ability to integrate people of different backgrounds, but rather depends on it. This approach emphasizes this principle. Member States must embrace pluralistic inclusion and transform their civic spaces into fluid environments where different cultural backgrounds can coexist without any issues underpinned by fundamental rights.



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Additionally, diversity should be a priority for all countries.

This change is heavily based on the principle of "reasonable accommodation" in administrative terms. Although it was first associated with disability rights, it has since become an important mediator in cultural and religious disputes. It is necessary for public service providers, employers, and state institutions to make targeted changes in general rules to prevent disproportionate pressure on minority groups' practices in the provision of reasonable accommodation. The legal requirement for these changes is "undue hardship," which means that the accommodation cannot interfere with an institution's core function, incur unsustainable costs, or harm others. Consequently, this has practical implications for policy changes, such as introducing non-elite foods to public schools and official uniform rules to allow for traditional headwear, or integrating basic public health data into minority languages. Additionally,

Inclusion pluralism requires the adoption of institutionalized minority participation in public life, rather than passive tolerance. If marginalized communities are completely excluded from the political mechanisms that shape their daily lives, providing meaningful protection is not feasible. The 1992. As per the UN Minorities Declaration, individuals of minority ethnicity are entitled to participate in all aspects of society, including making decisions about their own communities. To this end, Member States are being urged to establish independent consultative bodies, allocate administrative functions to regions with high concentrations of minority populations, and to create National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) which act as mediators between the state apparatus and marginalized groups. The structural avenues of minority communities that can shape public opinion can be bridged through proactive dialogue, rather than reactive litigation.

As the agenda item is nearing its conclusion, delegates are focused on codifying the shift from imposed uniformity to inclusive pluralism into an actionable multilateral framework. The commission is tasked with creating resolutions that outline specific, expanded methods of accommodating different legal systems and cultural backgrounds. Diplomatic negotiations must be rigorous to establish the boundaries of "undue hardship" and how states can manage public order while preserving cultural expression. But its success in the simulation depends on whether that committee can prove that a united, functioning state and societal diversity are not mutually reinforcing elements of dependable international order.



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## Key Terms & Definitions

- 1. Assimilation: The process through which individuals or minority groups absorb the cultural norms of the dominant society, often at the expense of their original cultural identity.
- 2. Bilateral Relations: Diplomatic, political, or economic interactions directly between two sovereign states, separate from wider multilateral frameworks.
- 3. Capacity-Building: The process of developing and strengthening the skills, legal frameworks, and institutions that Member States require to fulfill their international human rights obligations.
- 4. Civic Integration: State policies requiring minorities or immigrants to adopt the host country's language, civic values, and structural norms to participate fully in public life.
- 5. Civic Nationalism: A political framework that builds a unified national identity based on shared citizenship and constitutional values, rather than shared ethnic ancestry or religious lineage.
- 6. Colorblind Legislation: Laws drafted without regard to race, ethnicity, or cultural background, operating on the premise of formal equality but often criticized for perpetuating systemic disparities.
- 7. Consensus-Building: A diplomatic process aimed at reaching a broad, multilateral agreement among Member States by mitigating severe objections, rather than requiring absolute unanimity.
- 8. Constructive Ambiguity: The deliberate use of broad or ambiguous language in diplomatic drafting to allow differing Member States to agree on a text while retaining their respective interpretations.
- 9. Cultural Hegemony: The dominance of a single demographic group over a diverse society, structuring public life so that the ruling group's worldview becomes the accepted, "neutral" norm.
- 10. Cultural Rights: Fundamental human rights guaranteeing individuals and communities the ability to participate in, practice, and preserve their specific cultural heritage and traditions without state interference.
- 11. De Facto Discrimination: Discrimination that exists in everyday reality and systemic practice, even if it is not officially mandated or recognized by a state's legal code.



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- 12. **De Jure Discrimination:** Explicit discrimination that is legally codified, institutionalized, and enforced by a state's laws or official administrative frameworks.
- 13. **Derogation:** A legal provision allowing Member States to temporarily suspend certain human rights obligations during severe public emergencies, though core rights (like the right to life) remain non-derogable.
- 14. **Disaggregated Data:** Empirical demographic statistics broken down into specific sub-categories (e.g., ethnicity, religion, language), which are essential for identifying hidden structural inequalities.
- 15. **Ethnocentrism:** The evaluation or judgment of minority cultures according to preconceptions and standards originating from the dominant, majority culture.
- 16. **Formal Equality:** A legal doctrine asserting that fairness is achieved by treating all individuals identically under the law, regardless of historical context, structural barriers, or demographic background.
- 17. **Forced Assimilation:** The systemic process by which coercive state policies compel minority populations to abandon their distinct cultural, linguistic, or religious identities in favor of the dominant group's norms.
- 18. **General Comments:** Authoritative legal interpretations published by UN Treaty Bodies clarifying the exact meaning, scope, and state obligations regarding specific international human rights conventions.
- 19. **Good Offices:** A diplomatic practice where a senior UN official (such as the High Commissioner) acts as an impartial mediator, privately resolving human rights disputes through cooperative dialogue.
- 20. **Human Rights Council (HRC):** The premier intergovernmental body within the UN system, comprising 47 elected Member States, responsible for addressing global human rights violations and establishing normative standards.
- 21. **ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights):** A core UN treaty committing its State Parties to respect civil and political rights, explicitly including the right of minorities to profess their religion and use their language (Article 27).
- 22. **ICERD (International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination):** A foundational UN convention committing State Parties to the elimination of racial discrimination and outlining the legal parameters for permissible "special measures."



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- 23. **Inclusive Pluralism:** A governance model that actively integrates demographic diversity into the public sphere, operating on the premise that civic unity and cultural multiplicity are mutually reinforcing.
- 24. **Indirect Discrimination:** A legal phenomenon where a seemingly neutral law, administrative criterion, or practice yields a disproportionately negative or exclusionary impact on a specific minority group.
- 25. **Indigenous Peoples:** Distinct social and cultural groups sharing collective ancestral ties to the lands where they reside, holding specialized international rights to self-determination and cultural heritage.
- 26. **Institutional Racism:** Racial or ethnic discrimination that has become established as standard operating procedure within a state's legal, educational, or civil service organizations.
- 27. **Intersectionality:** An analytical framework recognizing how overlapping aspects of a person's demographic identity (such as race, religion, and gender) combine to create unique, compounded modes of discrimination.
- 28. **Linguistic Rights:** The collective and individual human rights concerning the freedom to choose the language or languages for communication in both private settings and administrative public spheres.
- 29. **Margin of Appreciation:** A legal concept allowing Member States a degree of discretion in how they interpret and implement human rights standards, factoring in their specific domestic cultural contexts.
- 30. **Marginalization:** The systemic social process by which specific minority demographics are pushed to the edges of society and denied equitable access to economic, political, and cultural resources.
- 31. **Minority Group:** A culturally, ethnically, religiously, or linguistically distinct demographic that coexists within, but is structurally subordinate to, a more dominant demographic group within a sovereign state.
- 32. **Multilateralism:** The diplomatic practice of coordinating national policies and resolving geopolitical issues in alliances of three or more states, forming the operational basis of the United Nations.
- 33. **National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs):** Independent, state-mandated organizations responsible for promoting and protecting human rights domestically, frequently acting as an intermediary between marginalized communities and the central government.



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- 34. Norm-Setting: The diplomatic process of establishing, defining, and codifying internationally recognized standards of behavior and legal obligations that guide state conduct.
- 35. OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights): The principal UN entity mandated to promote and protect fundamental human rights, functioning as the central secretariat for the broader UN human rights architecture.
- 36. Pluralism: A social framework recognizing and affirming demographic diversity within a political body, permitting the peaceful and equitable coexistence of different cultural lifestyles.
- 37. Public Sphere: The arena of civic life—encompassing government buildings, public schools, the judiciary, and the civil service—where state policies directly regulate behavior, attire, and language.
- 38. Ratification: The formal, legal process by which a Member State signs an international treaty and explicitly binds itself to observe its obligations under international law.
- 39. Reasonable Accommodation: Targeted, proportionate adjustments to general public policies that allow individuals to practice their distinct cultural or religious beliefs without causing undue institutional disruption.
- 40. Secularism (Laïcité): The strict separation of government institutions from religious doctrine, frequently debated in international forums when its rigid application restricts minority cultural expressions in public spaces.
- 41. Self-Determination: The cardinal right of a people to freely determine their political status and autonomously pursue their economic, social, and cultural development without external coercion.
- 42. Sovereignty: The supreme, independent authority of a state to govern itself and dictate its domestic policies, a principle frequently weighed against universal international human rights obligations.
- 43. Special Measures: Temporary, targeted interventions sanctioned by international law to accelerate the advancement of marginalized groups, which must be discontinued once baseline equality is achieved.
- 44. Special Procedures: Independent human rights experts or working groups mandated by the UN to investigate, advise, and publicly report on specific thematic rights issues or geographical situations.



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- 45. **State Neutrality:** The principle that a government must remain strictly impartial regarding the religious, cultural, or ethnic identities of its citizens, neither endorsing nor institutionalizing any specific group.
- 46. **State Party:** A sovereign Member State that has formally ratified or acceded to a specific international human rights treaty, thereby legally committing to adhere to its provisions.
- 47. **Structural Inequality:** A socio-economic condition where discrimination is deeply embedded in the systemic fabric of a society, operating invisibly through institutional processes rather than individual prejudice.
- 48. **Substantive Equality:** A human rights framework focused on achieving equitable outcomes rather than merely identical treatment, requiring proactive state measures to correct historical disadvantages.
- 49. **Technical Cooperation:** The provision of specialized expertise, training, and logistical resources by UN entities to assist Member States in strengthening their domestic human rights infrastructure.
- 50. **Treaty Bodies:** Committees of independent UN experts tasked with systematically monitoring how effectively State Parties are implementing the core international human rights conventions they have ratified.
- 51. **Undue Hardship:** The legal and administrative threshold at which providing a "reasonable accommodation" becomes too disruptive, financially burdensome, or legally problematic for a public institution to implement.
- 52. **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):** The milestone UN document adopted in 1948, serving as the foundational legal text outlining the fundamental, indivisible rights universally afforded to all human beings.
- 53. **Universal Periodic Review (UPR):** A unique, peer-driven diplomatic mechanism facilitated by the OHCHR that routinely and comprehensively evaluates the human rights records of all UN Member States.
- 54. **Xenophobia:** The deep-rooted, systemic, and irrational fear, prejudice, or hatred directed against individuals from other countries or marginalized cultural backgrounds.



## **Background of the Agenda Item**

### **5.1. How is "Neutrality" defined in the context of State Governance and Public Policy?**

The concept of state neutrality is a highly debated topic in the realms of international relations and domestic governance. Neutrality in theory, meaning that strictly not the fault of the state apparatus must reflect its citizenry morality and religious practices diversity. No truly impartial state government endorses a state-sponsored religion, demands adherence to specialized cultural beliefs, or allocates public funds based on ethnic preference. Its position is that of an impartial judge, with the objective of creating a civilized society in which all people can engage with state authorities, from lawyers to municipal services, without fear of institutional favoritism.

Transforming this philosophical ideal into practical public policy can lead to significant operational friction. The primary issue lies in the way that different Member States perceive the base principle of "neutrality." In some jurisdictions, neutrality is achieved through a multilateral approach, where the state actively accommodates various cultural expressions to ensure equal representation. Conversely, in other countries, a restrictive model is followed, often associated with strict secularism, which achieves neutrality by eliminating all cultural and religious markers from the public sphere. If policymakers confuse neutrality with homogeneity, the entire administrative apparatus will unintentionally fall back to the cultural preferences of the majority population. Thus, neutral policies can lead to a systematic alienation of minority groups, forcing them to adapt to an open and democratic environment that neglects their individuality.



## **5.2. Cultural and Religious Symbols' Intersection with Public Order**

The public display of cultural and religious identities in areas where they exist is a divisive issue between human rights concerns and state control. The occurrence of friction usually occurs when minorities wear conventional clothing, religious garments or unique cultural symbols in state-regulated settings such as public schools, courtrooms, or civil service offices. Consequently, legislative bodies frequently introduce laws that restrict these symbols, often invoking justifications for maintaining "**public order**" (ordre public), institutional impartiality, or national security. Identifying the exact moment when cultural symbols pose a genuine threat to public order and hiding systematic xenophobia or forced integration are both problematic for diplomatic reasons.

A strict framework for this intersection is established by international human rights law, specifically **Article 18 of the ICCPR**. There is no limit to the freedom of individuals to believe in a particular idea or concept, but their belief can be subject to control. Still, all such restrictions imposed by the state must meet a strict legal standard that requires them to be explicitly prescribed by law, serve ill-conceived purposes (such as public safety or health), and be strictly proportionate to that purpose. The proportionality test is hardly ever satisfied by blanket bans on cultural or religious symbols. Under the assumption that a neutral public order will maintain minority expressions, Member States run the risk of violating fundamental cultural rights and systematically excluding minority populations from active participation in civil service and public education.



### **5.3. Linguistic Standardization and Educational Homogenization**

Both as a medium of communication and civic engagement, language holds significant value. The implementation of linguistic standardization and centralised education have historically been highly effective means of nation-building for Member States. A unified common language and national curriculum, for instance, will certainly lead to more effective administration; economic mobility will increase, and social cohesion will ensue. Various peoples can communicate, trade, and engage in a shared political discussion through unified language.

However, the aggressive push for educational uniformity often results in the ostracism, or total elimination, of minority languages and indigenous narratives. State-sponsored educational systems often require minority youth to choose between a particular language of instruction and promoting adherence to solitary historical narrative, leading to the erosion of their sense of identity and belonging. A form of structural assimilation results in linguistic minorities being severely marginalized; they are evaluated in the second language, and their native tongues become irrelevant to them, leading to an acceleration of decline. Taking cues from protocols such as the **UN Minorities Declaration**, the OHCHR stresses that "promoting the language of our country shall not lead to the destruction of dialects of the minority." The task before this committee is to devise educational systems with dual-language content and curricula that respect a state's legitimate need for standardized labor while upholding the linguistic rights of minority groups. This is an urgent but politically sensitive issue.



## **Root Causes & Substantial Consequences**

### **6.1. Majoritarianism and State anxiety over Separatism**

Strong state concerns about territorial integrity exacerbate the political dynamic of majoritarianism that underlies restrictive cultural policies. If only one group of people has significant political power, the state apparatus will eventually align with their cultural values, making them the standard and objective for civic life. From this dominant vantage point, it is easy to misread minority requests for cultural accommodation. Instead of being considered as requests for fairness under international law, these demands are frequently viewed as threats to national unity in the eyes of some perverse power.

Historically, many Member States have deep fears that cultural, religious or linguistic autonomy will lead to ethnic balkanization or embolden separatist movements. Thus, governments frequently utilize the principle of state neutrality as a proactive defensive strategy. State officials attempt to neutralize perceived secessionist threats before they are politically feasible by enforcing a rigid, homogeneous public sphere through legal means. However, this defensive approach fundamentally misidentifies the root causes of civil disorder. By suppressing unique sub-group identities, the desire for autonomy is not undermined; rather, it consistently legitimizes the specific grievances that fuel separatist rhetoric, leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy of internal division and political fragmentation.



## **6.2. Socio-Economic marginalization and disenfranchisement of minority communities**

Besides political representation, the rigorous enforcement of cultural uniformity results in devastating socio-economic consequences. The capacity of public institutions to function within the linguistic and cultural constraints of the dominant group leads to the creation of formidable structural barriers to entry for minority populations. The mechanism of this exclusion is frequently subtle but widespread. Administrative laws that forbid certain religious clothing in office, effectively barring observant individuals from entering civil service jobs, the judiciary, and public education. For instance, Systemic denial of essential municipal services, legal representation, or public health information in minority languages also isolates those communities from the state's social safety net.

The cumulative effect of administrative friction over time is a severe form of socio-economic marginalization. Often, minority communities are forced to deal with the informal economy, struggle through poor housing conditions, and experience generational poverty. The formal public sector is systematically shutting them out, which also negates their ability to influence political decision-making processes that dictate their living conditions. This economic stratification goes against the fundamental principles of the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)**. It shows clearly that theoretical equality before the law is useless if the government effectively excludes a certain group of people from participating in the formal economy.



### **6.3. Civic trust and radicalization**

Systemic marginalization results in a complete collapse of civic trust between minority groups and the central state apparatus. A functional and stable nation is fully dependent on a robust social agreement that ensures the government's commitment to safeguard fundamental rights for all its citizens in exchange for civic loyalty. When state policies, masquerading as neutrality, actively suppress cultural expression, the fundamental contract is broken. Eventually, minority groups will see law enforcement, courts and public schools not as impartial protectors but rather as instruments of structural oppression and forced assimilation.

The sociological void is highly dynamic due to the extreme separation. Radicalization poses a significant threat to vulnerable groups, who are stripped of their cultural heritage and completely excluded from socio-economic mobility. Extremist factions and non-state actors frequently use this state-sponsored exemption as a weapon. They exploit the authentic concerns of marginalized communities, providing them with a sense of belonging, identity, and political involvement that the official civic sphere has forcefully denied them. Over time, governments with a tendency towards oppressive measures aim to create social harmony by suppressing minority rights, leading to the development of radicalism, extremism, and societal instability.



## **The International Legal Framework and previous UN initiatives**

### **7.1. ICCPR is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (IPR)**

Modern international minority rights jurisprudence is firmly established in the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**, which was officially implemented in 1976. Cultural preservation is the most important legally binding provision of this treaty, **Article 27**. The legislation makes it clear that in states where there is an ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority, individuals are not exempt from having their own culture, religion, and language.

The early development of the international human rights framework was primarily concerned with ensuring universal, individual rights and assumed that non-discrimination would safeguard marginalized groups. Yet the addition of Article 27 represented a significant legal advance. According to the law, establishing a strictly neutral standard for all citizens can often not resolve existing structural differences and may unintentionally aid in the process of forced integration. An essential interpreting principle in Article 27, however, is that the existence of a minority is an objective question of fact and not an entity dependent upon official state recognition. Hence, Member States are not allowed to bypass their treaty obligations by opting out of the legal recognition of certain minority groups living within their borders. Article 27, alongside the ICCPR's Article 18 and Article 26 refers to the state's responsibility in promoting individual cultural norms rather than simply permitting them from a passive position of authority.



## **7.2. The 1992 National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities are protected by the UN Declaration on Human Rights**

In December 1992, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the **Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (Resolution 47/135)**, which sought to expand the ICCPR's binding obligations. This groundbreaking document represents the most extensive political and normative commitment to minority protection on the international level. The Declaration decisively settled a protracted diplomatic dispute over whether universal human rights and specific protections for minorities were fundamentally at odds with each other. Instead, it placed minority rights at the forefront of the larger human right picture, arguing that "**absolute**" protections are necessary to achieve true universality.

The Declaration's wording surpasses the customary negative oath of non-intervention. In Article 1, Member States are obligated to take measures to safeguard the national, ethnic and cultural identity of minorities within their borders. Moreover, Article 4 sets forth specific programmatic demands, strongly urging legislatures to establish favorable conditions for minorities to express their traits. This includes an explicit demand on the part of states to ensure that minorities have adequate opportunities to learn their mother language or receive instruction in that language, wherever possible. This tool changed the diplomatic paradigm by emphasizing the importance of minority participation in cultural, social, and economic activities. State leaders must not only prevent the suppression of marginalized groups but also establish constructive, systemic structures that enable these groups to flourish visibly in the civic arena.



### **7.3. Previous OHCHR Reports and General Comments on Treaty Body Matters**

United Nations Treaty Bodies' interpretive work and the OHCHR's investigative mandate play a crucial role in guiding the implementation of multilateral agreements. "**General Comments**" are issued by Treaty Bodies to clarify the specific operational obligations of State Parties, as international conventions are frequently drafted with constructive uncertainty to ensure their adoption. The most crucial General Comment No. 23 is authored by the Human Rights Committee, which... 23. The Committee firmly believed that leaving a minority group to its own devices is tantamount to structural assimilation, particularly when the majority has dominant cultural and linguistic systems. The General Comment 23 concluded that Article 27 imposes binding positive obligations for Member States, which include taking affirmative measures to safeguard the cultural identity of minorities from the homogenizing pressures placed on them by the wider state apparatus.

In addition, the CERD issued **General Recommendation No. 32**, The proposal clarified the definition and scope of "**special measures**," which posit that targeted, temporary actions aimed at ensuring the adequate development of minority populations do not contradict non-discrimination.

In conjunction with these Treaty Bodies, the OHCHR supports the Special Rapporteur's ongoing investigative work on cultural rights and minority issues. These independent experts have consistently presented their most recent thematic reports to the Human Rights Council, which highlight how rigid interpretations of secularism and civic nationalism often go against international standards. By means of General Comments, thematic reports, and field investigations, delegates can access the legal precedents required to argue that cultural expression requires reasonable accommodations for genuine state neutrality.



## Case Studies

### 8.1. The *Lacit * Model: Religious attire and symbols on public places throughout Europe

The concept of state neutrality is most effectively implemented in European countries through strict secularism, or *lacit *, among other factors. The original intention of this model was to establish a progressive approach that would distinguish religious authority from state authority, but it now seeks to ensure parity by ensuring the removal of all religious associations in the public sphere. This ideology can be translated into law by prohibiting the use of conspicuous religious figures, such as headscarves, turbans and feigned crosses, within state-regulated settings like public schools, the judiciary, and the wider civil service. These frameworks are aimed at creating a common, non-secular civic identity in which all citizens interact with the state apparatus as equals.

Even so, the vigorous implementation of this model has prompted ongoing criticism from global human rights organizations. Despite being written in neutral language, the legislation often has a disproportionately negative impact on certain groups, particularly Muslim women and Sikh men, who believe that their religion mandates specific clothing. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has repeatedly emphasized that blanket bans on religious clothing often do not satisfy the proportionality test established in Article 18 of the ICCPR. Observers agree that forcing individuals to choose between their fundamental religious obligations and their entitlements to access public education or civil service employment is what constitutes structural exclusion. Through the use of a "neutral" aesthetic in the public square, these policies can threaten marginalized communities and undermine the social cohesion and civic integration that the secular framework had sought to safeguard.



## **8.2. Indigenous Land Use vs. State Economic "Neutrality" in the Americas**

The cultural preservation of Indigenous peoples and state-driven economic development are still at odds throughout the Americas. Member States often adopt ostensibly "neutral" legal systems over property rights, resource extraction, and infrastructure development, basing this on the belief that natural resources must be conserved for the economic benefit of the entire nation. State courts often follow the logic of formal equality and pass property laws that prioritize documented ownership or corporate concessions over undocumented land tenure systems used by Indigenous communities.

The strict enforcement of neutral property law completely ignores the profound and symbiotic bond that Indigenous peoples have with their ancestral territories, which is not just economic but also deeply spiritual and cultural. The cultural survival of these communities is directly threatened when state authorities knowingly or illegally allow mining, logging (or other forms of agriculture) on ancestral lands without **FPIC**. The OHCHR recognizes that disregarding traditional land rights based on economic development is contrary to international standards and operates within the framework of the **UN Declaration on Indigenous Rights (UNDRIP)**. In order to achieve true neutrality in this context, state institutions must legally acknowledge alternative, collective land ownership models, while also preventing the systematic displacement and cultural erasure of Indigenous populations.



### **8.3. South Asia's Minority Language Rights due to linguistic homogenization**

Several South Asian countries present an intricate case study of the use of language standardization in post-colonial societies. Following independence, a significant number of Member States in the region attempted to unite diverse and multi-ethnic communities into unified national identities. In this state-building effort, a crucial element was established through the adoption of solitary, dominant language as solely responsible for government functions, legal proceedings and public education. Despite being seen as a necessary logistical step to streamline governance and create unified national workers, the aggressive linguistic homogenization left ethno-linguistic minorities at severable structural disadvantages.

If a state doesn't allow minority languages in its bureaucracy, it is effectively creating systemic disenfranchisement. Linguistic minorities encounter significant obstacles in navigating the legal system, municipal healthcare services, or finding employment in the public sector due to the state's language barrier, which is often unpredictable given their non-native language proficiency. Furthermore, excluding a dominant language from educational curriculum accelerates decline of minor cultural heritage, forcing younger people to lose their mother tongue in order to achieve socio-economic mobility. A global system of human rights, based on the 1992 convention. **The UN Declaration on Minorities** highlights the importance of providing strong protection to minority dialects while also granting sovereignty to establish a national language. By not making reasonable linguistic adjustments in the critical public sectors, language transforms into another tool of political marginalization.



## **Possible Solutions**

Member States must prioritize the protection of minority cultural practices over state neutrality in order to achieve tangible outcomes through legislative and administrative measures. Within this committee, the resolutions must aim to operationalize **inclusive pluralism** while maintaining the functional impartiality of the state in public spaces. This is a crucial consideration.

### **1. Creating the Rules of Reasonable Accommodation.**

A fundamental solution is to have Member States drafting comprehensive domestic anti-discrimination legislation that legally requires "**reasonable accommodation**" across the public and private sectors. The resolutions should provide a consistent framework for states to determine the level of "**undue hardship**." This effectively means providing clear administrative channels for individuals to request exemptions from seemingly neutral policies, such as uniform requirements, standardized dietary provisions in public institutions, or rigid working hours, to accommodate cultural and religious obligations. By establishing independent arbitration boards to handle these requests, it is possible to prevent the transformation of cultural disputes into formal judicial litigation without any immediate impact.

### **2. Safe and ethical collection of dispersed data.**

To counter the invisible, structural disenfranchisement that underlies "colorblind" laws, it is imperative for the international community to rethink the collection of demographic data. Member States are encouraged by the OHCHR to create mechanisms for collecting **disaggregated data** on ethnicity, religion, and linguistic background that are both secure and comply with privacy regulations. It is crucial to emphasize in future resolutions that this information should never be used for state surveillance or punitive measures. It should only be used by independent oversight bodies and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to assess differences in healthcare, education, or criminal justice systems so that "neutral" policies can be inadvertently causing indirect discrimination.



### **3. Educational Pluralism and Linguistic Inclusion.**

Member States must embrace educational homogenization, which has historically resulted in forced assimilation, by establishing dual-language and culturally inclusive frameworks. This is an urgent need. The solution would be to decentralize educational curricula, enabling regional authorities with sizable minority populations to incorporate mother-tongue teaching into the curriculum alongside the national language. Moreover, civic education programs must be modified to incorporate the historical contributions of minority communities. Changing the public school system from an instrument of assimilation into a vehicle of cultural pride can foster genuine civic loyalty in states, without necessarily requiring "radical" elimination of minority groups.

### **4. Providing Support to National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)**

The adoption of multilateral resolutions should strongly urge Member States to establish and receive complete funding from independent **NHRIs** in accordance with the **Paris Principles**. The central state apparatus is connected to marginalized communities by these institutions. One solution could be to grant NHRIs the power to review proposed public policy before it is implemented, to ensure that it does not disproportionately impact minority communities. Governments can address the neutrality paradox by introducing minority consultation as a preemptive measure and transitioning from imposing majoritarian regimes to actively participating in legislative processes, which would encourage more active participation.



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### **Questions to be Addressed**

- How can the international community define the precise threshold at which a minority cultural practice genuinely threatens public order without enabling forced assimilation?
- By what mechanisms can Member States standardize the legal threshold for "undue hardship" when providing cultural accommodations in critical public sectors like education and the civil service?
- How can governments safely collect disaggregated demographic data to identify indirect discrimination while legally guaranteeing this information will not be weaponized against vulnerable populations?
- How should secular state models be reformed to ensure that the regulation of religious and cultural symbols in the public sphere does not structurally exclude minorities from participating in civic life?
- What administrative frameworks can effectively balance a sovereign state's need for a unifying national language with its international obligation to protect minority dialects?
- In what specific ways can the OHCHR assist Member States in transitioning from domestic legal frameworks of strict formal equality to those of substantive equality?
- How can governments successfully cultivate a unified national identity and civic loyalty without requiring minority communities to abandon their distinct cultural heritage?



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