

Speech to be delivered by Rup Sunar as a panelist in the inaugural session of the 18th Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues, under the panel theme: “Building Trust and Social Cohesion: Addressing Barriers to Peaceful Co-existence.”

Honourable Chair, SR Prof. Nicolas, fellow panelists, and distinguished participants,

It is an honor to join this discussion on such a critical topic. I am a chair of the Dignity Initiative and delegate of the International Dalit Solidarity Network. I speak today from the perspective of Dalit and minorities, who continue to suffer from structural exploitation, discriminatory state and social institutions. Therefore, trust and social cohesion are essential because they enable all communities to live together peacefully, participate equally, and contribute to building fair and inclusive societies.

Around the world, mistrust and exclusion continue to shape the lives of minority communities. These challenges are not new—they are deeply rooted in historical discrimination, reinforced by authoritarian trends, and sustained by social stigma and biases, and the persistent invisibilization of marginalized groups. At the same time, we have seen a marked increase in the rate of hate crimes, hate speech, and dehumanizing public rhetoric against these communities. As a result, they continue to face social, economic, and legal impediments to freedom and equality. This systemic exclusion not only limits opportunities for these communities but also weakens social cohesion and the very foundation of inclusive and peaceful societies. Let me briefly highlight the serious discrimination that minorities continue to face today.

Minority communities across the world continue to face discrimination and marginalization. Stereotypes, stigma, and pressure to abandon cultural or linguistic practices weaken their traditions and sense of belonging. These challenges are further reinforced by economic inequalities—limited access to education, health and job opportunities. At the same time, gaps in legal protections leave LGBTIQ+ persons, Dalit with disabilities, Muslim minorities and other groups vulnerable to hate crimes, displacement, or loss of land. Discrimination is often multi-layered, with overlapping identities compounding the barriers they face.

Minorities also remain politically underrepresented due to systemic obstacles such as restrictive laws and limited access to political power. In several contexts, these barriers are accompanied by repression justified under “national security.” Cultural

and religious persecution persists—from violence and forced conversions to the appropriation of minority cultural symbols for commercial use. A widening digital divide, along with the cross-border spread of biases such as caste-based discrimination, highlights the need for stronger national and transnational protections system.

Despite, or perhaps in reaction to this, movements have erupted to challenge discrimination and all of its forms through litigation, street protests, teach-ins, policy lobbying, and political campaigning. Many minority groups across the globe are mobilizing in ways never imagined using the digital space and through grassroots organization.

Trust and empathy are the foundation of any healthy society. When communities recognise the shared humanity in each other and trust one another, people are more likely to participate in democratic processes, engage in constructive dialogue, and work together to solve shared challenges. Conversely, when distrust dominates, institutions are weakened, divisions deepen, and societies become vulnerable to polarization, extremism, and social unrest. Building trust is therefore not optional—it is essential for peace, stability, and inclusive societies.

In Nepal, the Caste Equality Project led by the Nepal Youth Foundation works directly with Dalit communities, providing legal training and education to Dalit community. By empowering Dalit children and youth, this initiative strengthens community voices and builds confidence, fostering a foundation for greater equality and social cohesion.

In India, tribal communities are benefiting from mother-tongue education programs that teach children in their native dialects before transitioning to the state language. Initiatives like the Bhasha Adivasi Academy, Sikshasandhan, and Eklavya Model Residential Schools help preserve cultural identity while providing access to quality education in remote and underserved areas.

In Bangladesh, the Social Harmony Committees at district and local levels are set up to prevent communal violence. By bringing together local officials, law enforcement, and community leaders, these committees help resolve tensions early, fostering trust and supporting peacebuilding within communities.

In America, artistic expression has played a powerful role in the Black Lives Matter Movement, helping to build trust and foster social cohesion. Murals and street art performances have not only amplified the voices of Black communities but also created spaces for dialogue and reflection across racial and social divides.

BLM has strengthened community identity, raised awareness, and encouraged solidarity by demonstrating how culture and creativity can be tools for both resistance and reconciliation.

Finally, to build trust and social cohesion, I offer four key recommendations.

- The states must protect and expand equity measures, including affirmative action and reserved seats, to address historical wrongs and injustices
- The governments should strengthen mechanisms, both online and offline, to prevent hate crimes and monitor hate speech, ensuring accountability and safety for all communities.
- We must invest in inclusive education, unbiased media, and cultural platforms that challenge stereotypes and amplify minority voices.
- Ensure meaningful participation of minority communities in decision-making at every level, so that policies and programs reflect their needs and perspectives.

Finally, building trust is not a symbolic gesture—it is a structural and political necessity for lasting peace. I call on states, institutions, and civil society to commit to long-term, community-led solutions that empower minority voices and address systemic inequalities. Inclusive societies are not created by accident; they are built by recognizing dignity, valuing identity, and ensuring justice for all. Let us work together to make this vision a reality. I thank you very much.