

U.S. Statement on the Rights of Minority Women

**Statement of the Delegation of the United States of America
Fourth Session of the Forum on Minority Issues
Comments on Draft Recommendations on Guaranteeing the Rights of Minority Women**

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The United States is deeply committed to promoting and investing in the rights of minority women—their rights are human rights. Women are engines of change, and their inclusion and partnership are essential to solving the world's most challenging problems. When the rights of women and minorities are guaranteed, when they are healthy and educated, and when they can participate fully in society, then they can drive progress in families, communities, and nation

This session of the Forum on Minority Issues builds on our hard work in the previous three sessions held by the Forum, during which we highlighted the challenges persons belonging to minorities face and the opportunities we can offer in support of their rights, including with respect to education, and effective political and economic participation. During these sessions, the Forum consistently raised the need to address barriers to minority women in particular, as they are often confronted with multiple, compounded forms of discrimination in these and additional areas.

The draft recommendations prepared by the Independent Expert provide a firm foundation for our discussions at this year's Forum, aimed at increasing the roles and improving the rights of minority women around the world. We urge all States to prioritize the empowerment of minority women in all fields addressed in these recommendations, and recognize that different measures may be required to realize this goal, according to the present status of minority women in various local contexts. Empowering women and girls is already a priority of the United States, but we need more countries to step up and take on this challenge.

All too often decisions that affect minority women, their families and societies are made without women having a voice. Accordingly, a critical, underlying theme of these draft recommendations is the need to not only review, reform, make transparent, and implement legislation to eliminate discrimination against minority women, but also to enable and encourage the full and effective participation of minority women and civil society in decision-making processes. The recommendations are timely, particularly given the resolution on women and political participation adopted this month by the General Assembly's Third Committee.

In addition to engaging minority women in decision-making processes, States should expand efforts to provide access to quality education for all women and girls. Educated women will be empowered to increasingly participate as social, political, and economic leaders in their societies. Indeed, without access to education, minority women will be prevented from

effectively participating in efforts to carry out these action-oriented recommendations that seek to improve their condition and increase their roles in both public and private life.

Beyond calling for expanded access to education and decision-making processes, this Forum can also promote the rights of minority women by encouraging civil society organizations and development agencies to consider the inclusion of a focus on minorities in their projects on women's social, political, and economic empowerment. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has invested substantially worldwide in giving women a real voice in their communities by working to ensure their power to vote, to reform laws, to receive a quality education, to have maternal care, and to have an opportunity for economic growth. Sixty-seven percent of USAID's education programs focus on girls' education. Sixty percent of USAID's microfinance loans go to women. And nearly one-third of the clients receiving USAID-supported business training are women. These programs improve the status of women and expand opportunities for all women and girls.

Programs that provide women opportunities to better their health, education, and well-being have effects far beyond a single individual. A woman multiplies the impact of an investment made in her future by extending benefits to the world around her, creating a better life for her family and building a strong community. As Secretary Clinton has said, "No society can achieve its full potential when half the population is denied the opportunity to achieve theirs." Guaranteeing the rights of minority women is an important step that will advance the cause of human rights and propel societies around the world toward greater prosperity.

Thank you for your partnership on this most important work.