

**Fourth session of the Forum on Minority Issues  
“Guaranteeing the rights of minority women”  
Geneva, 29-30 November 2011**

***“A crucial step towards full citizenship of minority women: Effective participation in economic, social, and cultural life”***

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**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is our honor as IIDA Women’s Development Organization to participate in the fourth session of the Forum on Minority Issues.

IIDA, is a not-for-profit making NGO, which has been operating in all regions of Somalia since 1991. An organization that said NO to discrimination in Somalia and that from its origins had an equal participation between minority and majority women.

**My presentation will focus on challenges as well as recommendations.**

**I will focus mainly** on the situation on Somali’s neglected minorities, specifically focusing on the situation of minority women in conflict situation.

**I will also talk about the Women’s Rights in Islam,** as recommendation, I will prove how minority women from Muslim background can enhance their rights and status by utilizing the Holy Quran to make their rights respected.

In Somalia, minorities are communities discriminated against on the basis of their clan, ethnic affiliation, and culture and tradition.

Somali minority groups include Bantu, Somali of Arab origin and other Somali Minority clan.

Minorities in Somalia are also abusively defined as **“persons that no one will weep for when they die”**.

**Article 2 of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Minorities** states that *persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic life.*

In Somalia unfortunately this situation is far from being achieved:

**There are many obstacles faced by minority women in accessing economic, social and cultural life in Somalia:**

- 1) Double, triple discrimination faced which is an obstacle for their full citizenship in society.  
*An issue such as grant request is even more complex for such women.*
- 2) The intra-community based discrimination.
- 3) Traditional harmful practices such as FGM.
- 4) Lack of social protection
- 5) Minority women become the ground battle for conflicting parties: In Somalia, minority women were forcibly married by men or marriages were arranged by their own families in order to seek protection from majority clans.

The words of one such woman whom I met in Somaliland best exemplifies this situation:

***“No Majority person will invest in you; they will give the job to a person from their own clan”.***

**Moving to the issue of Women’s Rights in Islam...** In some Muslim communities, women are discriminated by extremist groups using an incorrect interpretation of the Quran. Muslim women, including the minorities, can utilize the Holy Book and the Hadith to enhance their rights.

I would like to start by referring to the Hadith of the Prophet SAW, which states: ***“I was sent to protect the rights of the weak, orphans, and women”.***

***Islam has equality as its funding principles, for instance:***

***Surat 51:45 (Wadariyat)*** And I (Allah) created not the Jinns and humans except they should worship Me (Alone).

***Surat 49:13 (Al Hujaraat)*** O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another.....

I can share with you a Position Paper on Women Rights in Islam that I recently wrote.

## Ladies and gentlemen on this basis I Recommend:

- Domestication of resolutions on minorities is needed in order to facilitate access and full awareness of minority rights. The first step is to translate them into indigenous languages
- National pressure groups can be established to advocate for the rights of minority women and monitor governments' implementation of their commitment to international conventions and resolutions

## At minority community level I would like to suggest the following:

- The discrimination within the community must be tackled and not denied.
- Synergies must be established within minority communities

## Government

- Should domesticate and implement the conventions/ resolutions signed. We need more than just a commitments, we need actions!
- ***In conflict or post-conflict areas** the Constitutional making processes can be used to mainstream women and minority rights. This can give Minority women the opportunity to go through (with gender and minority lenses) the various articles of the draft constitution and analyze them in an effort to enhance the rights of women from marginalized/minority groups.*
- **UN Agencies** ought to be in the front on implementation of resolutions on women and minorities, and especially in conflict zones. Therefore the UN should not overlook the women and minority women participation in conflict resolution for the sake of giving space to conflicting parties, which never involve women in conflict mediations process. I am afraid to say that UN Resolutions 1325 has been overlooked by UN Agencies in Somalia.
- As Ms Rita Issak mentioned in her video message yesterday, minority men have an important role to play as they can be our partners in this important process of positive change in our societies.

Madam Chair and distinguished guests, may I take this opportunity to thank you all for valuable work in ensuring human dignity and respect of human rights in your respective countries.

I am looking forward to witness the implementation of the Declaration coming out of this forum.

Thank you!