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MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN
AFFAIRS OF FINLAND

5th session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues

Item 4: Practical use of the Declaration: identification of good practices and positive measures

Statement by the Delegation of Finland Geneva, 27 November 2012

Madam Chairperson,

Over the years the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to Minorities has provided general guidance to the protection of minorities in Finland. The objectives and principles enshrined in the Declaration are turned into concrete actions through various legislative and policy measures. The analytical Commentary on the Declaration provides for a wide scope of application of the Declaration as it comprises various minorities, including new minorities.

Democracy entails the right of the individual to participate in and influence the development of society and his or her living conditions. According to our Constitution the public authorities have a duty to promote the opportunities for the individual to participate in societal activity and to influence the decisions that concern him or her.

A prerequisite for the improvement of the status of minorities is that they themselves are involved in decision-making processes. Article 2, paragraph 2, of the Declaration is a key reference which provides for the right of persons belonging minorities "to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life".

With this in mind we would like to address a draft recommendation number 31 on the establishment of advisory or consultative bodies with the full participation of minorities. The structures for dialogue, interaction and co-operation between minorities and authorities are needed all over the world. A greater commitment to understanding and implementing minority rights, with the full inclusion and participation of minority groups, can prevent conflicts from becoming violent.

In Finland we have a long tradition of including civil society in the decision-making. Structures are built to ensure that persons belonging to minorities are able to play a full and equal part in our society, and contribute towards eradicating discrimination against them. The work carried out by advisory bodies is an excellent way of ensuring that the views of minority groups and other civil society actors are heard.

The Advisory Boards for Minority Issues, for Ethnic Relations and on Romani Affairs as well as the Regional Advisory Boards seek to promote extensive dialogue and serve as expert bodies in developing an ethnically equitable and diverse society.

The legal basis of these Advisory Boards lies on the Decrees which provide a standing status and legitimacy to the work of these bodies. Civil society groups are invited to choose their representatives to the Boards through a self-selection process.

All Advisory Boards monitor the development of the circumstances of minorities living in Finland. Civil society organisations representing minorities can play a very productive role as “watchdogs”, helping to ensure that Government actors are accountable to the people and communities they serve.

Thank you.

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