

FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES

Sixth session

“Beyond freedom of religion or belief: guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities”

Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

PROGRAMME OF WORK

26 November 2013

Morning Session

10:00 - 13:00

I. 10:00-11:00 Opening meeting

Statement by the Vice-President of the Human Rights Council, **H.E. Ambassador Ms. Iruthisham Adam**

Statement by the Chief of the OHCHR Special Procedures Branch, **Ms Jane Connors**

Remarks by the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, **Ms Rita Izsák**

Remarks by the Chair of the Forum on Minority Issues, **Ms Hedina Sijerčić**

Remarks by the United Nations Special Adviser on the prevention of Genocide, **Mr Adama Dieng**

II. 11:00 -13:00 Legal framework and key concepts

This session will provide a brief overview of existing international and regional standards and principles relating to the rights of religious minorities, including the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. The applicable standards and principles providing for the right to freedom of religion or belief will be addressed. Participants will further discuss how to ensure that international standards relating to the protection of the rights of religious minorities are reflected in national legislation, policies and practices.

Presentations by:

- **Ms Nazila Ghanea, presenting on “*Religious minorities and the question of responsibilities*”**
- **Mr Rodrigo Vitorino Souza Alves, presenting on “*The protection of religious minorities in the United Nations and Organization of American States’ systems*”**
- **Mr Brian J. Grim, presenting on “*The Connection Between Government Policies and Social Hostilities Toward Minorities*”**
- **Mr Mohamed Eltayeb, presenting on “*Towards a Framework for Guaranteeing the Rights of Religious Minorities: a Quest for Combating Religious Hatred*”**

Discussion

Lunch Break

**Afternoon Session
15:00 – 18:00**

III. 15:00-18:00: Protection of the existence of and prevention of violence against religious minorities

The present session will aim to identify the measures taken by States and other actors to prevent tensions and acts of aggression or violence against religious minorities, their places of worship and assembly. This session will also consider the situation of religious minorities in conflict and post-conflict settings, and the role of all actors involved in ensuring protection of religious minorities and accountability for violations of their rights. The positive role that religious leaders can play in addressing violations of the rights of religious minorities, preventing further violence and promoting peace and reconciliation, will further be examined.

Presentations by:

- Mr Majed El Shafie, presenting on *“Protecting religious minorities: A human imperative”*
- Ms Salpy Eskidjian, presenting on *“Inter-Religious dialogue and the Cyprus Peace Process”*
- Ms Diane Ala’I, presenting on *“Involvement, inclusion, expression and protection”*

Discussion

27 November 2013

**Morning Session
10:00 – 13:00**

IV. 10:00-13:00: Promotion and protection of the identity of religious minorities

This session will discuss effective practices to ensure the protection and promotion of the identity of religious minorities. The discussion will look into opportunities to protect religious minorities through the promotion and protection of their culture and language, including by taking measures in the field of education. This session will also consider the specific challenges that women belonging to religious minorities may face, both within and outside of their religious communities.

Presentations by:

- Prof. Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, presenting on *“The rights of religious minorities”*
- Mr Sergine Mansour Sy Djamil, presenting on *“The rights of non-Muslims in Islam”*
- Mr Tun Khin, presenting on *“The situation of the Rohingya people”*
- Leila Elali, presenting on *“Challenges encountering women belonging to minorities, women's rights and cultural relativism”*

Discussion

Lunch Break

**Afternoon Session
15:00 – 18:00**

V. 15:00-17:45: Promotion of constructive interfaith dialogue, consultation and exchange

This session will discuss the role that key actors, including religious minorities, religious and community leaders, as well as political actors, can play in the promotion and protection of the rights and security of religious minorities and in promoting tolerance and harmonious relations between faith groups. This session will also address the role that women can play in fostering intercommunity tolerance and dialogue and promoting the rights of religious minorities. Under this agenda item, participants will identify and discuss positive examples of interfaith dialogue and exchange and assess how existing mechanisms, institutions and processes have been established and work in practice.

Presentations by:

- **Mr José Riera, presenting on “UNHCR’s engagement with faith-based organizations, faith leaders and communities of faith”**
- **Mr Usman Fornah, presenting on the “Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone”**
- **Ms Carmen Asiain Pereira, presenting on “Freedom of conscience and religion as a uniting factor in interfaith dialogues”**
- **Mr Louis Climis, presenting on “Minorities in Iraq, victims of religious, sectarian and ethnic conflicts”**

Discussion

- **Concluding remarks by Mr Ralston Deffenbaugh**

VI. 17:45-18:00 Concluding remarks

Remarks by the Chairperson of the Forum on Minority Issues and the Independent Expert on minority issues

Session Closes