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Recommendations of the Forum on Minority Issues at its fourth session: guaranteeing the rights of minority women and girls (29 and 30 November 2011)

Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction	1–6	3
II. General considerations	7–9	4
III. General recommendations	10–50	4
A. National, regional and local governments	12–32	5
B. National human rights institutions	33–36	8
C. Civil society	37–39	8
D. United Nations system and human rights mechanisms	40–49	9
E. Media	50	10
IV. Thematic recommendations	51–103	10
A. Minority women and girls and the right to education	51–63	10
B. Effective political participation	64–79	12
C. Effective participation in economic, social and cultural life	80–103	14

I. Introduction

1. The fourth session of the Forum on Minority Issues (held 29-30 November 2011) focused on practical and concrete measures and recommendations aimed at guaranteeing the rights of minority women and girls. It was informed by and built on the work of the previous three sessions of the Forum relating to “Minorities and the right to education”, “Minorities and effective political participation” and “Minorities and effective participation in economic life”. The Chairperson of the Forum was Graciela Dixon of Panama. The work of the Forum was guided by the independent expert on minority issues, Rita Izsák. The participants, more than 400, included representatives of Governments, treaty bodies, United Nations specialized agencies, regional intergovernmental bodies, national human rights institutions and civil society. Importantly, participants also included several representatives of minority communities from all regions of the world.

2. In accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 6/15, the present document contains the recommendations that emanated from the fourth session of the Forum, which sought to provide concrete and tangible outcomes in the form of thematic recommendations of practical value to all stakeholders. These action-oriented recommendations are aimed at increasing the role of minority women within the State while enabling them to maintain their own identity and characteristics, thus promoting the good governance and integrity of the State.

3. In addition to the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and the commentary thereon, the recommendations are based on other international and regional human rights standards, principles and guidelines developed by different stakeholders as well as national legislation. The Declaration on Minorities is inspired by article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The jurisprudence and general comments of the Human Rights Committee and other treaty bodies, including the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, have also informed the recommendations.

4. The range of issues included in the recommendations is not exhaustive. It is hoped that the recommendations will be interpreted in a constructive manner, in cooperation and dialogue with minority communities in the light of the obligations of States to implement human rights standards effectively in practice.

5. The recommendations are phrased in broad terms and can be implemented in countries with diverse historical, cultural and religious backgrounds, with full respect for universal human rights. The Forum took into account the fact that a great variety of country and minority situations exist and that, consequently, different measures may be required to improve the participation of minority women, who can be deeply affected by the context in which they live. Standard solutions are generally neither possible nor desirable.

6. The present document provides decision-makers, public officials, non-governmental organizations, academics and others, including minorities and minority women themselves with an overview of possible options and solutions to the challenges facing minority women. The recommendations are a resource for decision-makers, assisting them to make appropriate and informed choices when designing legislation and policies aimed at guaranteeing the rights of minority women, with emphasis on the rights and opportunities for minority women to have access to education, to take part effectively in economic life and to have access to labour markets, and to participate fully in social, cultural and political life. The document further constitutes a useful tool for minorities themselves, both men and women, guiding them in their efforts to improve the situation of minority women. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that a country situation will evolve over time, and

therefore needs to be assessed on a regular basis in order that existing mechanisms may be improved or new mechanisms established to ensure that minority women can enjoy their rights fully.

II. General considerations

7. Women belonging to minorities frequently experience unique challenges and multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination emanating from their status as members of minorities and as women or girls. This may make minority women and girls particularly vulnerable to violations of their rights in both public and private life. Without explicit recognition of the different life experiences of minority women and men, such discrimination will often go unnoticed and not be addressed adequately. A gender perspective that takes into account the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that minority women and girls might face is critical when addressing minority rights and the situation of minority women and girls in a given minority group, and in a particular country. The rights of every single member of such minority groups must be respected fully and equally, in all circumstances. Likewise, the existence of entrenched gender roles or local customs does not relieve the State of its responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of minority women.

8. The diversity that exists within every minority group must also be recognized. They are diverse communities, including women and girls, who may experience multiple forms of discrimination in the course of their interactions within and outside their group. Women may be regarded as subordinate or inferior by men; in addition, minority women may face discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity, nationality, language or religion from those outside the community.

9. The issues and concerns of minority women are frequently given a lower priority than the efforts made to ensure minority rights for the group in general. Women belonging to minority groups often struggle within their communities to advocate for their rights, which may be set aside as a result of the prioritization of the general concerns of the group. Barriers to the empowerment of some minority women, including lack of social or economic contacts, networks or minority women's support groups, and scarcity of female minority role models have an important impact on the enjoyment by minority women and girls of their human rights. Minority women may hesitate to voice their gender-specific grievances even within their own groups, and much less outside them. Minority women's rights could benefit from greater attention by the broader movement for women's rights. In turn, the women's rights movement would also benefit from the specific experiences of minority women in their overall struggle for equality.

III. General recommendations

10. All measures taken with a view to implementing the recommendations made below should be developed, designed, implemented and reviewed with the full and effective participation of minorities, both men and women. The conditions allowing for such collaboration and mechanisms to facilitate consultation should therefore be put in place by all actors involved. Since no community is homogenous, efforts should also be made to ensure that the diverse views within minority groups be heard and taken into account in the process.

11. In this conjuncture of difficult worldwide economic situation, all stakeholders should ensure that the attention to gender and issues of minority women not be sidelined or reduced.

A. National, regional and local governments

12. Governments should acknowledge the particular challenges and barriers faced by minority women. They should ensure that domestic legislation relevant to anti-discrimination, equality, the rights of women and minority rights is adequate to guarantee the protection of minority women and, where appropriate, that it take explicitly into account the rights of minority women and the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination to which they may be subjected.

13. Governments should review, reform as appropriate and make transparent any legislation, policy or practice that has a disproportionately negative effect on women from particular minority groups, for example, by restricting their access to public and work places, employment opportunities and educational institutions.

14. In addition to adopting domestic legislation preventing direct and indirect discrimination against minority women and girls, Governments should ensure the implementation of such legislation and that adequate penalties exist for acts of discrimination.

15. Minority women's access to justice should be evaluated and barriers identified. Governments should consider appropriate safeguards, including those aimed at guaranteeing the right of minority women and girls to non-discrimination and their equal access to remedies in cases of violation of their rights. The justice system, in particular at the local level, should be equipped to help ensure that minority women have full and effective access to justice and comprehensive reparation. For example, legal aid could be targeted at and made more easily accessible to women from minority groups, including by means of outreach and the provision of translation services in minority languages.

16. Governments should take all necessary measures to ensure protection of minority women's rights defenders and minority women who fulfil leadership roles and may be at greater risk of violence.

17. Governments should recognize the need for special measures, policies and programmes in order to address entrenched situations of discrimination and exclusion experienced by certain women belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. They should ensure that policies equally benefit minority women by adopting targeted approaches devised to eliminate gaps and inequality between them and others in society. Such measures should be time-bound, monitored and evaluated to assess their impact on the situation of disadvantaged minority women and girls.

18. Accurate data disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion and language allows for a greater understanding of the issues affecting minority women and their circumstances, including their socio-economic situations, and enable targeted interventions to be considered. A crucial prerequisite for this data collection to be initiated is the recognition by Governments of the very existence of minorities on their territory. Governments should undertake data-gathering exercises that are designed and implemented in full consultation with minorities and minority women. Disaggregated data collection should serve three ends: it should be used first of all to assess the prevailing situation, then to assess the resources that are available and actual access to and use of such resources and finally to conduct an outcomes and impact assessment. Data collection should be conducted in an ethnically sensitive manner and on a voluntary basis, with full respect for the privacy and anonymity of the individuals concerned, in accordance with international standards of personal data protection. The reason for data collection, the process and the way that the information collected will be used should be fully transparent. Using equal opportunity and non-discrimination indicators is essential to develop, monitor and regularly review effective and targeted programmes to improve the situation of minority women and tackle

discrimination against them. States should consider issuing a national status report or a white paper on the status of minority women.

19. Governments should evaluate and, where necessary, improve minority women's access to information, including with regard to such areas as service provision, social and child services and health care. Where appropriate, this should be provided in their mother tongue and to those living in remote regions, and should include measures to facilitate access to and use of new information technologies, including social media.

20. Governments should take measures to identify and integrate consideration of minority women and the intersectional dimensions of discrimination, as well as a gender and minority perspective, in all national programmes, policies and initiatives relevant to minorities. Decisions on policy choices should be fully transparent and made with the full and effective participation of minority women. Obstacles preventing minority women's participation in decision-making should be identified and addressed by prioritizing the development of a systematic and consistent approach to identifying, evaluating, monitoring and eliminating existing forms of discrimination against minority women and girls.

21. Governments should systematically include principles of gender equality in their planning and budgeting processes and policies, and allocate adequate resources to projects to address the priorities of minority women. Where they have gender-sensitive budgets, Governments should ensure that these include minority women, as should Governments where they have budgets for minorities or marginalized groups.

22. Governments should build multidimensional partnerships at the national and local levels with ministries, training institutions, parliaments, minority groups, women's organizations and, more broadly, civil society organizations operating at policy or community levels. When working on gender equality and minority rights, all should collaborate in the development of clear, long-term strategies and programmes that reflect the needs, expectations, priorities and agendas of the different minority groups in society and minority women belonging to these particular groups. These programmes could include training sessions tailored for minority women in leadership and negotiation skills, as well as in civic representation.

23. Governments should work together with minority communities, minority and women's rights organizations to develop and implement programmes to sensitize minority women about their rights, and men about minority women's rights. Carefully designed and implemented public sensitization programmes should also address discrimination and violence against minority women perpetrated by both majority communities and in minority communities. Such public sensitization programmes should be sensitively carried out so that they do not exacerbate discrimination against the minority communities.

24. Efforts to identify and address violence against minority women should be made in close collaboration with local and minority institutions and existing administrative structures. Governments should also ensure that their strategies to tackle violence against women include – and are culturally sensitive and relevant to – all women, including by reflecting the views, opinions and experiences of minority women, and make sure that they have full access to protection and effective remedies. Violence against women occurs in all communities, not only minority communities, and minority women have the right to protection as much as majority women.

25. Government and law enforcement officials, social workers, health professionals and other relevant actors should receive training on non-discrimination, women's rights and violence against women, including domestic violence, and on the particular situation of minority women who may be disadvantaged or vulnerable. In areas where minorities predominantly live, public sector employees should be encouraged to have at least a basic

knowledge of the minority languages. Governments should further ensure that officials who discriminate against minority women are effectively sanctioned.

26. Governments should conduct periodic reviews of the accessibility of key social services to minority women, with a view to identifying and removing possible barriers that may prevent minority women, including those who are victims of violence, from having access to remedies and protection. The provision of and access to refuges, shelters and social and health-care services should be culturally sensitive and secure.

27. Minority women and girls may be particularly vulnerable in conflict and post-conflict situations. Peacekeeping operations and national security forces working to secure peace in regions affected by war and/or rebellion should pay particular attention to the need to protect minority groups, including the specific needs of minority women and girls. Staff members, police and military personnel should receive training on the specific needs and vulnerability of marginalized minority women and girls, in particular with regard to the use of sexual violence as an instrument of war. Women's and minority rights should be mainstreamed in the constitution-making processes in conflict or post-conflict areas. Minority women should be included in all processes of conflict settlement and post-conflict reconstruction. Measures should also be taken to ensure access to justice for minority women and girls and accountability for those guilty of violating their rights.

28. Evidence demonstrates that minorities in all regions experience denial or deprivation of citizenship, which affects their full enjoyment of their rights and frequently leaves them stateless. The consequences of denying or depriving minority groups of citizenship are considerable. It can have a negative impact on affected persons' living conditions and the degree of their integration in all aspects of society. These situations are sometimes compounded by discrimination against minority women, for example, with regard to the acquisition, change or retention of nationality and the conferral of nationality on their children. States are urged to review national laws or policies that may deny or deprive minority women and their children of their legitimate right to citizenship.

29. Minority women may be particularly vulnerable to trafficking in persons, particularly those living in situations of poverty or conflict, or in remote and border regions. Governments should strengthen bilateral, regional and international cooperation aimed at the elimination of trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Regional institutions should be established with concrete plans of action to combat and eliminate all forms of trafficking in persons and, which should include explicit attention to minority women and girls, as well as protection measures, in order to prevent their return to their country of origin where they might be at risk of further violence from traffickers or of re-trafficking. Such institutions should pay particular attention to ensuring the recruitment of minority women within all of their programmes and to the several factors that might make minority women particularly at risk of trafficking in some situations. Counselling and support programmes should be culturally sensitive and accessible for minority women who are victims of trafficking.

30. Disadvantaged minority women and girls may also be particularly vulnerable to other contemporary forms of slavery, including forced labour, debt bondage, child labour, the sale of children, forced prostitution and forced and early marriage. Governments should put in place systematic measures to identify such practices and take robust action to eradicate violations.

31. All women have the right to protection from harmful practices, which may be found in all communities - majority or minority. Governments should take measures to eliminate all harmful practices, including those that discriminate against minority women and girls, or subject them to violence or physical injury. This process should seek and involve the collaboration of minority, traditional and religious leaders, and especially of minority

women themselves and women's organizations. Minority women frequently work on eradicating harmful practices and their efforts should be supported. The rights of minority women to equality before the law and to non-discrimination must be given priority over long-standing harmful practices. Governments should ensure that any prohibition of minority practices, that are not per se harmful, be based on reasonable and objective grounds, proportionate to the aims pursued, and not result in an indiscriminate attack on minority cultures. Practices that lead to and/or perpetuate gender inequality or violate the rights of individual women in certain minority communities should be rectified, including through dialogue directly with the communities concerned and with the effective participation of minority women.

32. Governments should allow full access to regions where minorities, and minority women in particular, predominantly live during country visits by special procedures as well as to international organizations and the media, in order for the latter to be able to collect information directly from minority women on their experiences and bring more visibility to the situation of minority women and the challenges they face.

B. National human rights institutions

33. National human rights institutions should ensure that the full spectrum of views, issues and challenges and the diversity of their respective societies are reflected in their activities and programmes. They should consider specific mechanisms in their secretariat to address minority issues, for instance, a focal point on gender and discrimination, with particular attention paid to issues relevant to minority women.

34. National human rights institutions should design a programme of work to analyse the implementation of non-discrimination legislation for minority women. They should analyse domestic legislation and customary laws that are discriminatory towards minority women and recommend policy and legislative reforms where appropriate. They should also assist in developing programmes to enhance the implementation of non-discrimination legislation, including with regard to minority women's access to education and vocational training, employment, labour rights, social security, financial services and land and property rights.

35. National human rights institutions should support Government actors in such areas as the training of public officials, the design and implementation of gender and racial equality projects, and ensuring access to justice for minority women. They should also act on behalf of minority women and facilitate their access to justice.

36. In the design of promotional and educational human rights material and programmes, national human rights institutions should ensure that they mainstream not only a gender perspective but also a minority rights focus, with particular attention to the specific situation of women who are members of the minority groups in society.

C. Civil society

37. International and national institutions and non-governmental organizations working on women's rights should review the extent to which they integrate minority issues into their work, with a view to strengthening their attention to the issues of women belonging to minorities. Equally, those working on minority rights and issues of racial discrimination should ensure that they integrate a gender perspective into their work and programmes. Organizations should consider developing joint programmes to ensure that issues of minority women and intersectional discrimination are made visible and addressed in their work.

38. Minority and women's rights organizations should implement targeted programmes to address the exclusion and discrimination experienced by certain minority women. These could include literacy training and adult education programmes, support for the creation of women's committees in communities, assistance for minority women to establish networks and organizations providing advice and social support, local advocacy groups to address problems as they arise, and the identification and sharing of experiences of positive role models.

39. Minority rights organizations should encourage a process of national consultation with minority communities with a view to studying the impact of customary practices, as well as national legislation and policies on the rights of minority women. Such studies could then be used to assist the Government in reviewing existing legislation and in designing targeted interventions in favour of minority women's rights and empowerment.

D. United Nations system and human rights mechanisms

40. All United Nations and regional human rights bodies should address minority issues specifically and systematically, and adopt a gender perspective throughout their programmes and activities. If it is not already the case, they should adopt a specific policy on minority issues, including paying particular attention to the rights of minority women. They should consider appointing a specialist to focus on intersectional discrimination and to help to address minority women's issues.

41. Development agencies should work with minority women and minority non-governmental organizations to ensure that, wherever appropriate, their interventions address the specific issues faced by minority women, including by systematically collecting and disseminating disaggregated data to inform policy direction in all their fields of work.

42. Development agencies should provide adequate resources for detailed research on minority women for capacity-building support for minority women's organizations, to help them implement effective advocacy and development programmes for minority women and support initiatives on the access of minority women to legal remedies, economic opportunities, education and health.

43. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) should take the lead on issues related to multiple or intersectional forms of discrimination faced by certain minority women, and collaborate with other agencies with a view to addressing those issues in an effective manner. The approach taken by UN-Women in putting emphasis on particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups should encompass a minority rights-based focus with a view to ensuring that the situation of minority women is addressed and mainstreamed into all their programmes, and that national frameworks ultimately cover the full range of women's rights concerns.

44. Individual mandate holders and working groups of the Human Rights Council and special representatives of the Secretary-General mandated by the General Assembly are encouraged to continue to examine, where appropriate within their mandates, the situations of minority women and intersectional discrimination affecting them. The existing collaboration between special procedures mandate holders in this regard, at the United Nations level and with the regional mechanisms, should be further strengthened and consolidated. Greater collaboration could lead to a more efficient information-gathering process, enhanced discussions with States with a view to revising discriminatory laws and facilitate the exchange of best practices.

45. Treaty bodies should require States to provide information in their periodic State reports on the situation of minority women and on policies and programmes of the State to ensure the full enjoyment by minority women of their rights.

46. Treaty bodies should continue to develop and embrace a systematic approach to their consideration of multiple forms of discrimination, involving not only rural or vulnerable women but also minority women. They should ensure analysis of intersectional discrimination in all their work so that it reflects the realities of minority women, and should consider adopting general recommendations on minorities and minority women.

47. Treaty bodies should systematically consider cases where harmful practices breach the principle of equality, including family law, land, property and inheritance rights, and marital rights, and cases where other human rights of minority women and girls, such as the rights to life, health, dignity, education and physical integrity, may have been violated.

48. Within the context of the universal periodic review, all stakeholders, including Member States, non-governmental organizations and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, should require specific information relating to the situation of minority women in countries under review and make recommendations aimed at guaranteeing the rights of minority women.

49. A United Nations voluntary fund for minorities should be created to enable minority representatives, to participate in, assist and use the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations system. This fund should ensure that its composition be gender-balanced. The voluntary fund should also provide funding for projects managed by minority groups in general and minority women's groups in particular, aimed at guaranteeing the enjoyment of their rights by minority women, and strengthening their effective participation in all spheres of life.

E. Media

50. Private and public media actors should avoid perpetuating existing misconceptions and stereotypes about minority women and ensure that they conform fully to legislation and guidelines for the media with regard to non-discrimination and the appropriateness of references and language. Media reports should be monitored by independent oversight bodies to ensure compliance with standards, and penalties should be imposed for breach of standards. Media should evaluate and, where necessary, increase the representation of minority women in their staff and in all categories. Efforts should be made to ensure positive representation of minority women in broadcast programming; this includes programme content that portrays minority women positively and raises awareness of the diversity of minority women's perspectives and personal experiences.

IV. Thematic recommendations

A. Minority women and girls and the right to education

51. Access to education for minority girls may pose particular challenges, especially in highly patriarchal family and community structures where gendered societal roles persist. Lack of education represents an absolute barrier to their progress and empowerment in every region of the world. In some cases, where barriers to access are compounded for girls, sometimes owing to the prioritization given to the education of boys, this results in a vicious circle leading to severe educational exclusion and diminished opportunities for girls to take part fully in economic, social, cultural and political life. As a consequence, some minority girls and women excluded from education suffer from high illiteracy levels.

52. To warrant equal opportunity for women belonging to minorities, it is essential that they and their children be offered the opportunity, upon their request, to have access to

education in their minority language, without impeding the high level acquisition of the official State language.

53. Ensuring equal access to education for women and girls from minority groups, upon whom poverty and family responsibilities may have a disproportionate impact, remains a considerable challenge. Internal factors, including cultural practices, early marriage and entrenched patriarchal structures and gender roles that, for example, restrict the free movement of girls and women, are important issues that raise barriers to access to education for girls, and must be addressed. External barriers, such as discrimination against minority girls at school by teachers and pupils, discrimination in textbooks, targeted and mass violence against minority groups, including minority women and girls, sexual violence or fear of violence against minority girls because of stereotypes about them, parents' fear of violence against their daughters on the journey to school in more remote regions, and poor infrastructure should also be taken into consideration.

1. National, regional and local governments

54. Governments should identify the underlying causes that might prevent minority girls from exercising their right to have access to quality education, including extreme poverty; hunger; living in remote areas; cultural issues; early marriage and pregnancy; security issues; lack of adequate water and sanitation and separate bathrooms, in order to address these root causes systematically. Governments should implement specific programmes to tackle the underlying causes.

55. Governments should develop and implement inclusive and targeted education policies that provide access to high-quality learning environments for all women and girls belonging to minorities in their languages. They should develop adult-literacy schemes for minority women who missed out on education. The core principles of equality and non-discrimination should be at the centre of the design of their education systems.

56. Governments should make every effort to identify girls from marginalized communities and systematically support them in ensuring that they begin school at the same age as other children, and subsequently continue to the level that they choose. Awareness-raising schemes should be implemented to inform minority parents about the importance of quality education for their daughters and to encourage them to prioritize education, while discouraging such practices as early marriage.

57. In reforming school curricula, Governments and other relevant stakeholders should pay particular attention to empowering girls belonging to minorities. A good understanding of cultural and religious identity issues will assist Governments and education authorities in designing better educational interventions. Intercultural education approaches that are minority and culturally sensitive and that address gender discrimination should be adopted, with particular attention paid to countering stereotypes and myths with regard to minority women and girls. Educational programmes and learning environments, including non-formal and flexible learning approaches, appropriate for minority girls should be developed in collaboration with minority groups to ensure that they respect their history, culture, religion and language, as well as distinct minority cultures of learning. As well, more resources should be created to highlight relevant role models and include them in the education curriculum.

58. Governments should monitor school authorities to ensure that they fulfil their obligations with regard to the educational rights of all minority girls.

59. As part of their right to education, minority women and girls should be provided with human rights education as a means of empowering them to claim and defend their rights. Governments should collaborate with minority women and minority rights

organizations in the development of material to provide human rights education, including material focusing on minority rights.

60. Governments should make targeted efforts to increase the training and recruitment of women teachers and teaching assistants from minority groups. Training of teachers should include anti-discrimination, gender-sensitivity and intercultural training.

2. National human rights institutions

61. National human rights institutions should play a central role in ensuring the provision of human rights education for all majority and minority communities in accordance with the plan of action of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, which includes information relating to the rights of minority women and girls.

62. National human rights institutions should develop material on the importance of access to education for all, including women and girls, and make sure that such material is tailored to the situation of all minority groups present in their State and available in minority languages.

3. United Nations system and human rights mechanisms

63. United Nations entities should consider including minority rights in general and minority women's rights in particular in all their relevant human rights education programmes, including in human rights training material and other educational tools and resources produced by them. United Nations Children's Fund in particular should ensure a full inclusion of minority girls in all their education programmes.

B. Effective political participation

64. Minorities often lack adequate representation and participation in national and local bodies responsible for policy, including with regard to economic life, national development and budgeting, and this is particularly the case for minority women. Consequently, the issues and situations of minority women may be neglected or not given the priority that is required to achieve meaningful change. Minority women may face obstacles within their homes and communities that deny them a role in decision-making. In the larger society, they may in turn be denied a say in decisions of the national polity because they are subject to multiple forms of discrimination owing to their status as women, and as minorities. Ensuring effective political participation for minority women not only ensures their participation in decision-making on issues directly affecting them but also helps to ensure that society as a whole benefits from their contribution and truly reflects its diversity.

1. Governments and parliaments

65. Governments should adopt a policy statement that recognizes the diversity in their respective societies with regard to gender, race, ethnicity, religion and language. They should develop plans and programmes to ensure the effective political participation of all sectors of society. These plans should explicitly require measures to promote the participation of minority women, including the adoption of positive measures to increase their participation, the development of educational programmes and campaigns to promote minority women's political participation, measures to ensure diversity and multiculturalism among public administration staff, and the allocation of sufficient resources to realize identified objectives. Minorities, including minority women, should be fully involved on an informed basis in debates on the design of plans and programmes. The establishment of a specific mechanism or institutional procedure to monitor progress achieved in increasing

minority participation, with a specific focus on minority women's participation and their equal and meaningful representation in political life at all levels should be considered.

66. Obstacles preventing the effective political participation of minority women should be identified and addressed through laws, policy and programme measures.

67. Literacy, language or religious or other requirements that unfairly or disproportionately exclude minority women from the right to vote or from standing for elected office at the national, regional or local level should be removed, given that they breach the prohibition of discrimination and result in women belonging to minorities not being able to effectively participate in political life. Governments should develop mechanisms to tackle the root causes of such exclusion.

68. Governments should intensify their efforts to ensure fair and adequate participation of all minority women in political life and public service. They should elaborate innovative initiatives and tailored measures aimed at increasing and strengthening minority women's representation and participation, including, for example, support for women's committees, leadership training initiatives, mentoring programmes, awareness-raising campaigns, networking and the sharing of good practices. Such measures should also aim at ensuring that women who have a role in decision-making bodies are able to play that role effectively, namely, that they know and understand their duties, are not discriminated against or prevented from carrying out those duties because of prejudice, do not face any backlash or violence for taking up those roles and are not given positions as a token gesture.

69. Parliamentary groups and committees of both minorities and minority women should be encouraged and supported, including through experience-sharing and capacity-building.

70. The Inter-Parliamentary Union is encouraged to continue to promote the representation and participation of minority women in parliaments and political life, and to specifically address the challenges facing minority women in this regard.

71. Central Governments should encourage the representation of minority women in local governments and provide them with opportunities to build their leadership skills once they gain seats. Minority women who become community leaders should be supported and promoted to become positive role models in their community and to educate society at large about the issues relevant to its minority groups.

72. Local governments and minority communities themselves should also empower and encourage young women members of minority communities to engage in the political life of their localities.

2. Political parties

73. Political parties should be aware of the diversity of the society and/or communities that they represent and take concrete steps, including adopting a policy statement to recognize the importance of reflecting such diversity. Parties should develop strategies to increase the level of minority women's participation with specific targets, including by ensuring gender-balanced representation within their ranks.

74. Political parties and legislatures can consider adopting quotas or other measures to increase participation of women, including those belonging to minorities. In their efforts to reach out to the minority groups within their constituencies, they should make sure that they are also reaching out to the women in these groups and that they cultivate minority women's engagement. Such efforts should include holding meetings in the regions where minorities live, seeking views of minority women within those groups, promoting them to leadership roles and engaging with minority and women's organizations.

75. Political parties should consider establishing such measures as mentoring programmes through which successful minority women politicians may act as role models. They should identify minority women with potential and encourage them to run for office, raising awareness on minority women's political participation while also reaching out to the majority population to ensure continuous dialogue among all groups in society.

3. National human rights institutions

76. National human rights institutions should consider developing outreach programmes and civic education aimed at increasing the effective political participation of women belonging to minorities.

4. Civil society

77. Civil society should seek to play a role in breaking down the barriers preventing the effective political participation of minority women, including by drawing on different approaches, such as capacity-building and training.

78. Civil society should develop civic education projects targeted at minority and majority communities, highlighting a citizen's rights, roles and responsibilities, and train young women belonging to minorities in the skills of negotiation, communication, advocacy, policymaking and governance.

79. Support should be given to minority women's organizations to elevate their status in decision-making in general and also to increase their participation in traditional decision-making structures that are all too often male-dominated. It is also necessary to involve male leaders in activities undertaken to increase the participation of minority women and develop their leadership skills in order to also help in changing men's perceptions of these women in certain societies.

C. Effective participation in economic, social and cultural life

80. Minority women are often restricted in their access to the labour market or at higher risk of unemployment. Barriers to minority women's access to labour markets include lack of education, lack of awareness of job opportunities, remoteness of the work location, lack of public infrastructure for child care, cultural traditions and gendered societal roles, gender- and minority-based discrimination in hiring, promotion and pay. Many working minority women are involved in low-income earning activities, frequently in the informal sector. In such informal labour markets, women are often excluded from basic labour protection and employed under not only poor but also insecure, difficult, harmful or even dangerous working conditions. The full and effective participation of minority women in economic life is a prerequisite for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, especially with regard to Goal 1, target 1 (a), on halving extreme poverty, and target 1 (b), on the achievement of full, productive and decent work for all, and with regard to Goal 3, on the promotion of gender equality.

81. In some societies, minority women experience even more complex burdens of poverty, ethnic, religious or descent-based prejudice and gender-based restrictions that can frequently result in increased challenges relating to the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate housing. Access to and use and ownership of land and property are central to women's economic independence, social status and political influence. Existing legislation and practices may, however, disadvantage minority women, while entrenched gender roles leave them highly vulnerable, particularly with regard to ownership of land or property, inheritance rights and access to credit, technology or markets. Displacement as a result of any of a wide range of reasons, such as war, men having been

forced to flee or killed in a conflict, increased poverty and climate change may also render minority women more vulnerable to such issues as kidnapping, sexual exploitation, violence and HIV/AIDS.

1. National, regional and local governments

82. Governments should take steps to redress imbalances in the representation and participation of minority women in employment and access to labour markets, economic progress and development. Such measures should be implemented in particular in the fields of employment, credit and other financial services, land tenure and property rights and social security.

83. Minority women frequently find themselves confined to specific low-skill, low-status and low-paid sectors of employment. Governments should therefore allocate resources to expand the employment opportunities available to minority women, including through education, literacy (including in minority languages), vocational training (including skills to run small businesses), credit and market access so that they can realize their economic rights, and both seek and create new forms of employment within and beyond their communities.

84. Governments should lead by example and aim at achieving better representation of minorities, including women, and encourage the recruitment and retention of minority women in public employment, the civil service, law enforcement bodies, social services and other administrative bodies, including in senior positions. Equally, private sector employers should be required by Governments to comply fully with non-discrimination legislation, including on the grounds of ethnicity and gender, and should be encouraged to ensure that minority women have equal opportunities for recruitment and promotion.

85. Governments should take concrete measures aimed at enabling minority women to express their views and to take well-informed decisions, in order to guarantee their effective participation in economic and social policy at the national level and in regional or local economic and social policy decision-making. This could include creating women's committees in areas where minority communities live, conducting sensitization and awareness-raising programmes, as well as developing the skills of minority women so that they become not only economically independent but also leaders. Governments should also involve minority men and leaders in programmes and workshops in order to achieve a change in traditional perceptions and practices and to eradicate discrimination against minority women from within communities. Sensitization programmes should also be tailored for the majority communities with a view to eradicating existing stereotypes that may make employers reluctant to employ or promote minority women.

86. Governments should ensure that minority women realize their economic rights by developing policies geared to build their capacity and creating new employment opportunities for them as alternatives to traditional gendered occupations. Governments should also guarantee access of minority women working in the informal economy to non-contributory and contributory or insurance-based schemes. Minority women's burdens can also be alleviated by providing sufficient child benefits, which would allow them to secure child care and pursue employment, as well as by making other key social services accessible to minority women in their communities.

87. Governments should implement policies and programmes, including gender-responsive budgeting, in regions where minorities predominantly live and ensure minority inclusion in gender budgets and programmes for women's economic empowerment.

88. Certain measures, including the creation of specific projects for minority women in such areas as training, including in livelihood diversification, and support for business initiatives or quota systems to enhance their participation, could be envisaged to ensure the

equal participation of minority women. Programmes for employers to assist them to fight discrimination or to raise cultural awareness, mentoring and positive action in recruitment should be considered.

89. Governments should facilitate minority women's access to microcredit to allow them to establish small business initiatives, and design training programmes on how to effectively use microcredit and run businesses.

90. Minority women may face challenges relating to property rights and barriers to their ownership of land and property and their control of assets in some minority communities owing to certain factors, including traditional and customary practices and inheritance laws that assign property rights to men. This can leave minority women highly vulnerable. Governments should work together with minority communities, their leaders and minority women to eliminate traditional and cultural practices that discriminate against women and create inequalities in such areas as access to land and inheritance rights of minority women. Governments should also ensure that property and inheritance laws safeguard fully the rights of minority women.

91. A review of service provision to minority communities and needs assessment projects should be undertaken in order to reveal priority areas of concern relating to minority women. Governments should establish national programmes that facilitate access for all, including minority women, to basic health and social services without discrimination.

92. Minority women often lack health care and medical treatment owing to economic, social, political and geographical barriers. Minority women may be denied proper health or medical services, fear the consequences of asking for medical assistance, receive improper or low-quality care or live in places where no health services are available. Governments should ensure that health services are suitable as far as possible and accessible to mobile households and to the reality of the different minority groups present in their territory. Practices such as employing female minority health mediators to work closely with minority communities and to help build bridges between minority women and health and social services providers should be considered.

93. The activities of health-care providers, including hospitals, should prevent discriminatory practices against minority women such as the refusal of treatment, isolation in separate wards or conducting medical interventions without their consent.

94. Governments, in collaboration with national human rights institutions and minority and women's rights organizations, should seek to ensure fully the cultural rights of minority women, including through the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue and cooperation at all levels, especially at the local and grass-roots levels.

2. National human rights institutions

95. National human rights institutions should study impediments and recommend legislative and policy reforms and assist in developing programmes to guarantee the implementation of non-discrimination legislation with regard to such areas as minority women's access to education and training, employment, labour rights, social security, financial services and land and property rights.

3. Civil society

96. Civil society actors should consider dedicated initiatives that focus on issues such as promoting minority women's access to training and skills, employment, financial services, social security and land tenure and property rights.

97. Civil-society actors' efforts should be focused on identifying the particular needs of minority women and drawing the attention of relevant Government departments and bodies to them in order to address challenges and discrimination faced by minority women that contribute to poverty and gender inequality in their communities. Particular attention should also be paid to the monitoring of resources allocated to initiatives to build the capacity of minority women and to supporting the role of minority women in participatory budgeting processes at the local level. Efforts should be made to ensure that resources are used to the best effect in reaching the most marginalized minority women.

4. Trade unions

98. Trade unions should explore the situation of minority women and extend membership and institutional, legal and advocacy support to informal economic sectors where minority women are overrepresented. They should inform minority women about their activities in the relevant minority languages and build their capacity to defend their labour rights.

99. Trade unions should also aim to secure minority women's active involvement in union decision-making and in the development and implementation of policies, plans of action and equality initiatives. In their efforts to address the gender pay gap, they should pay particular attention to the situation of minority women, who frequently earn less than the average salary for women.

5. United Nations system and human rights mechanisms

100. Representatives of minority women's groups should be invited by the United Nations and its specialized funds, agencies and programmes to provide information on aspects of economic, social and cultural participation that are priority concerns for them, including in the areas of poverty reduction, employment, social security, financial services, education and training and land rights protection.

101. United Nations human rights mechanisms should urge Governments to ensure the full and effective participation of minority women in all aspects of economic, social and cultural life and to involve representatives of minority women's groups in the preparation of reports to be submitted to international supervisory bodies. To this end, they should seek information from Governments on domestic policies that show the extent to which minority women enjoy and exercise their rights equally and without discrimination, and have access to effective remedies when violations occur.

102. Development agencies should consider the inclusion of a focus on minorities in their projects on women's social and economic empowerment. They should work in collaboration with Governments and civil society to identify barriers to development and to remedy the root causes of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by minority women that result in their economic and social exclusion.

103. Development agencies should ensure the full and effective participation of minority women in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all programmes or projects that will affect minorities or the regions in which they live. They should seek the active participation of a minimum number of minority women in civil-society consultations relating to the country strategy development process. To this end, they may consider making information on their activities accessible to minority women by means of proactive outreach to minority women's groups, communities and minority media outlets, holding meetings in regions where minorities predominantly live, and by facilitating attendance of minority women in such gatherings.