

Forum on Minority Issues

Item 4 – The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities: 20 years on Statement by Canada

November 28th, 2012

Thank you Madame Chair.

We welcome this opportunity to discuss measures for promoting and protecting the rights of persons belonging to minorities and would like to share some good practices developed in Canada to this effect.

As a pluralistic society, Canada views diversity as a strength and source of national identity and pride. Immigration has helped to make Canada a culturally rich and prosperous nation and Canada benefits enormously from the skills and background of newly arrived Canadians. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed in 1998 underlining the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religion. We are proud of our pluralistic society, which fosters respect for differences between people within it.

Some examples of measures developed in Canada to foster the full enjoyment of the rights of people belonging to minorities include:

- Legal guarantees and equality of opportunity, regardless of origin, through Canadian citizenship, and the Canadian Constitution. Canada's laws and policies recognize Canada's diversity and guarantee to all men and women complete freedom of conscience, of thought, belief, opinion expression, association and peaceful assembly, regardless of race, cultural heritage, ethnicity, religion, ancestry and place of origin;
- Awareness raising through public education activities
- Canada has an array of programs that promote multiculturalism, support the integration of newcomers, and foster social cohesion.
- Canada provides \$900 million annually for settlement services to help immigrants and refugees fulfill their desire to participate fully in Canadian society. We offer needs assessments, orientation services, language learning, employment-related services and labour market preparation, and initiatives that foster welcoming communities. We are proud that approximately 85% of immigrants eventually become Canadian citizens.

In keeping with our pluralist heritage, the Government of Canada also funds initiatives that foster intercultural and interfaith understanding, promote active citizenship, and instill civic memory and pride.

In addition, the Government provides significant contributions to and works in partnership with a number of key organizations:

- The Canadian Race Relations Foundation is a national centre of expertise and an active promoter of anti-racism issues in Canada. In 2011, the Foundation created a nationwide interfaith network that will serve as a forum for promoting inter-religious discussion.
- The Government of Canada also partners with the Aga Khan to create the Global Center for Pluralism in Ottawa, with a goal of advancing openness to diversity and promote mutual understanding between communities internationally.
- In 2013, Canada will Chair the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

Thank you very much.