

FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES FOURTH SESSION

**29 and 30 November 2011
Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva**

SUMMARY BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE FORUM

Ms. Graciela J. Dixon C.

Former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Panama

Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 6/15 of 28 September 2007, the Forum on Minority Issues was established to provide a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, as well as thematic contributions and expertise to the work of the Independent Expert on minority issues. The Forum identifies and analyzes best practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives for the further implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (hereinafter referred to as "Declaration on Minorities"). The Forum meets annually for two days allocated to thematic discussions. The Independent Expert on minority issues, Ms. Rita Izsák, is responsible for guiding the work of the Forum, preparing its annual meetings and reporting on its thematic recommendations to the Human Rights Council.

The fourth session of the Forum took place on 29 and 30 November 2011 in Room XX of the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. Ms. Graciela Dixon was appointed as Chair of the Forum for this fourth session that focussed on **"Guaranteeing the rights of minority women and girls"**.

The Forum offers a unique opportunity for engagement and dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders including United Nations Member States and specialized agencies, intergovernmental and regional organizations, human rights treaty bodies, national human rights institutions, academics and individual experts as well as civil society actors working on minority issues. In addition this session of the Forum brought together persons belonging to minorities from all regions who are actively engaged in or have experience in promoting the education of minority women and girls; encouraging greater political participation of minority women at national or local levels; developing programmes to facilitate minority women's access to income-generating activities; working together with minority women in social projects; achieving success in the arts, science and culture; and as minority women leaders. Over 400 participants took part in

the Forum, including representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia and experts as well as delegates from United Nations member States.¹

A note by the Independent Expert on minority issues, Ms Rita Izsák, on “Guaranteeing the rights of minority women” and a set of draft recommendations has been made available to all Forum participants prior to the session, and formed the basis for the discussions².

Format of the Forum

The Forum followed the procedure that has been developed over the past three sessions and has proven successful. To help focus the discussions during the two days of the Forum and ensure that they would be highly inter-active, each agenda item was introduced by a few pre-determined presentations, most of which were provided by minority women. These presentations were followed by additional interventions from all participants, based on a sign-up sheet.

Forum Reports

The present document is prepared in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 6/15 which requests the Chair to prepare “a summary of the discussion of the Forum, to be made available to all participants of the Forum”. This summary complements the outcome document containing the recommendations from the Forum that will be presented by the Independent Expert on minority issues to the Human Rights Council at its 19th Regular Session in March 2012. This summary does not provide the full details of all presentations made during the Forum’s proceedings. However, the consolidated list of speakers and, where available, the full text of the presentations can be found on the Forum’s website at the following address: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/session4.htm>

Item I. Opening statements³

Ms. Navanethem Pillay⁴, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, attended and made a statement in which she underlined that, by bringing together different actors from within and outside of the United Nations system, the Forum has been essential in providing valuable guidance to the work of her Office, the Independent Expert on minority issues and other actors at international, regional and national levels.

¹ The list of the organizations and delegations that participated in the Forum is available on the website of the Forum on Minority Issues:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/docs/session4/Listofdelegation-organizationtotheFourthForumonMinority.pdf>

² See A/HRC/FMI/2011/2 and A/HRC/FMI/2011/3 available on the Forum’s website.

³ The full text of the opening statements is available on the Forum’s website:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/session4.htm>

⁴ The High Commissioner delivered her statement on 30 November due to other commitments.

She highlighted that recurring issues raised in all sessions of the Forum include the need to recognize all minorities within a State and the need for strong anti-discrimination legislation. She also stressed that one of her Office's thematic priorities is to translate the principles of equality and non-discrimination into reality in the daily lives of all women, including women belonging to minorities, and gave a few examples of the wide range of activities that are directed to the achievement of this goal. In this regard, she also pointed to the need to strengthen her Office's collaboration with other agencies to improve a system-wide coordination on issues affecting women belonging to minorities. She urged all participants to use the recommendations, disseminate them widely and to give them meaning in their local situation. The High Commissioner mentioned the forthcoming 20th anniversary of the Declaration on Minorities and announced that her Office would be engaging with partners regarding events and activities to promote the Declaration and its implementation globally.

H.E. Laura Dupuy Lasserre, the President of the Human Rights Council, welcomed all stakeholders and in particular the minority women and men from around the world who would share their personal experiences. She underlined that the Forum had established itself as one of the main platforms for dialogue on the promotion and protection of the rights of minorities, for sharing best practices and for promoting mutual understanding of minority issues. She welcomed the continuous efforts to give prominence to the voices of persons belonging to minorities, throughout the Forum proceedings. She stressed that the Council has truly benefited from the comprehensive and action-oriented recommendations that have emanated from the Forum and looks forward to receiving the recommendations to be presented by the Independent Expert to the Council in March 2012. She emphasized that the promotion and protection of women's equality, rights and the fight against violence against women have been central to the work of the Human Rights Council. She encouraged all participants to engage in a truly constructive and inter-active dialogue, to exchange ideas and share experiences, including on obstacles and challenges, as well as on solutions and good practices. She noted the importance for Member States and all stakeholders to translate the Forum recommendations into action.

Ms. Rita Izsák, the Independent Expert on minority issues, addressed participants through a video message in which she first commended her predecessor, Ms Gay McDougall, for her dedicated and successful work as Independent Expert and for her expert guidance of the first three sessions of this Forum. . She underlined that the rights of minority women had not received the dedicated attention that is required and that this event would help to put the issues and concerns of minority women more clearly on the agenda of the United Nations. She stressed that girls and women from disadvantaged minorities face unique challenges from the beginning of their lives, and this must be recognized and addressed, not only by Governments, NGOs and other decision-making bodies but also by minority communities themselves. She noted the need to use this meeting to also celebrate the endeavour of minority women, their resilience, their

innovation and their achievements, and the minority women who have become successful role models. The Independent Expert called on representatives of governments to share any policies and activities that have proved effective for minority women, and to learn from existing good practices that have been successful elsewhere and that could be introduced in their country. She encouraged NGO representatives to use this opportunity for dialogue with governments and other experts, to establish networks and to share problems, and good practices. She also called on minority experts and representatives of minority communities to use this platform to make their voices heard and to influence and shape the Forum recommendations. She highlighted the important role played by minority men also in bringing home the experiences and wishes of minority women and in helping other minority men to understand those issues. Ms Izsák concluded by recalling that 2012 would mark the 20th anniversary of the Declaration on Minorities and that special events and regional commemorations would be planned worldwide.

Ms. Graciela Dixon, Chair of the fourth session of the Forum on Minority Issues, gave her opening remarks in which she recalled that, as a former participant, it was with a sense of pride, strong commitment and understanding of the importance of this Forum that she returned as Chair. She underlined the relevance of human rights-based approaches to the situation of minority women, whose empowerment can only be achieved through ensuring their effective participation in political, economic, cultural and social life, and that this is made possible through first ensuring their equal access to quality education. She recalled that the previous sessions of this Forum had consistently highlighted the need to specifically address the situation of minority women, without which the intersecting forms of discrimination that they might be subjected to will often go unnoticed and not be addressed adequately. Ms Dixon reiterated that dialogue between all actors is particularly essential and that there are clearly no easy answers or one-size-fits-all solutions. Since its first session, the Forum has successfully given a voice to minorities from every region and from different backgrounds. She underlined the importance of ensuring that the diverse views within all groups, including minority groups, should be heard. She urged participants to take full advantage of this gathering to share challenges but also positive measures that have proven successful towards improving the situation of minority women and that might be a source of inspiration for others. The Chair reminded all participants that the aims and objectives of the Forum as established by Human Rights Council resolution 6/15 were to:

- provide a platform for dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities;
- provide thematic contributions and expertise to the work of the independent expert on minority issues;
- identify and analyse best practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives for the further implementation of the United Nations Declaration on Minorities;
- produce thematic recommendations to be reported to the Human Rights Council;

- contribute to efforts to improve cooperation among United Nations mechanisms, bodies and specialized agencies, funds and programmes on activities related to the promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, including at the regional level.

The Chair explained the format of the discussions and underlined that all interventions should be focused on the draft recommendations and the identification of challenges and problems facing minority women and States, good practices and the consideration of opportunities, initiatives and solutions. She also encouraged everybody to show respect for others' views while inviting all participants to exercise decorum, avoid abusive or inflammatory language and uphold United Nations standards when referring to countries and territories. She further reminded participants that given that the principal nature of the Forum is to be a platform for dialogue, as in previous years, the organisers would not seek to negotiate or adopt the final content of the recommendations, rather all contributions would be collected and considered in detail and the final thematic recommendations presented to the Human Rights Council at its 19th Regular Session in March 2012.

Item II. International and regional human rights frameworks and recent global initiatives relating to minority women's rights⁵

This short session provided participants with a brief overview of existing international standards and principles and recent global initiatives relating to the rights of minority women with a view to set the framework for the ensuing discussions.

Ms. Anastasia Crickley, member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), underlined that this session of the Forum was an opportunity to directly assert minority women's rights. She highlighted relevant international instruments addressing the multiple intersecting discriminations experienced by minority women, including the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. She emphasized that the task of ensuring that women from minorities are fully integrated, and that the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they experience are adequately and consistently considered by both Treaty Bodies and enshrined in all instruments of the United Nations, was still work in progress, CERD Recommendation No. 25 on gender related dimension of racial discrimination recognises the need for disaggregated data to help in establishing the position of minority women and creating the conditions for addressing discrimination. At the regional level, she reminded participants of ground-breaking precedents for the reproductive rights of minority women established through the European Court for Human Rights. She further mentioned the significant and on-going importance of minority women's organizations had played a significant role in realising their rights and moving their agendas forward.

⁵ The full text of the presentations is available on the Forum's website:
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/session4.htm>

However, she noted the impact of the current recession on women in general and minority women in particular. Lasting progress will only be achieved for minority women by minority women she noted. Ms Crickley concluded with recommendations including: there needs to be explicit mainstreaming of the rights of minority women including when women's rights are considered by treaty bodies; measuring is essential and special measures and positive actions need to be taken; there is a need to go beyond the idea of the equality of opportunity as the goal, to equality of participation, equality of outcome, and to the measuring of impact; there is a need to link rights, recognition, and redistribution and ensure that these go hand in hand, so that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged women from minorities, can share progress and realise their rights.

Ms. Soyata Maiga, Special Rapporteur on the rights of women in Africa of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, first gave an overview of the legal framework for the promotion and protection of women's right in Africa, including the recently-adopted Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights of Women in Africa. She then focused on the challenges that might be faced specifically by women belonging to minorities in Africa, including in terms of access to justice, quality education and healthcare. She informed Forum participants of the different measures that have been taken at the level of the African system for the promotion and protection of human rights to address those challenges, including the establishment of the mandate that she has been entrusted with. She concluded by mentioning additional obstacles to the full implementation of the existing standards such as past and on-going conflicts in some African States and the famine that has hit the Horn of Africa, and their impact on women belonging to minority groups.

Mr. Leonardo Reales Jimenéz, from Columbia, presented on the situation of Afro-Descendant women in Latin America. He noted that the poverty, exclusion and racial discrimination that they have historically faced are structural problems that should be of concern to NGOs, governments and international institutions. He underlined that the region urgently needed its minority women to have equal access to the education systems and health services, as well as to loans and labour markets in order to stimulate social development. He suggested that there is a socio-political context in which Afro-Latinas suffer permanent violations of their rights, although many public and private institutions disregard the existence of problems affecting Afro-descendant women. He noted that these abuses often began at the family level and that there had been many cases of Afro-Latino girls who had been direct victims of gender and racial discrimination in their schools. He noted that most people in the region did not recognize such abuses as human rights issues and that distinct stereotypes against Afro-Latinas are perpetuated, reinforcing their exclusion and lack of empowerment at all levels. The media had been one of the main reproducers of racism and gender discrimination in the region. He highlighted strategies to help overcome the current situation regarding education, including: the importance of strengthening Afro-descendant networks in order to design and implement inclusion projects and programmes; the need to establish clear priorities to

address structural problems such as unemployment, poverty, social and political exclusion, gender discrimination and institutionalized racism; the need to implement laws regarding Afro-Latino women, and the value of partnerships between Afro-descendant NGOs and public and private institutions, including to improve Afro-Latina participation in education and the skilled labour force.

Discussion

The Chairperson opened the floor for discussion⁶. During the discussion under Item II, participants identified the following aspects in relation to international and regional human rights frameworks and recent global initiatives relating to minority women's rights:

- The impact of the Framework Convention on National Minorities of the Council of Europe on the situation of minority women was explained. Two more recent Council of Europe instruments of relevance to the situation of minority women were also mentioned, namely, the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence;
- The situation of Roma women and the multiple forms of discrimination that they are subjected to. Presentation of best practices and the importance of their full and effective participation in the decisions affecting them. In this regard, the EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies was briefly presented.

Item III. Minority women and girls and the right to education⁷

This session focussed on the essential requirements for an effective education strategy for minority women and girls; remaining barriers and measures aimed at guaranteeing their equal access to quality education and training.

Ms. Maya Sahli, member of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, presented on the measures taken by the Working Group to address the situation of women of African descent. Women and girls of African descent still suffer from intersecting forms of discrimination that have a negative impact on their access to quality education. Their exclusion from the education systems and available trainings is a recurring theme for the Working Group that has worked to identify remaining obstacles. This stigmatisation of girls of African Descent is justified by the lack of resources, poverty, cultural traditions and customs. These girls sometimes have access to the first level of education but then face obstacles in reaching higher levels resulting in vulnerability to hunger, violence, ill-treatment, trafficking, HIV/AIDS, and illiteracy. She

⁶ The list of speakers, and where available the full text of their presentations, can be found on the Forum's web site at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/session4.htm>

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pointed to the need for inclusive policies of access to quality education for all girls so that they can contribute to the economic and social development. The Working Group has elaborated recommendations aimed at the inclusion of girls of African descent in the education systems of States. She underlined that recommendations and specific strategies are required to ensure access to education for all minority girls, fight illiteracy and language barriers as well as the need for positive measures aimed at combating discrimination. She also highlighted the responsibilities of States in this regard and the importance of collecting disaggregated data.

Ms. Kirsi Madi, UNICEF Deputy Regional Director for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, underlined that UNICEF was renewing their equity-focus with the aim of ensuring that their services reach the most excluded and marginalised children. She emphasized that minority populations generally lag behind in all levels of education, and recalled the unique challenges faced by minority girls, made complex by intersecting forms of discrimination. She underlined that girls from minority groups often live in remote geographic locations generally neglected by government social services and requiring travel to great distances to the nearest school, multiplying the risks for their personal security. She informed participants that UNICEF's field presence offers them a unique opportunity and obligation to support a number of initiatives benefitting women and girls, in particular in the field of education. UNICEF advocates for all schools and education systems to be responsive to children's rights, to be gender-sensitive and to promote gender equality in both enrolment and achievement. UNICEF proposed recommended actions, calling on Governments and societies to: implement initiatives to combat exclusion faced by women and girls, ethnic groups as well as those who live in poverty; identify those individual children and groups of children who require special measures aimed at overcoming inequalities through rigorous disaggregated data collection; invest in teacher training, including teachers from minority communities, to include anti-discrimination, gender-sensitive and intercultural training. Educational curricula should promote human rights education and gender aware materials with the aim of overcoming stereotyped and demeaning images of minorities, girls and women. Ms. Madi recognised the need for UNICEF to invigorate their own initiatives and noted that, in 2012 it would take steps towards expanding its data collection methods with a view to ensuring that minority communities would be captured in future. UNICEF had further initiated the design of the organization's Programme Guidance on Indigenous and Minority Children that would provide country offices with more specific assistance on how to programme for and with minority children in a more systematic manner.

Ms. Farah Naqvi, from India, made a presentation on "Minority women and girls in India: Critical elements to consider towards equity in education". She highlighted that Muslim women in India have the lowest literacy indicators and formal work participation rate of women from any socio-religious community. She then made recommendations aimed at addressing the remaining obstacles to minority women and girls' access to quality education: Addressing issues of targeted and mass violence against minority

groups and ensuring the right to life, justice and comprehensive reparation through robust State legislation is a critical backdrop to educational initiatives for minority women; education must be defined broadly: declarations of intent towards ‘education for women’ must be replaced by concrete programmes and substantial resource allocation; prioritizing of adult and continuing education in the overall education agenda is vital; new media tools should be employed to reverse the existing forms of discriminatory access to information and to power.; for minority women’s leadership to be advanced, there is a need to create for minority girls a global public environment that legitimizes aspiration - towards true excellence and the highest possible intellectual endeavours; there is a need to shift from referring to access to schooling, to the right to an education that is dignified and empowering; that does not harm the child’s sense of self or dignity; and which gives outcomes of both expanded minds and expanded job opportunities; A comprehensive anti-discrimination law, with focused attention to education, must be among the key mechanisms to guarantee in substantial measure the rights of minority women.

Ms. Beata Bislim Olahova, Grants Programme Manager at the Roma Education Fund in Slovakia, provided an overview of the barriers that Romani women face, stressing that many lack the education they need to find jobs, have shorter life expectancy and reside in poor-quality housing. When seeking to improve Roma inclusion in education, it is essential that the actions at the local level be aligned with appropriate national policies and to ensure adequate institutional and financial means so that national policies can actually be implemented. Furthermore, local initiatives must receive sufficient support from local institutions, such as schools, the education inspectorate, municipalities and teachers’ trade unions. In many cases, policies and programmes fail to have an impact because of the absence of an adequate policy framework or because they underestimate the very strong negative incentives built in to the education systems and the level of institutional changes that are needed. In the case of Roma education, Roma participation is essential for a number of reasons; including the need to empower Roma communities, create commitment, trust and confidence as well as increase parents’ involvement. She concluded with recommendations, including: cooperation among teachers, authorities and parents should be encouraged to promote girls’ continued education; make scholarships available or provide subsidized fees, free transportation and required school materials for marginalized and poor families at all school levels, with special attention to excluded Romani families and ensure that scholarships target Romani girls and young women; Adult education and literacy programmes should be carried out with a specific focus on Romani women’s participation; motivate Romani parents to enroll their children, especially daughters, in education; Promote the Romani culture and traditions in the educational system as a significant contribution to general culture and erase negative stereotypes about Roma and Romani women from text books.

Ms. Hannan Elsaneh, from Israel, made a presentation focusing on “Bedouin Women in the Naqab: Interaction of Poverty, Marginalization and Gender discrimination”. She indicated that residents of so-called “Unrecognized Villages” endure an absence of basic

infrastructure services, such as running water, electricity and sewage systems and that most villages lack schools, health clinics and access roads. The Naqab Bedouin have the highest rate of unemployment in the country, and the worst school retention and matriculation record. Bedouin women are further constrained by the harsh patriarchal tradition of their community, which has implications in every aspect of women's lives. Thus, without education or employment, Bedouin women are denied any possibility for improving their own lives or exerting a positive impact on their families and their communities. She noted that many adult Bedouin women remain marginalized and illiterate, hence the need for adult women's education and literacy trainings. Although the situation is slightly improving, illiteracy is still present among girls today, since many unrecognized villages don't have elementary schools and the dropout rate for girls is the highest in the country. She emphasized the need to address adult Bedouin women's education as part of an integral empowerment process to improve self-esteem and increase their communications and leadership skills and the need for economic and workforce development support provided in the form of vocational training, financial literacy and small business development. She concluded with recommendations aimed at addressing the high rate of minority girls' dropping out of school, including: increased access to early childhood education and high school education for young girls in villages;; scholarships and other forms of financial assistance must be made available for girls and boys, with a focus on girls who forego learning due to their difficult financial situation; and increasing the awareness and involvement of local men.

Ms. Maria Joyce, Coordinator of the National Traveller Women's Forum Ireland, made a presentation on the situation of Irish Travellers and the Irish education system. She underlined the denial of ethnic status to Travellers by the Irish Government. The population profile of Travellers was similar to that of developing countries with a high birth rate and a young population coupled with high mortality rates and a life expectancy much lower than that in the general population, with Traveller women having a life expectancy which is 11.5 years less than women in the general population. She noted the important role of data collection as a mechanism for assessing and monitoring the situation of Traveller women and noted that some progress has been made but in areas such as education, monitoring of the situation of Traveller women was virtually non-existent. She noted the history of segregation and disregard for Travellers in education policy and practice. Progress has however been made since 2003, including through the creation of a joint working group by the Department of Education and Science, within which Travellers, including women, could participate in the formulation of policy related to education. This process has led to the development of a Traveller Education Strategy based on the principle of an inclusive mainstream education provision. In addition to the recession in Ireland, she noted that critical issues that still need to be addressed include ensuring that Travellers have access to schools and that Travellers are in the curriculum.

Discussion

The Chairperson opened the floor for discussion⁸. During the discussion under Item III, participants identified the following aspects in relation to minority women and girls and the right to education:

- The fact that the dropout rates of girls from migrant backgrounds is often higher than that of boys and that of the majority population. Measures that have been used to address this include improvement of teachers' training, promotion of pre-schools attendance for children with migration background, projects aimed at increasing literacy levels, with a specific focus on female immigrants who are particularly affected by this phenomenon, gender equality constantly mainstreamed and implemented into the school's systems.
- The impact of the current recession on the progress achieved and on marginalised groups including minority women.
- The fact that gender-based discrimination is still very much a reality.
- The necessity to provide for example food, uniforms, materials and transport to ensure that minority girls can indeed afford to stay in school.
- The importance of vocational trainings in several sectors including agriculture.
- The discrepancies between rural and urban areas in some countries with regard to education of minority girls and women, including in terms of safety and security issues.
- The need for an international independent body to monitor and evaluate school curriculum and ensure that they are respecting the principles of non-discrimination and equality.
- The negative role played by some media actors in perpetuating stereotypes.
- The importance of adopting measures aimed at equal opportunities to access education and employment.
- Need to not only review, reform, make transparent and implement legislation, practices and policies to eliminate discrimination against minority girls and women, including with regard to their access to education, but also to enable and encourage the full and effective participation of minority women in decision-making processes.
- The importance of gathering disaggregated data on minority girls in and out of schools.
- The need for mainstreaming of human rights education in schools, including on the rights of minority women and girls.

⁸ The list of speakers, and where available the full text of their presentations, can be found on the Forum's web site at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/session4.htm>

- The need to address the impact of early marriages and early pregnancy on access to education for some minority girls.
- The impact of conflict on access to education for some minority girls and women, including with regard to their freedom of movement and in terms of ensuring the protection of girls living in conflict zones.
- The gap in some situation between languages used in schools and that used at home which can represent an obstacle for minority girls' access to education.

Item IV. Minority women and effective political participation

Under this agenda item, the discussion identified the conditions required to guarantee the effective political participation of minority women, as well as remaining obstacles, concrete steps and existing measures aimed at increasing the political participation of minority women.

Ms. Mercedes Barquet, member of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, first gave a brief overview of the mandate of the Working Group which was established by the Human Rights Council in October 2010 and mandated inter alia to prepare a compendium of best practices related to the elimination of laws that discriminate against women or are discriminatory to women in terms of implementation or impact. She indicated that the Working Group intends to build on existing standards and initiatives developed by other stakeholders which would include the wealth of concrete recommendations that have emanated from the Forum. The intersection of various grounds of discrimination will be a cross-cutting perspective in all the work carried out and particular attention will be given to specific groups of women, including women belonging to minorities. In terms of strategies for empowering minority women's political participation and combating blatant discrimination in this field, she noted that the use of temporary special measures is provided for and recommended by international human rights law, supported by empirical research and that gender quotas have also emerged as a tool that can be effective to redress women's exclusion from political participation and to ensure their presence in formal structure of politics. However, gender quotas need to be accompanied by other measures to ensure that barriers to equality are overcome, including those resulting from illiteracy, language, poverty and impediments to women's freedom of movement.

Ms. Sonu Rani Das gave a presentation on the political participation of Dalit women in Bangladesh indicating that they were faced with a lot of problems, both inside as well as outside their communities. She indicated that 99 per cent of Dalit women were not educated and were not aware of their rights. Obstacles to access to education included poverty. She concluded with recommendations aimed at increasing the political participation of Dalit women and engaging them, including: increase empowerment and mobility of Dalit women and their access to justice; increase admission of Dalit girls into schools and universities, and make efforts to help them stay in school; more opportunities

for employment and access to finance; legally protect Dalit's rights in the Constitution; include quotas for Dalit women in public offices, schools and universities; recognise caste discrimination as a priority when addressing human rights issues and make discrimination against Dalit a criminal offence.

Ms. Renu Sijapati, representing the Feminist Dalit organisation, made a presentation on the political participation of Dalit women in Nepal, in which she first gave an overview of the current situation and the multiple forms of discrimination that they are facing, both within and outside their community. She underlined the importance to continue addressing the issues of social exclusion in the current peace-making process and the fact that the representation of Dalit women in policy-making of political parties as well as different organs of Governments was still weak. With a view to increase the political participation for Dalit women she called on the Government to: ensure Dalit women's proportional representation in political bodies; ensure meaningful representation of Dalit women in public policies, planning, project development and monitoring and evaluation; adopt constitutional provisions for the proportional representation of Dalit women in all areas of economic, political, administrative, educational, social and cultural life, with a strong oversight mechanism for monitoring and implementation; pay particular attention to combating violence against Dalit women and girls and adopt comprehensive measures to address such violence, including undertaking wider awareness raising programmes in Dalit communities, specifically targeting men and boys.

Ms. Sherine Xavier presented on "The Realities of Minority Women's Political Participation in Sri Lanka" in which she discussed the impact of war and post-conflict reconstruction on the situation of minority women in Sri Lanka. She indicated that many communities were completely displaced during the course of the war, losing their ability to participate politically and were now in the process of resettlement but were unfamiliar with, or distrustful of, local governance bodies and unaware of the services available to them. She pointed to the current opportunity to create a vibrant civil society at regional and grassroots levels to advocate for democratic participation and respect for human rights. She deplored the fact that although Sri Lankan women record a high-level of literacy, social development, participation in local-level of associational engagement, political representation at local or provincial or national levels continues to remain dismally low and that the local government reforms currently being discussed, which include a quota of 25% for women and youth, appeared to be inadequate because it combined women and youth with no guarantee of an exclusive quota for women, and with no penalty in case of non-compliance.

Ms. Anastasia Chukhman, member of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, discussed the work of this mechanism, underlining that in all four sessions of the Expert Mechanism a considerable place was given to discussions on the rights of indigenous women. In this regard, she indicated that issues relating to access to education and participation in decision-making processes had been discussed thoroughly

by the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which had also paid particular attention to the different obstacles faced by indigenous women and girls in the implementation of these rights. She informed Forum participants that the Expert Mechanism had recently initiated the preparation of two different studies, the first on indigenous peoples and the right to participate in decision-making process during the implementation of industrial projects on their territories and the second focusing on the role of language and culture in promoting and protecting the well-being and identity of indigenous peoples. She underlined that particular attention would also be paid to the situation of indigenous women in the preparation of both studies.

Ms. Kareen Jabre, from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), presented the work done by IPU to guarantee the rights of all women to political participation, underlining that there can be no democracy without equal participation of men and women, also stressing the link between democracy and effective participation of persons belonging to minorities, including women. She explained that IPU's three objectives are first to increase the number of women in parliaments, second to support and enhance women parliamentarians' work to parliament and third to enhance parliament's capacity to address and defend women's rights and equality between men and women. The other area of IPU's work is on legal reforms and to take advantage of democratic transitions to introduce reforms to advance women's political participation, which includes training sessions on CEDAW. She mentioned the need to reform parliaments in order to transform them into gender-sensitive institutions. She noted the importance to look at what happens next when minority women are in parliament and whether they are able to have an impact on the decisions taken and promote minority rights. With this in mind, she noted that IPU supports women's parliamentary committees on gender issues and human rights, women's caucuses and gender mainstreaming initiatives in parliaments in order to promote gender equality. She mentioned that IPU would be working on facilitating networking among minority women via the "Iknowpolitics" network; would continue raising awareness on women in politics, with a specific focus on minority women; would be working on providing gender disaggregated data on minorities, including their political participation and would be trying to develop research on the intersection between special electoral measures for women and minorities.

Discussion

The Chairperson opened the floor for discussion⁹. During the discussion under Item IV, participants identified the following aspects in relation to minority women and effective political participation:

- The usefulness of quota systems in some situations to increase the political participation of minority women.

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- The importance of increasing the participation of minority women within electoral management bodies as well as within political parties.
- The impact of poverty and lack of education on minority women and their effective political participation.
- The efforts needed to protect and involve minority women in post-conflict and peace-building processes and the importance of creating mechanisms to ensure their effective participation in conflict resolution processes, including ensuring their physical protection against harm when necessary.
- The need to ensure that the protection of minorities, and minority women in particular, are included in constitution-drafting processes and of recognising and ensuring their effective and meaningful participation through such processes.
- The fact that poor education levels mean that elected minority women might lack the information and negotiation skills and self-confidence as compared to other elected representatives. The need for capacity-building and for improving the skills of minority women so that they can properly fulfil their obligations/roles once they have reached leadership positions. The need also for institutionalised trainings of minority women.
- The need to remove discriminating provisions from existing laws.
- The importance of ensuring freedom of association for minority women to effectively participate in political life.
- The need to remove all gender-based segregation, in particular in public places.
- The need to address and change stereotypes in some communities, particularly among minority men about the status of women in their communities.

Item V. Minority women and effective participation in economic, social and cultural life¹⁰

This session focused on existing challenges faced by minority women and good practices to ensure their access to work, labour markets, sustainable livelihood activities generally undertaken by men, social security, culturally and gender-sensitive health care and childcare facilities, housing, land, property and inheritance.

Ms. Pramila Patten, member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), highlighted that General Recommendations issued by the Committee address the multiple forms of discrimination faced by some minority women and the need for States parties to legally recognize such intersecting forms of discrimination and prohibit them. CEDAW consistently monitors the disadvantages, obstacles and difficulties faced by minority women and regularly expressed concern about the lack of information on the situation of disadvantaged groups of women. CEDAW urges States to conduct regular research and comprehensive studies on discrimination against minority women and to collect statistics on their situation in

¹⁰ The full text of the presentations is available on the Forum's website:
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/session4.htm>

employment, education and health, emphasizing the need for quality data and information. The economic, social and cultural rights of minority women must be interpreted and implemented in a manner that ensures them equal exercise of their rights. CEDAW has called on States parties to integrate attention to women from minority groups into national policies, plans and programmes, and to implement specific measures to eliminate discrimination against them. States should place high priority on the reduction of the illiteracy rate of women including through the adoption of temporary special measures. CEDAW has often expressed concern about minority women being employed in lower-paid and lower-skilled work with very little emphasis on their right to develop a career. The Committee is concerned about high maternal and infant mortality rates and the high fertility rate, especially among ethnic minorities, and the lack of healthcare facilities. The Committee has addressed the impoverished living conditions of minority women, poor health, inadequate housing and access to clean water, low school-completion rates and high rates of violence. CEDAW urges Governments to take proactive measures, including awareness-raising, to sensitize public opinion on minority women's issues. She pointed to the need for robust and concerted efforts to address the plight of minority women, underlining that there is room for better coordination.

Ms. Heisoo Shin, member of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), first highlighted that, in addition to the principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights contains many provisions which are critical to the protection of the rights of minority women in the areas of economic, social and cultural rights. The Committee always raises the issues faced by minority people in a given country under consideration, which include issues such as higher rate of unemployment, poverty, land ownership and titling, forced eviction and shortage of housing or cultural heritage at risk due to development projects. She then mentioned that the main challenge is to educate minority women about their rights and that education should not be limited to girls' education in schools or literacy classes for adult women but should also be about their basic human rights in economic, social and cultural areas. She concluded by calling on all minority women to take the ICESCR into their hands and use it as a tool to protect and promote their rights, while at the same time recognizing the need for the Committee itself to pay closer attention to the situation of minority women and to urge governments and other stakeholders to take measures to eliminate discrimination and to stop violation of minority women's rights.

Ms. Atieno Jennipher Kere, from the Women in Fishing Industry Programme in Kenya, made a presentation on "Social mobilization and economic empowerment for the minority widows of Mt. Elgon-Kenya". She noted a social rehabilitation project aimed at nearly three hundred Mt. Elgon widows/minority women from the Ogiek minority group, most of whom had lost their spouses to war, as the first step to reconstructing their lives socially and economically. She explained how women suffered the most, including from internal displacement and loss of both shelter and livelihood, and that psycho-social

support was necessary for their healing process to start. She spoke of the positive outcome of this project so far, which is the result of strategic capacity building on agribusiness, consultation and collaboration with government institutions, followed by close monitoring. She underlined how these women, through social mobilization have assisted each other. The recognition of the sexual and reproductive challenges faced by the widows, HIV/AIDS and reproductive health was further mainstreamed in this project. She indicated that the constitution of Kenya promulgated in August 2010, if implemented and enforced, could have potential for improving the situation of minority women. Her recommendations included: the Government should make efforts to protect the gains so far made in the Constitution; NGOs have a responsibility in mobilizing minority women and grassroots communities to be vigilant and watchful on all violations of their rights and take appropriate action; building the economic capacity of minority women is pivotal in their progression to satisfy basic needs at personal and household levels, gain knowledge and build confidence, make informed decisions, gain respect from the wider society, including men, and making these women ambassadors of change; capacity-building should include skills training in livelihoods diversification, increasing knowledge base, and access to credit and facilitating access to market. Non-formal and flexible learning approaches should be promoted.

Ms. Mariam Yassin Hagi Yussuf, from Somalia, focused her presentation on the situation of minority women in conflict situation. She mentioned that there are many obstacles faced by minority women in accessing economic, social and cultural rights in Somalia, including: intersecting forms of discrimination, harmful practices, lack of social protection and forced marriages. To address those, she provided recommendations, including: international law should be incorporated into domestic law; national pressure groups should be established to advocate for the rights of minority women and monitor governments' implementation of their international obligations; discrimination within minority communities should be tackled and not denied and synergies should be established within those communities; in conflict or post-conflict areas the Constitution-making processes should be used to mainstream women and minority rights, including by giving minority women the opportunity to go through the various articles of the draft constitution and analyze them from a minority and women's rights perspective; United Nations Agencies should be at the forefront of the implementation of resolutions on women and minorities, and especially in conflict zones, and ensure women and minority women's effective participation in conflict resolution.

Discussion

The Chairperson opened the floor for discussion 11. During this first segment of the discussion under Item V, participants raised the following issues with regard to the effective participation of minority women and girls in economic, cultural and social life:

- The importance of disaggregated data gathering.
- The need for gender-budgeting in States' national programmes.
- The need for capacity-building for minority women to participate effectively in trade unions, including by bringing quotas to ensure their representation.
- The risk of exploitation and discrimination against certain minority groups and women within these groups in particular.
- The difficulties in accessing justice for some minority women.
- The importance of ensuring minority women representation in statutory bodies and committees.
- The need for existing laws, policies and programmes aimed at protecting the rights of women to be reviewed and strengthened and for laws that discriminate against minority women to be reviewed or repealed.
- The importance of having plans and policies to ensure implementation of existing anti-discrimination legislation.
- The use of different forms of violence, especially sexual violence, to maintain some minority women subordinated.
- The importance of adequately addressing land, property and inheritance rights for minority women.
- The impact of displacement, as a result of inadequate standards of living which has multiplied effects on the situation of minority women in terms of economic independence, social status and influence as well as on their right to work.
- The impact of conflict during which minority women may become targets, victims of sexual violence, forced labour, and the need for mechanisms to address the situation of minority women living in conflict zones as well as those living in remote/rural areas, as well as the need to ensure access to remedies for women who have suffered violence.
- The need for encouragement and support for some minority women with regard to access to employment; the fact that having counsellors with minority background has proven helpful in this regard and that such support can also be helpful to assist minority women in creating their own businesses.
- The need to mainstream minority women's rights into poverty reduction strategies developed by States.
- The importance of addressing school dropout, early marriages and childbirth within some minority groups.

¹¹ The list of speakers, and when available the full text of their presentations, can be found on the Forum's web site at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/session4.htm>

Ms. Aleksandra Bojadjieva, from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, focused her intervention on the meaning of “specific measures for employment of Romani women”, based on some practical experiences. She first highlighted that, while there are initiatives and policies throughout Europe and measures have been implemented to tackle unemployment of Roma, these have rarely yielded results in terms of employment of Romani women. To have results in this sense, specific circumstances have to be considered within the employment measures for Romani women. She therefore focused her presentation on issues relevant for employment of Romani women from some communities throughout Europe i.e. the traditional role of the Romani women in the family and the community, the low level of education of Romani women that remains an important barrier to their employment and the language and information spreading barriers. She also elaborated upon possible measures to tackle those issues in designing and implementing employment strategies for Romani women. She indicated that employment measures should not automatically make Romani women ineligible for social benefits and at the same time impose the obligation of paying social contributions. If the authorities are to implement effective employment measures for Romani women, they have to get closer to the community and gain a better understanding including by involving Romani women from design to evaluation.

Ms. Jocelyne Stevens, from Canada, presented some concrete solutions based on programmes that have been developed and implemented, specifically with regard to economic, social and cultural life, to address barriers to minority women’s empowerment, including culture, discrimination, language, education, lack of job opportunities, expected roles within their own families, and lack of community involvement which they felt heightened feelings of isolation. The programmes would consist of an integrated approach to classroom instructions, where mainstream community women would learn alongside minority women. She provided examples of concrete measures based on the results of these programmes. Examples of positive results included: in 2010-2011 the Government of Canada (Status of Women) have made it policy that all funding requirements and guidelines will include funding for various comprehensive data collection methods, such as Gender Based Analysis (GBA) and evaluation that will help identify factors that may impede women, including minorities, in decision-making and leadership roles; the implementation of a two-year "Mentorship for Visible Minorities & Newcomer Women" programme to prepare approximately 60 women and girls from the various ethno-cultural communities to become future community and business leaders by linking them with women mentors.

Ms. Sonia Pierre, from the Dominican Haitian Women's Movement, made a presentation on the denial and deprivation of citizenship of Dominicans of Haitian descent and focused on the right to citizenship and the impact of its denial on the situation of some minority women in the Dominican Republic. She explained how the discrimination faced by Dominican women of Haitian descent has left thousands of them stateless and thus excluded from the political, economic, social and cultural development

of the country. She then gave a few concrete examples of how minority women can be affected by the denial of citizenship in several ways in the implementation of all their other human rights, including with regard to acquisition, change and retention of nationality and the conferral of nationality on their children. She concluded by calling on the Government to cease to apply existing resolutions and administrative practices that have an effect to exclude and breach the rights of Dominicans of Haitian descent.

Ms. Maria Vicenta Andrade Chalán, from UN Women, gave a brief overview of the international and national legal framework with regards to the rights of persons belonging to minorities, after which she mentioned that there is still a huge gap between the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies, and that this gap is even greater in relation to minority women, hence the importance of taking into account the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that they might face. In her recommendations, she mentioned the central role that UN Women should play in the creation of a network and the establishment of focal points in different United Nations agencies with a view to addressing the intersection between gender and intercultural approaches, and paying particular attention to cases of double and triple discrimination. She also mentioned the need to strengthen capacity-building initiatives and training of ombudsmen, judges and administrators with a view to increasing their knowledge of the international and national legal framework for the protection of women belonging to minorities and the elimination of the various remaining forms of discrimination.

Discussion

The Chairperson opened the floor for discussion¹². During the discussion under this second segment of Item V, participants raised the following issues with regard to the effective participation of minority women and girls in economic, cultural and social life:

- The importance of recognition of minorities within a State as a very first step to protect their economic, social and cultural rights.
- The low life expectancy for some minority women.
- The heightened risk of trafficking, sexual harassment and sexual violence for some minority women.
- The need to increase capacity-building programmes in relation to the right to land ownership and the fact that nationalization of land cannot be implemented without recognising the rights of minorities on the land. The need to provide fair and just compensation in case of nationalization of lands that belong to minority groups.
- The importance of conducting sensitization programmes on the rights of minorities.

¹² The list of speakers, and when available the full text of their presentations, can be found on the Forum's web site at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/session4.htm>

- The problems faced by minority women with regard to access to healthcare and access to justice.
- The importance for the recommendations to be culturally and religiously-sensitive.
- The fact that political reforms cannot be successful if the minorities present in the State are disregarded in the process.
- The impacts of early marriages and childbirth as well as forced marriages on the participation in economic and social life of some minority girls.
- The security concerns and fear of gender-based violence, abduction and sexual violence against minority women and girls in conflicts.
- The need for focused measures to be adopted to tackle all forms of discrimination that minority women are subjected to.
- The need to identify obstacles to the development of minority women and to tackle the causes of all multiple forms of discrimination.
- The importance of providing proper guidance to job-seekers, especially minority women who are seeking employment.
- The need for trade unions to intensify their work with regards to minority women and to make efforts to increase the number of minority women within their ranks.
- The need for special attention to be paid to the pay gap between men and women in general and that affecting minority women in particular.
- The importance of improving accountability mechanisms.
- The importance of ensuring equal access for minority women to government services with a view to increase their participation in economic and social life.
- The provision of culturally-sensitive information sessions and workshops on women's health issues and on access to healthcare and other support services.
- The creation of bi-communal community centres as an example of best practices; such centre could serve as an informal place for social gathering but also provide advice and support and a variety of training programmes for children, teenagers, women and the elderly and focus in particular in learning languages and computer skills.
- The importance of giving access to minority women to vocational trainings.
- The need for NGOs to promote diversity within their ranks and focus on this when they are offering employment.

Item VI. National practices and experiences: positive measures/affirmative action and role models¹³

Under this agenda item governments were invited to describe their national laws and their political, economic, social and cultural policies and practices designed to support and promote equal rights and opportunities for minority women. Minority women discussed

¹³ The full text of the presentations is available on the Forum's website:
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their role in policy and decision-making in the public and private spheres and shared their positive grass-roots experiences, including as role models. Discussions also focused on measures taken to enhance the mainstreaming of women's rights in minority groups' discourses and how women's organizations are integrating the rights of minorities in their overall work and activities.

Ms. Shaista Gohir, board member of Muslim Women's Network UK, noted that little attention is paid to Muslim women's successes and achievements and stressed the importance of celebrating and highlighting these as a strategy to advance rights and raise aspirations of young girls, and break down stereotypes. Following a brief overview of barriers that Muslim women in Britain face, she pointed out that, for the first time in 2010 a Muslim woman was included in the government cabinet and three were elected to parliament. Muslim women are participating at all levels in civil society and in diverse sectors, including the police, the army, as district judges, lawyers, teachers, scientists, engineers, bankers. There are Muslim female actors, television presenters, comedians, writers and other participating in sports. When Muslim women are given opportunities, they are taking them, hence the need for more opportunities to be created. Ms. Gohir highlighted examples of good practices, focusing on initiatives promoting role models, including Muslim female role models going into schools to speak to and mentor Muslim girls and exhibitions showing role models which are used by schools, libraries, and women's groups. They have developed posters and produced booklets highlighting role models. A website called "Big Sister", highlights Muslim female role models from around the world and from diverse sectors and is used as a resource in schools, universities and workshops. She concluded with the following recommendations: more Muslim women need to be empowered to challenge religious extremist rhetoric; Muslim women living in the West as minorities are being neglected and need to be connected to each other so they can work on the similar challenges that they face; more resources need to be created to highlight role models in the education curriculum.

Ms. Angie Cruickshank, director of the Association of Costa Rica Caribbean Project and coordinator of the first African Descent Youth Summit 2011, focused her presentation on the situation of women and girls of African descent in the Americas and the significant problems that they continue to face in areas critical to their full development. She insisted on the need for disaggregated data as a fundamental tool for decision-making and informed policy development and implementation. She also underlined the need to continue to promote the political participation of minority women at all levels, including within political parties and government institutions as well as the need to mainstream a generational component in the development and implementation of public policies and cooperation to ensure the active participation of young women in economic and political empowerment. She mentioned that the participants to the first African Descent Youth Summit had reaffirmed in the Declaration of San José various aspirations, including: develop strategic plans to combat the selective structural violence against the youth of African descent, particularly against girls, adolescents and young

women; promoting equal opportunities for decent work and increase investment and continuous strategic development and entrepreneurship programmes for young people of African descent; guarantee sexual and reproductive rights as fundamental human rights, as well as facilitating access to comprehensive, culturally-sensitive health services.

Ms. Libérate Nicayenzi gave a presentation on the situation of minority women in Burundi, underlining that they continue to face multiple barriers, including extreme poverty, high level of illiteracy, low level of education and school attendance. She therefore emphasized the need to sensitize women and girls belonging to minorities to the multiple benefits of education and to develop strategies aimed at the reduction of poverty, taking into account the specific needs of minority women. She also emphasized the need to increase their political participation, gave a few examples of national practices aimed at empowering minority women, including free primary education, and concluded with a few recommendations, including calling on African states to ratify the optional protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights of women in Africa.

Ms. Mucha-Shim Quiling Arquiza, from The Philippines, gave a presentation on the importance of strengthening education systems as a means to promote community empowerment. She mentioned that since 2005, in the Philippines, concerted efforts of education rights advocates and civil society network working on educational reforms have been supporting Alternative learning system (ALS) and schools for living traditions as strategies in the campaign for Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals. In response, the government has adopted important laws and implemented programmes to institutionalize the ALS. Besides, the Department of Education has since upgraded the 'Non-Formal Education' programme and created a Bureau of Alternative Learning System.

Ms. Marilyn Pasco Gonzalez, from Colombia, gave a presentation on some meaningful experiences and affirmative-action that have been implemented in Colombia with a view to improve the situation of minority women. Those examples included: empowerment of minority women through the strengthening of networks at local, regional and national levels, the use of quotas to guarantee the participation of women into politics, positive measures aimed at enhancing access for minority women to colleges and universities. She however pointed to the need for follow-up on implementation and actual impact of such measures. She highlighted that despite those positive measures, minority women in Colombia still faced discrimination, violence and exclusion so that there was a need for more concerted efforts amongst all stakeholders to address those issues. In this connection, her recommendations included: the need to increase efforts to ensure the full enjoyment of the rights of minority women, in particular those living in rural areas; the need to monitor and review the measures aimed at increasing access to education, especially at higher levels of education for Afro-Colombian women and those living in rural areas; there should be more accountability and monitoring of the allocation of resources for programmes and projects by the national governments as well as local

governments, aimed at women; and access to justice and security for women belonging to minorities should also be enhanced.

Ms. Nagwa Musa Konda, from the Nuba Mountains in Sudan, made a presentation on the multiple forms of discrimination that might be faced by minority women in view of the current context. With regard to access to education, community schools were used in her region as a result of which a considerable amount of girls belonging to minorities have had access to primary education. In addition to the promotion of girls' education as a long term strategy, she mentioned the conduct of targeted trainings for potential minority women leaders as well as those who have already gained a seat into Government, in order to build their capacity to effectively fulfill their roles. She further underlined the importance of promoting role models to win the understanding of minority communities, while implementing different activities advocating for a holistic gender mainstreaming. She concluded with recommendations which included: empowering the local communities by strengthening their capacity through different forms of education and targeted training; NGOs should take the lead in working for the rights of minority women and girls with multiple stakeholders including national and international human rights institutions, and the private; International Development Agencies must have training on minority, gender and human rights issues to effectively work to identify barriers to development and remedy the root causes of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by minority women.

Discussion

The Chairperson opened the floor for discussion¹⁴. During the discussion under items VI, participants raised the following issues in relation to national practices and experiences: positive measures/affirmative action and role models:

- The representative of one State indicated that minority women in that State enjoy special constitutional rights with regard to protecting their own language and culture in the country. Minority women and girls have a whole set of legal means at their disposal to deal with discrimination and they are supported in this by the ombudsperson for equal treatment and the equal treatment commission. The representative explained that protection measures to deal with violence against women and trafficking have also been expanded and improved, including a network of intervention centres that has been established across the country.
- Examples of practices in gathering reliable gender-specific data across minority groups which are critical in assessing improvement with regard to the situation of minority women were given.
- The importance of taking into account the rights of minority women in a post-conflict context was also discussed as well as the many remaining challenges to

¹⁴ The list of speakers, and when available the full text of their presentations, can be found on the Forum's web site at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/session4.htm>

- creating a truly pluralistic society in a reconciliation process, including the effective participation of minority women in the political sphere.
- Examples were also given of measures taken in some States to improve the situation and ensure that Roma women do enjoy access to healthcare, including free medical consultations, and access to healthcare for Roma being included in national action plans in some States.
 - The use of positive measures constitutes a fundamental part of the realisation of the right to equality of access, including for example training and recruitment initiatives or quotas in public and private sectors to promote access by minorities to labour markets.
 - In the field of the judiciary, the creation of an independent judicial appointments commission could prove useful to encourage transparency and ensuring that applicants from all parts of society are fairly treated and that the judiciary is representative of society. In this regard, the need to encourage more minority women to apply for positions within the judiciary was highlighted, helping to create more role models.
 - The need for targeted advocacy was highlighted as a way to advance minority women's rights.
 - Research and data were considered to be a useful tool, as well as study sessions and trainings targeted at minority women.
 - The importance of creating and consolidating networks of organizations working on minority women's rights.
 - The use of proper terminology in training tools and materials.
 - Examples were given of measures taken to tackle discrimination, including a new action plan on gender equality. The need for more knowledge on these issues and not to forget the intersecting forms of discrimination and to adopt a holistic approach was further highlighted.
 - The usefulness of adopting a multi-pronged approach including social, economic, administrative as well as legal affirmative measures for the advancement of women as well as rights-based approach to social, economic and political empowerment of women, including women belonging to minorities; examples of such targeted programmes include gender-responsive budgets.
 - They also underscored the importance of allocating more resources including on social awareness and in addressing domestic violence.
 - Examples were cited of constitutions that contain explicit provisions to ensure that there is no discrimination.
 - The importance of the legal framework was reiterated and an example was given of a national programme focusing on equality between men and women that focuses on building public policies with a gender perspective, promoting the elimination of established gender stereotypes, increasing the number of girls in schools, giving special attention to women living in poverty.
 - It was stated that measures taken to increase political participation could also include the translation of electoral information materials into minority languages.

- Ensuring accountability for violation of minority women's rights and helping them in ensuring their equal access to justice.
- The importance of the necessary political will to recognise minority groups within a State and that of involving minorities, including women, in resources management and the establishment of protected areas were also highlighted.

Item VII. Concrete steps aimed at guaranteeing the rights of minority women

Under this agenda item, discussion focused on improving the draft recommendations with a view to formulate practical policies, actions or programmes that would ensure the full enjoyment of the rights of minority women and generate a greater degree of participation in private and public life at the national, regional and local levels.

Discussion

The Chairperson opened the floor for discussion¹⁵. During the discussion under item VII, the following comments and/or suggestions of amendments to the draft recommendations were made by Forum participants:

- The scope of the recommendations should be extended to minority girls in addition to minority women, in line with the Declaration on Minorities.
- The need to collect and disseminate data disaggregated not only by ethnicity and sex but also by nationality, religion and language in accordance with the Declaration on Minorities was reiterated.
- Paragraph 24 of the recommendations should be amended as follows: “in areas where minority predominantly live, knowledge of the minority language by public sectors employees would be an asset”.
- The following should be added to paragraph 48: “To warrant equal opportunity for women belonging to national 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”.
- Additional details about the specific experiences of minority women in conflict, particularly in reference to the issue of one-sided or state-sponsored violence should be included in the recommendations.
- The need to adopt a holistic approach to the situation of minority women.
- The need to acknowledge that harmful practices are not only found in minority communities.

¹⁵ The list of speakers, and when available the full text of their presentations, can be found on the Forum's web site at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/session4.htm>

- In addition to Government and law enforcement official receiving training on non-discrimination and women's rights specified in recommendation 24, the recommendation should include ensuring sanctions against those officials who discriminate against minority women.
- The recommendations to United Nations agencies need to be strengthened.
- As per last year's recommendations, a voluntary fund for minorities should be created to enable minority representatives, including 50 % minority women to participate in the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations system.
- It is important that everyone ensure that gender and attention to issues of minority women are not sidelined or reduced in the current difficult economic situation and a recommendation should be added in this regard.
- Recommendations dealing with human trafficking should be amended to explicitly address concrete steps regarding refugee trafficking, encouraging states to work together to create bilateral or regional bodies whose sole purpose would be to combat the slave trade and protect the minority women caught within it and make sure that minority women are actively recruited to work in these bodies.

Item IX. Concluding remarks

In her closing remarks, the Chair, Ms. Graciela Dixon, mentioned that time constraint was an issue and the Forum would have liked to be able to hear from more participants. However, she highlighted that the Forum was open to receive all additional comments from participants by writing and that they would indeed feed into the outcome document.