

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES
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**GOOD PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES ON MINORITIES FOR ETHNIC AND
POLITICAL MINORITIES: THE CASE OF BURUNDI**

By LIBERATE NICAYENZI (Member of the Parliament of Burundi: National Assembly).

Excellencies,

Your honours,

Madame Independent Expert,
Distinguished Guests,

We take this opportunity to express our joy to participate in this 2nd session of the Forum on Minorities on the matter of effective participation of minorities in political life.

We would like to thank the initiators and organisers of this framework of expression for the minorities of the whole world.

My country, Burundi, includes in its ethnic composition the Batwa, the Bahutu, and the Batutsi, representing respectively 1%, 85%, and 14%.

The Batwa are an ethnic minority of the country and at the same time an indigenous minority, which explains their double marginalisation.

Compared to other countries in the Great Lakes region, Burundi has already started to show an interest in the promotion and integration of the Batwa minorities in the political life.

Thus, the national Constitution of Burundi reserves a representation of Batwa in the two chambers of Parliament, with three seats in the National Assembly and three seats in the lower chamber (164 and 180).

This system of cooptation is done in consultation with the 'Let us unite for the Promotion of the Batwa' (*'Unissons nous pour la Promotion des Batwa'*, UNIPROBA), which is the organisation created by the Batwa to defend their interests in all fields of national life, and the Independent Electoral Commission.

Other appointments have been granted by Presidential Decree to the same minorities in other important national institutions, in particular the National Independent Commission, the General Inspection of the State, as well as an Advisor of the Governor of the province of Kirundo.

We shall not forget to mention the existence of an Ad Hoc Commission in the Senate that takes care of indigenous minorities issues.

In other political parties we see some Batwa representing others in the communal and other local councils.

All this gives us a sign of hope and we would like to invite the other States of the Great Lakes region to follow this path.

The electoral code recently adopted by the Parliament sheds more light upon the system of cooptation of the Batwa since the representation of the Batwa in the Parliament as well as the representatives of the Batwa in the communes and the hills or localities. For the Representatives in Parliament the lists are made in consultation with the most representative organisations. In the communes a Mutwa will be coopted where they are more representative.

In the hills the presentation of candidacy of the leader of the hill is free. UNIPROBA is called upon to make the Batwa aware and mobilise them to get elected.

To be able to ensure the sustainability of this process we would like to recommend that:

- Minorities themselves defend with energy their rights and strengthen their solidarities,
- Minorities spread widely their rights in collaboration with the media and increase their activities of advocacy and lobbying to the States, and fight against poverty and discrimination.

To the Forum we ask to encourage States that have already started the process of promoting and protecting minorities at national level, while calling upon those that have not begun to do so as soon as possible, in order for minorities to be able to enjoy all the rights as recognised by international instruments.

To financially and morally support NGOs defending minorities,

To facilitate visits and sharing of experiences in order to mutually strengthen each other.

To conclude, Madame President, it is a long-winded work that will require your strength and patience. We wish you good luck and we join your efforts.

Thank you.