

SECOND SESSION OF THE FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES

- First of all, I must congratulate the Independent Expert for the Committee of Minorities of Human Rights for organizing this second forum on the rights of minorities.
- Behatokia also participated last year in the Forum, just as it has done in diverse Committees of the United Nations: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Committee on the Rights of the Child... We met with the Expert in Paris two years ago, etc.
- In those committees we have made evident the attitude of the French State before the territorial collectivities, and we would like to take advantage of this forum to again give evidence to the injustice and discrimination that we suffer as Basques, Britons, Alsatians, Corsicans, Catalans, Occitans...and also as citizens of Reunion, Mayotte, Guyana, etc.
- For the countless time, I want to make evident the attitude of the French State in concern to the national minorities of the State itself: "France does not recognize the existence of minorities given that collective rights are opposed to the judicial order." France's response to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on April 2, 2008.
- In 2001, the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights recommended to the French State to change its attitude towards minorities.
- In 2008, the same Committee reiterated with greater strength that the French State should change its attitude towards minorities. Even more, it affirmed that the principle of *Égalité* should not be understood as an obstacle for the recognition of rights.
- In June 2009, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended once again to the French State to change its attitude in concern to the recognition of minorities.
- The Independent Expert for Minorities, Gay McDougall recommended in her report of March 2008 that the State must change its attitude.
- In light of all these petitions the State has paid no attention.
- Additionally, and taking into account that in this Forum the political participation of minorities is discussed, we would like to establish the following:

- In 1982, a small process of decentralization began in France, but today a legislative reform draft exists in which power is centralized to the central power.
- The minority communities cannot decide on the teachings in their languages, furthermore, the central power has a tendency to assimilate different regions and peoples in new regions with a unique national identity, language, history, etc.
- This is the case, for example, of the region Loire-Bretagne.
- The Basque case is even more scandalous. The linguistic Basque community does not have any type of recognition, and it cannot adjust to the legal division of departments in the French State. For the State, the north of Euskal Herria simply does not exist. Furthermore, we must remember that in the organization of the State there is no collective recognition of the three provinces of Euskal Herria: Zuberoa, Nafarroa Beherea and Lapurdi. Since the period of the French Revolution, the three territories were included in the department of Basses-Pyrenees, along with the region of Bearn.
- **Therefore**, we share the struggle with another minoritized linguistic community, the Occitan.
- All of this does nothing more than place obstacles for the participation of the Basque collective, given that in that great department, our collectivity represents nothing more than a small number of inhabitants.
- All of this occurs in the 21st century and inside the framework of Europe, which has opted to recognize linguistic and cultural diversity, or inside the framework in which the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations has opted to articulate tools for the consensus of minority communities through, for example, this Forum.