

UNIPROBA

**Theme: Obstacles to the effective participation of minorities in political life**

Thank you, Madam President, for giving me the floor in front of this august assembly.

Madam President, Distinguished Delegates

It is a great honor for me to speak in front of you about the obstacles faced by the Batwa to their effective participation in political life. The Batwa are minorities from the Great Lake region, which covers Burundi, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda.

Indeed Madam President, the major similar problems that block the effective participation of the Batwa minorities in political life and that deserve overall solutions are the following:

- Extreme poverty of the Batwa
- Lack of clear policy in matters of education and health
- No access to a fair justice
- Persistence of marginalization and discrimination
- No involvement of Batwa women in the sphere of national life
- No recognition of the indigenous identity in the sub region
- No access to information on rights and duties of the citizen
- Armed groups destabilize the Batwa communities in the sub-region, which causes massive displacement

Madam President, Ladies, Gentlemen

The Batwa are discriminated against with regards to participation since all the constitutions of the above-mentioned countries provide for equality of all before the law, non-discrimination, and participation of everyone in public affairs. We welcome, however, some efforts of the government of Burundi where the post transition constitution provides for the representation of the Batwa in the Senate and the National Assembly with three Batwa in each chamber. It is quite clear in Article 19 that:

All women and all men are equal in dignity, rights, and responsibilities. No one may be subject to discrimination because of their origin, race, ethnicity, sex, skin color, language, social situation or religious, philosophical or political beliefs, because of a physical or mental disability or because they have HIV/Aids. All citizens are equal before the law, which equally guarantees them protection. Nevertheless this constitution of Burundi has shortcomings which require it to be reviewed so as to ensure representation of the Batwa in all spheres of the country.

This concerns in particular the participation at the executive level, where it is mentioned 60% for Hutu and 40% for Tutsi and where 30% of representation is reserved for women. It also regards articles on the defense and security forces that guarantee 50% for Tutsi, since we know that those corps include an important number of Batwa.

In the DRC we observe that the Batwa are not represented since the Constitution provides that:

***Article 11***

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. However, the enjoyment of political rights is granted to Congolese only, except for cases the law has determined otherwise).

***Article 12***

All Congolese are equal before the law and have the right to equal protection by the law.

### ***Article 13***

No Congolese person may be subject to any discriminatory measure on the ground of his/her religion, family origin, social condition, residence, views or political beliefs, or membership of a certain race, ethnicity, tribe, cultural or linguistic minority, in matters of education or access to public functions or in any other matter, whether it results from the law or from a measure of the executive.

### ***Article 14***

The public authorities ensure the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the protection and promotion of their rights.

They take all appropriate measures in order to ensure the full realization of the potential of women and their full participation in the development of the nation in all areas, and most notably in the civil, political, economic, social and cultural areas.

They take measures in order to fight all forms of violence against women in their public and private life.

Women are entitled to fair representation in national, provincial and local institutions.

The State guarantees the achievement of equality between men and women in said institutions.

The law determines the conditions for the enforcement of these rights.

In Uganda, Article 1 Paragraph 4 states that the Peoples shall express their will and their consent to those who will govern them and are free to elect their representatives with a referendum.

As part of the goals of politics and democratic principles of the Ugandan constitution, it is stated that the State shall be based on democratic principles and encourage the active participation of all citizens at all levels.

Likewise, we would like to add that all Ugandans should have access to positions of high responsibility at all levels.

The constitution of Rwanda, in its article 9, paragraph 4 and 5, ensures:

4° the building of a state governed by the rule of law, a pluralistic democratic government, equality of all Rwandans, and equality between women and men reflected by the fact that women are granted at least thirty percent of the positions in decision-making bodies;

5° the building of a State committed to the well-being of the population and to social justice,

### ***Article 11***

All Rwandans are born and remain free and equal in rights and duties. The Chamber of deputies shall be composed of 80 members as follows:

1° fifty three (53) are elected in accordance with the provisions of article 77 of this Constitution;

2° twenty four (24) women; that is: two from each Province and the City of Kigali. These shall be elected by a joint assembly composed of members of the respective District, Municipality, Town or Kigali City Councils and members of the Executive Committee of women's organizations at the Province, Kigali City, District, Municipalities, Towns and Sector levels;

3° two (2) members elected by the National Youth Council;

4° one (1) member elected by the Federation of the Associations of the Disabled.

Thus, Madam President, you will notice that these constitutions contain contradictions that are nearly insurmountable obstacles to allow the participation of Batwa in the decision-making bodies. We call on the Forum to pay special attention to our region and especially to ask the Rapporteur on the Rights of Minorities to organize a visit to the Great Lakes region in the period running up to the elections this year.

Thank you for your kind attention.