

Statement by the Delegation of Armenia
Minority Forum

Madam Chair,

Armenia's engagement in the international cooperation on minority issues emanates from two perspectives: as a country which addresses needs of a diverse and vibrant minority community and historic homeland to numerous Armenian communities residing in various parts of the world. These two perspectives give a very unique opportunity to assess needs of minorities from various angles and to encourage inclusive dialogue among all stakeholders.

The Armenian Government has been undertaking essential measures to protect and promote the rights of 11 national minorities residing in Armenia. At the very outset of its independence, Armenia duly involved persons belonging to minorities in land privatization project and empowered them with equal property rights regardless of their historic presence in Armenia. For the last 2 decades Armenia has accumulated a valuable experience in engaging minorities in decision making, particularly in areas of their direct concern such as assistance to their cultural, linguistic and educational needs.

To this end, an advisory body, Coordination Council for National Minorities representing national minority groups has been created. The Coordinating Council comprising 2 representatives of each of the 11 national minorities participates, inter alia, in elaboration of recommendations concerning more effective promotion of national minority rights, discussion and analysis of draft legal acts having any bearing on them.

Another important avenue for safeguarding rights of minorities is minority expert mechanism created at the Office of Human Rights Defender. This representative group provides expertise and advises to the Human Rights Defender in promoting rights of minorities as well as addressing their particular complains.

We subscribe to the view that the respect of property rights constitutes a sound foundation for any economic activities of minorities worldwide and no any economic project should be undertaken at the expense of those rights. Along side with natural resources, cultural heritage of minorities should also be considered as an asset which economic utilization such as touristic promotion should be undertaken with the consent and participation of minorities. We appreciate that during this forum many valuable ideas were put forward with regard to property reconstitution within the context of rehabilitation of minorities who were subject of historic injustice. Here again dialogue and common undertaking is essential measure to build trust and prosperity in the affected societies.

We regret that instead addressing concerns of the CERD and the CoE Framework convention regarding mistreatment and discrimination of the Armenian minority in Azerbaijan, the latter one tries to portray its failed massive ethnic cleansing campaign in Nagorno Karabakh as a military aggression of Armenia. Armenian population of Nagorno Karabakh suffered severe discrimination by the authorities of Azerbaijan and their protests were strongly suppresses. As a result approximately 75 years of Azerbaijani domination resulted in reducing the Armenian population of Nagorno Karabakh from 95 to 75%. Meantime, the Azeri population of the enclave grew tenfold. The rise of violence was the only response of the Azerbaijani authorities to the peaceful demand of the Armenians for respect for their rights.

The Armenian population of Azerbaijan was the first victim of ethnic violence in Soviet and Post-Soviet area.

Hence, Nagorno Karabakh conflict is an interesting case which illustrates how state should deal or should not deal with a particular minority in order to compel the latter one to realise its right of self determination and establish an independent statehood as the only medium of survival on its ancestral land.