

Intervention at the 3rd UN Forum on Minority Issues, Geneva, 14-15 December 2010

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Madam Chair, distinguished delegates,

Minorities are among the most in need, but have so far benefited the least from the Millennium Development Goals. Direct or indirect discrimination, language barriers and geographic remoteness are considerable obstacles preventing many minority communities from participating in economic life.

In parts of Europe, Roma face very serious discrimination in employment and the destabilising effects of forced removals. In China, ethnic minorities have seen their average incomes not keep pace with that of the majority Han Chinese. In Colombia, Afro-descendant communities face forced dispossession of their land as the on-going conflict continues to cause displacement and affect individual livelihoods. In many countries, including for example Iran, government infrastructure investment lags behind in minority areas, preventing access to markets and reducing chances of employment.

Minority Rights Group International is troubled by the lack of meaningful minority participation in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). This is true for example in both Kenya and Uganda, where development planning processes have had little impact for minorities on the ground. Moreover, many of these PRSPs have been drawn up without the fully disaggregated data needed to understand the needs of minorities.

Many PRSP's lack any comprehensive analysis of the situation of minority women. In addition to the obstacles faced as members of minorities, minority women are discriminated against as women. Minority women face the effects of less equal access to education – placing many categories of employment out of reach. Minority women may also face particular problems to do with unjust inheritance and land ownership practices and laws. And if they do have employment, minority women may be disproportionately represented in the most stigmatised work. This is the case for example of Dalit women in India and Nepal.

The draft recommendations are very comprehensive. In particular we support recommendation 48 on the creation of a Voluntary Fund to support participation of minorities in the work of the UN. We would suggest that they could be strengthened through greater mention of minority women, for example in no. 18 (by mentioning budgetary allocations specifically for minority women), no. 26 (by recommending skills training for minority women small business-owners) and no. 36 (by suggesting attention to minority women in monitoring of budgets for minorities and in gender budget initiatives).

Finally, while speaking of multiple discrimination, we note that recommendation no. 14 does not mention either gender identity or sexual orientation. We would suggest that these grounds be inserted as well.

The Millenium Development Goals will quite simply not be achieved if more is not done to involve minorities and address their situation. Thank you.

