

Oral Statement at the Third United Nations Forum on Minority Issues

“Minorities and the Effective Participation in Economic Life”

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Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010, Geneva

Thank you Madam Chair,

My name is Sameena Nazir and I work with the Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA) in Pakistan. We work for the promotion and protection of human rights in rural areas of Pakistan through providing educational about national and international human rights standards, by facilitating the empowerment of rural communities through sustainable livelihoods skills and by advocating for the rights of rural women and small landholding farmers in Pakistan.

I thank the Independent Expert on Minority Rights Issues, Ms. Gay McDougall for organizing this critically important and timely Forum to highlight the challenges and obstacles that minorities face in their full and equal access to economic rights and for providing an opportunity to grassroots activists like me to share our experiences and strategies for solutions. We are thankful for the highly important, practical and action-oriented DRAFT Recommendations that have been prepared for this session's work. The draft recommendations cover a vast range of economic rights for minorities and highlight the roles and obligations of eight key actors such as the governments, the international community and the private sector to understand how these

rights can be ensured and protected. The key message of the recommendations is that we all have to work together and that we all have a role to play to ensure that these recommendations are implemented.

While we appreciate the holistic approach visible in the Draft Recommendations, I wish to highlight that the issue of minority women and the process of gender integration in these draft recommendations needs further deliberations. The current Draft Recommendations highlight the issue of gender and minority women in several places such as in paragraph 14, 17, 19, 25, 28 and a few other paragraphs, the gender-specific challenges that minority women face in all areas of their life is not fully addressed in all sections of the draft recommendations. Since women face multiple discriminations because they are a minority and because they are women, we strongly recommend that the gender-specific obstacles of minority women should be highlighted and integrated in each section of these draft recommendations. It is well documented that minority women face multiple forms of discriminations because in most countries of the world women are already marginalized and are systematically excluded from the power structures at all levels. Therefore there is an extra need to highlight the gender-specific issues, discriminations, needs and priorities in order to formulate practical recommendations that will benefit minority women and girls. For example the section B, paragraph 34 that highlights how national human rights institutions should work with the government in times of crisis, a special focus on the situation of minority women in time of crisis is critically important because we know from our first hand experience of working in the field that the most marginalized are often the most

ignored in times of natural or man-made crisis and we also know that women have special gender-specific needs that must be addressed when preparing disaster response. I will share a recent example from my country Pakistan. In August 2010 Pakistan was devastated with one the biggest flood in 80 years. One fifth of the country with 180 million population was under water and millions of people were affected and their agricultural land and livelihoods were destroyed. Today over 20 million Pakistanis are living as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in all parts of the flood affected areas. We urge the international community to continue to pay attention to the needs of flood affected communities in Pakistan. Most rural communities are displaced because their villages do not exist any more as the water has taken their land along with their traditional livelihoods means. Women were the most affected in this flood because most women live and work in their native areas while most rural men venture out to find other sources of livelihoods to compliment family income. Most women did not know how to swim and many lost their lives while saving a child or a goat or a cow that is as important to a rural woman as a child. Now when the government and UN agencies have started the compensations and rehabilitation programs for the flood affected women there are many forms of gender-based discriminations. Many women especially poor and minority women do not have their national Identity cards that is essential for getting any form of compensation. Like in many places in the world, we fear that women will be left out from the compensation processes if we do not shout their names and if we do not say please pay special attention to women and girls because they area already marginalized in the society's power structures. Therefore it is critical to have gender integrated into each and every section of these DRAFT Recommendations and to have a

special focus on the gender-specific obstacles, needs and priorities of minority women and girls in order to ensure that women are not forgotten or marginalized.

Thank you.