

Intervention **at the 4th UN. Forum on Minority Issues, Geneva, 29-30 November 2011**

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international Madam Chair, distinguished delegates,

Minority Rights Group feels that much more needs to be done to secure the meaningful participation of minority women in post-conflict peace-building processes.

The impact of conflict on women is wide-ranging. Women are often the most likely to stay back and protect their families, increasing their vulnerability. Many also find themselves heading their households and struggling to find an income. They risk being coerced into sex work or having to offer sexual favours to be able to support their families. If displaced, women are at risk of being exploited by border guards and traffickers.

Madame Chair, beyond these risks facing women in conflict, women from minority communities are specifically targeted for attack by both state forces and armed opposition groups. Minority women can face sexual and gender-based violence as a means of punishing their communities. They are frequently targeted both because of their gender and their ethnic, religious or cultural identity.

Today, Minority Rights Group is launching a report on Iraq's participation of minorities in public life. In Iraq, as in Somalia, concrete measures to guarantee political participation have resulted in little for minority women, who typically find themselves excluded from gender quotas because they are minorities and from minority quotas because they are women.

Despite the end of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka, minority women face sexual abuse and harassment, due to increased militarisation in the former war zone. Moreover, minority women are not being adequately included in state-building processes.

While risking multiple abuses, many minority women lead the way in seeking to resolve conflicts. But when it comes to national level processes, it is very unlikely that they will be given a place at the negotiating table.

Draft recommendation no. 26 addresses these issues. The language can be strengthened in order to call on governments to put in place mechanisms to ensure the effective participation of minority women in conflict resolution processes. This includes ensuring physical protection against harm when necessary.

Frankly, in recognition of the grave harm done to many minority women during conflicts, the bravery many show in seeking solutions and the right they have to justice, minority women must be effectively included in peace- and state-building processes.

Finally, *Madame Chair*, next year is the 20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the rights of minorities. We urge all delegates to reflect on the gains made by minority communities over the past two decades and what more needs to be done.