

Intervention of L.A. Ms. Laura Dupuy Lasserre Ambassador
(Uruguay)
President of the Human Rights Council
Opening of the fourth session of the Forum on Minority Issues
Tuesday November 29, 2011, 10:00 a.m.
Palais des Nations, Room XX

Chairwoman of the Forum,
Madam High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to address you this morning at the opening of the fourth session of the Forum on Minority Issues on the theme "Ensuring the rights of women belonging to minorities".

First, I would like to warmly welcome Ms. Graciela Dixon, Judge of the Supreme Court of Panama, who has graciously accepted the important task of chairing this period of sessions. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to the representatives of Member States, specialized agencies, representatives of the bodies of human rights treaties, international and regional organizations, national human rights institutions as well as non-governmental organizations, academics and experts.

Also, I welcome all women belonging to minorities around the world that are gathered here today, and in some cases, have traveled far to share their personal experiences with other participants of the Forum, providing the richness of its first-hand knowledge in this important meeting. It is also transcendent to have the presence of men belonging to minority groups from all regions of the world, as their contributions to the discussions of this forum will be crucial, especially in view of its central role in efforts to ensure the rights of women and girls who belong to minorities.

I take this opportunity to congratulate Ms. Rita Izsak on his appointment as independent Expert on minority issues and wish you success in carrying your mandate. Unfortunately, Ms. Izsák may not be physically present with us the day today, but her absence at this meeting is due to the merriest of family reasons. We will have the opportunity to listen to her through a recorded statement and I am confident she will follow closely the discussions. I would also like to express the sincere gratitude of Human Rights Council to the former head of the mandate, Ms. Gay McDougall, who has led successfully the work of this Forum during its first three sessions and that through its strong commitment , she has managed to establish a very high level for this annual meeting.

This Forum has established itself as one of the main platforms for dialogue among stakeholders in the promotion and protection of minority rights. It is the space to share best practices and to promote mutual understanding of minority issues, in accordance with resolution 6/15 which established it. Since the creation of the Forum, the organizers have always done their best to give the protagonism to the voices of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, throughout the proceedings of the Forum. I hope that the variety of experiences from the wide range of participants present here, will be reflected again in the discussions and eventually feed recommendations that will be presented by the independent expert to the Human Rights Council in March 2012.

In the last three years, this forum has addressed key issues relating to the promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, namely, "minorities and the right to education", "minorities and effective political participation" and "minorities and effective participation in economic life". The Council welcomed and benefited from the exhaustive recommendations and practices that have emanated from the previous three sessions of the Forum on minority issues. This year, the period of sessions will focus on the specific challenges that women belonging to minorities face in relation to these issues. The Council looks forward with particular interest the recommendations that will result from this meeting.

Madam President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The promotion and protection of women's rights and combating violence against women have been instrumental in the work of the Human Rights Council since its creation. The double principle of equality and non-discrimination, which are in fact the basis on which all international human rights system is built, are also the foundations on which the Council has been established and will continue to build their work.

Since 2007, the Human Rights Council has included in its work program a day dedicated to the rights of women, in recognition of both the importance of the rights of women and the centrality of issues related to their activities. In 2010, the discussion focused on the empowerment of women through education, a key issue that will also be discussed in this forum, focusing on the particular challenges that women who belong to minorities face, doubly discriminated sometimes for being a woman and belonging to minorities.

The Council also decided in 2007 to hold an annual debate about the integration of gender perspective in their work and its mechanisms. Moreover, in addition to the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Last year the Council created a new working group on discrimination against women, in law and in practice, which will present its first report in June 2012. Under its mandate, the working group will have to formulate recommendations on improving legislation and law enforcement, to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular goal 3 on the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.

Madam President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year session will build on previous achievements and will report on the rules that guaranteeing the rights of women belonging to minorities in all parts of the world, as well as the necessary policies to ensure the protection and empowerment of women belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

To this end, I encourage participants, including grassroots organizations coming from all over the world and that represent the whole spectrum of society, to participate in a really constructive and interactive dialogue, to exchange views and share experiences and good practices, to report on obstacles and challenges, but especially to identify solutions.

Hopefully your inputs will feed the work of the various bodies of the Council to address effectively the multiple forms of discrimination that girls and women belonging to minorities are subject to.

It is essential that Member States and all other stakeholders, translate the recommendations of this Forum into action at local, national and international levels. The recommendations must be seen by States as a tool, that could help them in adopting legislation and policies or programs that ensure full respect for the rights of women belonging to minorities. It is in this spirit, with the purpose to make a meaningful difference in the lives of minorities in general and in particular those of women belonging to minorities, I wish you a substantive and action-oriented debate, successful and rewarding.

Thank you very much for your attention