

**4<sup>th</sup> Session of the Forum on Minority Issues**  
**Ms Maya Sahli on Item III**

**In French**

Thank you madam President. First of all, congratulations on shouldering this enormous event and chairing this forum. On behalf of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent I will briefly tell you about the main steps taken by our group to deal with the rights of women of African descent. Clearly the right to access education is a fundamental right as it was recalled in previous comments. Today the right to education still remains out of reach for a large quantity almost all children of African descent. When we take account of children of African descent you also need to focus on girl children who are side-lined. Women and girls of African descent thus suffer from two-fold discrimination. First of all because they are women, and secondly because they are of African descent. This is therefore, cross-multiple discrimination. The real cause is of the marginalisation of women and girls of African descent and the right to education are essentially to do with cultural religious and linguistic differences and women and girls from minority in general and people of African descent in particular suffer from a global situation of racism and racial discrimination xenophobia and intolerance also related to poverty. Therefore we need to take account of concept of multiple discrimination. Exclusion from any participation in education or system in vocational training for adults creeps up all the time for women and girls of African descent. And our group of experts on persons of African descent has dealt a lot into the subject of education for women and girls and through our various recommendations and working sessions we have been able to detect a number of obstacles all of which are erected in the path of girls and women of African descent whether they live in developed and developing countries. In this respect, discrimination based on ethnic identity or descent, racial type discrimination has been exacerbated against girls and girls pay the price of poverty the stigmatisation of women and girls of African descent in the educational system is justified by the lack of resources, by poverty, by cultural traditions and custom. The discrimination is all the more important when it is targeted much more against girls than against boys. Girls of African descent sometimes get into the first rounds of the education ladder but very often they remain in a disastrous situation when they are excluded from the school system and therefore confined to domestic labour. Girls who cannot go to school are more vulnerable in situation of poverty, hunger, violence, harsh treatment, exploitation, trafficking, HIV, AIDS, and other diseases. If they become mothers they are more at risk of transmitting illiteracy and poverty in the social system they are a part of. Therefore, women have to be educated, women of African descent in particular. And our Working Group had an opportunity to visit a number of countries, particularly Ecuador, The USA, Portugal, and the situation of women differs of course, depending on the level of development of the countries concerned. Nevertheless, there is a common denominator: women and girls of African descent remain far from being a priority for these states as it is essential to ensure there is an inclusive policy on the right of education for girls on the basis of a pragmatic approach in ensuring equality in education and particular ensuring that education is free. Education for girls, well first of all make it possible for them to make a full contribution to the political social and economic development of their host countries or countries of

residence and ensure that they become more autonomous. The best means of ensuring high quality teaching and to eliminate obstacles for attendance for girls and minorities and of African descent is to ensure that there is high quality education because education is a development tool. Madam Chair, looking at the recommendations our working group in its various sessions has been keen to make recommendations on a number proposals on the inclusion of girls of African descent in the educational systems in their countries. It would be essential to formulate recommendations and specific strategies on the right to education for girls from minorities and to provide legal responses through positive action, overcoming illiteracy, language barriers and poverty. Also adopting specific measures targeting disadvantaged groups in order to mitigate or eliminate the condition which perpetuate discrimination, encouraging girls to get in to the educational system also combating signs of mandatory discrimination in all of its forms which are based upon on link to descendants, sometimes as we refer to as “Afrophobia” for persons of African descent. States must take their responsibilities and ensure their responsibilities to all these communities. They must encourage literacy for girls and women of African descent so that in future the effective participation of women and girls in real economic policy can be ensured. Significant commitments need to be made, promises must be a thing of the past, and things must be done. We must have a road map and we must monitor disaggregated data, which take account of all ethnic categories on the basis of age and geographical representation. Madam Chair, it will be important at the end of this forum for us to be able to take account of the situation of women and girls in all sectors and also take account of the need to continue the work we have been doing and to implement the recommendations emerging from this forum.