

Madam Chairperson, over the years the UNDM has provided general guidance to protection of minorities in Finland. The objectives and principles enshrined in the declaration are turned into concrete actions through various legislative and policy measures. The analytical commentary on the declaration provides for wide scope of application of the declaration as it comprises various minorities, including new minorities.

Democracy entails the right of the individual to participate in the influence the development of society and his or her living conditions. According to our constitution the public authorities have a duty to promote the opportunities for individuals to participate in societal activity and influence decisions that concern him or her. A pre-requisite for the improvement of the status of minorities is that they themselves are involved in decision-making process. Article 2 paragraph 2 of the declaration is a key reference which produces for the rights of persons belonging to minority to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social and economic and public life.

With this in mind we would like to address the draft recommendations number 31 on the establishment of advisory or consultative parties with the full participation of minorities, the structures for dialogue, interaction and cooperation between minorities and authorities are needed all over the world. A greater commitment to understanding the minority rights with the full inclusion and participation of minority groups can prevent conflicts from becoming violent. In Finland we have a long tradition of including civil society in the decision process, structures are built to ensure that minorities are able to play a full and equal part in our society and contribute towards eradicating discrimination against them. The work carried out by advisory bodies is an excellent way of ensuring that the views of minority groups and other civil society actors are heard. The advisory boards for minority issues and ethnic relations on Roma affairs as well as the regional advisory board seek to promote the extensive dialogue and serve as expert bodies in developing an ethnically equitable diverse society. The legal basis of these advisory boards are in the decrees which provide a standing status and legitimacy to the work of these bodies. Civil society groups are invited to choose their representatives to the boards through a self-selection process. All advisory boards monitor the development of the circumstances of minorities living in Finland. Civil society organisations that representing minorities can play a very productive role as watchdogs helping to ensure that the government actors are accountable to the people and community they serve.

Thank you.