

Check against delivery

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL — FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES

(27th November 2012)

**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Italy
H.E. Ambassador Laura Mirachian**

Thank you Madame President.

Twenty years after its adoption, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities remains the cornerstone in the international endeavors aimed at enhancing peaceful co-existence and eradicating discrimination.

Consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Italy -A which hosts many ethnic and linguistic communities is committed to upholding all minorities' rights and fundamental freedoms. Articles 3, 6 and 19 of the Constitution guarantee that all citizens are equal before the law irrespective of their race, language or religion, that linguistic minorities are specifically protected and that everybody has the right to freely profess and exercise his faith. The Italian legislation also sanctions incitement to racial, ethnic or religious discrimination and violence.

While the protection of vulnerable categories is a benchmark to assess whether human rights are effectively respected, we register with grave concern a worldwide rise in acts of intolerance and violence against members of minorities, and attacks against communities of any religion and belief in different Continents. They are grave human rights violations, and a major threat to peace and stability.

These challenges, however, can be turned into opportunities. In a world increasingly intertwined and globalized, societies that succeed in positively integrating minorities — with their cultural, social and economic contributions — can take advantage and improve their performance, while those that pursue exclusion along ethnic, religious or cultural lines are exposed to internal conflicts and are likely to decline.

Today, our countries are becoming truly multicultural, with important components of our societies made of immigrants: in Italy, they are

approximately 8% of the population. Italians are realizing that immigrants are not a burden but an added value, including from an economic point of view.

Education to dialogue and mutual respect is vital to dispel stereotypes and mistrust, and to foster a culture of tolerance.

Italy is reaching a turning point in this respect. For the first time in our history, a Ministry of Cooperation and Integration has been established in 2011. A National Strategy for Inclusion of Roma and Sinti Communities, providing for enhanced access to schools, professional training, health services and housing, has been adopted. An "Observatory on freedom of religion has been created in Rome. The National Office against Racial Discrimination is intensifying programs and activities to monitor and prevent episodes of racial discrimination.

We look forward to discussions in this Forum and we are confident that the recommendations presented by the Independent Expert will strengthen our common resolve to protect the rights of minorities, and to promote dialogue and mutual understanding as the most effective antidote against intolerance and sectarian violence.

Thank you, Madame President.