

Human Rights Council

Forum on Minority Issues

Fifth Session

Implementing the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities: Identifying positive practices and opportunities

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Intervention presented by:

Mr. Issa Hamad Al-Hewetat (Jordan), Samer Masouh (Syria), Noman Qaid Al-Hudhaifi (Yemen)

OHCHR Minority Fellows

Ms. President,

Ms. independent expert on Minority issues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to intervene on behalf of the many young men and women defending human rights on the topic of education in regards to persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

In the present day, education has become an urgent need for a dignified and safe life, in addition education [has become] a lifelong right for all. Education is no longer confined to a single social class. If successful and effective governments rely on successful and balanced educational strategies, they stand at the same distance from all their citizens and inhabitants.

With the advent of the year 2015, minorities are expected to constitute a third of the world population, making them a human force, which represent national assets - technicians, scientist, builders of the future,- and a strong resource for building the societies, in which they live.

The young men and women defending minority rights long for the world governments to keep hope alive by putting in place the sincere educational strategies stemming from human conscience, which were outlined by the UN Declaration on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities of 1992 and whose anniversary, 20 years after its declaration, we celebrate today.

The declaration of the United Nations regarding minorities stipulated in its second article the right to enjoy [their] own culture and language, and the right to effectively participate in the national culture as well. Further, in the third article it affirmed the human rights and the basic freedoms, while the fourth article affirmed the right to develop [their] culture, language, religion, traditions and customs as well as the right to

learn [their] mother tongue, the right to know the minority's history, and the opportunities to know the society as a whole, and the right to participate in progress.

Reflecting on its spirit, how do we explain the lack of equality for young men and women belonging to minorities in regards to opportunities for education in their countries and the obstacles put in the way of their progress? How do we explain the suffering of girls and women in attaining equal opportunities in education and the high illiteracy rate among them? How can we eliminate the violence, exclusion and discrimination, which sons and daughters of minorities face among study colleagues as it is the case, for example, with the Al-Akhdam in Yemen and the Haratines in Mauritania, and so on? How can schools be an attractive force for empty stomachs?

As education has become one of the foundations of modern life, it teaches respect for minority rights as they are considered citizens equal in all rights in regards to civil society and its organizations.

In fact, we can take advantage of the experiences of a few countries, in which most citizens live in an accepted and lasting harmony with a certain minority or more. Perhaps Jordan is the best example regarding the right to education. The eight minorities [living] in it were granted many of the rights endorsed by the international community and called for by the United Nations' declaration on minority rights. This, realistically and concretely, embodies the right of the minorities to have and enjoy [their] culture, as well as the freedom to establish schools and houses of worship, to enjoy the culture and the language specific to the minorities, and to establish educational and cultural institutions and organizations.

Based on what young men and women belonging to minorities report seeing, all countries should translate the articles of the UN declaration on minorities in a genuine and tangible way, and on a large scale in the following manner:

1. Call on governments to put human rights [as a topic] among study activities and programs and to introduce educational topics to address psychological conditions of students belonging to minorities and breaking the psychological barrier between them and their peers at school.
2. Call on governments to cooperate with civil society with the aim to take possible steps to build connections to the minorities as a reference and source for organizing awareness campaigns on human rights and inform them in their own language and culture.

3. We recommend to the governments to act to grant enough space for persons belonging to minorities to learn their mother tongue, train who wishes and talk to each other in it.
4. Urge the governments to provide (personal) identity documents to the sons of minorities in order to enroll in schools, so that [they] are not precluded from attaining education.
5. Call on governments to cooperate with international and regional institutions and organizations to insert motivational programs to support and encourage the sons, girls and women of the minorities to access education.
6. Urge the government to make education for citizens, including minorities, and inhabitants free for the first 12 grades of education. This means that the basic and secondary education alike are free for all students living in the countries.
7. Urge the government to allocate part of its budget to support educational institutions in regards to minorities.
8. Call on governments and national institutions to cooperate with the civil society to publish the UN declaration on minority rights on a large scale through different media and educational means.
9. Urge the governments and the civil society organizations to establish centers for illiteracy and the education of elders, especially in marginalized and remote areas.

Thank you for listening