

Mr Melakou Tegegn, presented on “Minorities and the African context” on Item V

Thank you Madam Chair.

In the coming five minutes there are three segments I will touch upon will be three points. To start with, I think the major problem in Africa as far as the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Minorities is basically lack of information. A great many people in Africa are not aware of the existence of the Declaration, let alone conduct advocacy or lobby on it. And this is basically most institutions of the ideological set of parts like the media, universities and other institutions who are in the business of information and knowledge production. They are not sensitive enough to minority rights issues. So as such, they don't take the initiative to inform the public on the very existence of the Declaration. There are also structural problems asserted with this. Most media houses are controlled by governments and are not intrusted in making society aware of the Declaration. Private media houses are not sensitive enough on minority rights, and this tell us how the dominant discourse on development as well as democratisation and so on still prevails in many countries on the continent.

Non state actors are also weak and - with a few exceptions of a few right-based organisations— are not still sensitive enough to the rights of minorities. They are very much bogged on by issues on democratisation and human rights and so on. So this is the first problem.

The second problem is the orientation of governments on the continent. There is a tendency – or actually this is an established fact – that equating social development with modernisation, therefore the livelihood systems of most minority communities is traditional which is considered as backward. This is a very dominant attitude and it holds to not only minorities in general but also specifically to indigenous populations. The traditional livelihood systems of minorities is basically incompatible with the erosions of the market economy, therefore the natural resources in their custody are targeted for use by the market. This is a very serious strategic problem.

Governments remain to be repositories of foreign investment that target the natural resources of minority communities. This is another serious problem that prevails in the continent.

Prevalence of conservative notions about sexual minorities are almost a national consensus in some countries. Both among governments and civil societies at large. It's one big problem. Therefore, the more silence about minority rights, the better for the marketization of natural resources under minority communities. This is a structural problem.

Now, when we come to strategy, especially those involved in advocacy for human rights, minority rights and social change the biggest problem is the weakness of civil society, and a lack of accountability by governments. That goes back to the fundamental question in Africa which is a lack of freedom and democracy, which has greatly weakened the emergence of civil societies in the continent. Therefore, that's why we have a very weak state of advocacy when it comes to minority rights. Most human rights organisations are not free to operate fully as a result.

Now at the end we have an absence of civil society in the continent. Therefore, lack the freedom and space to advocate for minority rights, and make society aware of minority issues. These I presume are the structural and conjunctional problems and challenges that face the advocates of minority

rights in the continent as far as the implementation of the Declaration on rights of minorities concerned.

Thank you very much.