

Thank you Madam Chairperson, we are very grateful to have the opportunity to address the forum and wish to express our appreciation for all the work leading towards the UN minorities declaration adopted by all UN member states in 1992. We also wish to thank the forum for providing opportunities to discuss issues, best practices, challenges and future courses of action for protecting and promoting minorities worldwide.

Celebrating 20 years of minorities declaration we can applaud the initiatives taken by the Indian government for the welfare of religious minorities. Prime Minister's new 15 point programme the multi-sectoral development programme in minority concentrated districts, launch of scholarship for minority students and the minority commission are a few landmarks in ensuring the welfare of minority communities in India. However we wish to express our deepest concern that religious minorities in India especially Dalit Christians are deprived of their fundamental rights of equality and cannot benefit from affirmative action in employment and education. Due to the limitations within the presidential scheduled castes order of 1950 the original text of the third paragraph reads, notwithstanding anything contained in paragraph 2, no person that professes a religion than Hindu shall be deemed to be a member of the scheduled castes. This paragraph was changed in 1956 by Parliament to Hindu or Sikh, and again in May 1990, it was changed by the Parliament to Hindu or Sikh or Buddhist, thus Dalit who convert to Christianity or Islam effectively lose the constitutional safeguards given to scheduled castes of three of the religions, which increases their vulnerability. This constitutes a grave challenge to the effective implementation of rights enshrined in the UN minorities declaration. Dalit is a Dalit whether he or she is a Hindu, or a Muslim or a Buddhist, or a Christian.

Dalits suffer on segregation, oppression and unjust discrimination, moreover Dalit Christians who make up 20 million of the 25 million strong Christian population in India are also discriminated against because of their religion, both by other Christians and by the wider society. Conversion into new faith doesn't mean that Dalit Christian no longer live with the stigma of untouchability and caste discrimination. Hence we recommend the Indian government to withdraw discriminatory paragraph 3 from the 1950 presidential scheduled castes order and extend scheduled caste status to Dalit Christians and all other Dalit communities so that all Dalits can benefit from affirmative actions.

Thank you Madam Chairperson.