

Norway's statement on Item II

Thank you Madam Chair.

We are confident that the Minority Declaration has been an important contribution to the protection of minority rights and in this sense the development of sustainable democracy. However, as the independent expert stated in her report to the General Assembly: in all regions significant challenges remain for minority communities – and I would like to refer here in this connection also to what the Secretary General said about minorities by being particularly vulnerable in times of societal change. In other words, we still have important work to do to achieve the goals of the Declaration which is why the focus is on implementation at the Forum is very welcome.

We would like to use this opportunity to thank the independent expert for her most recent report to the General Assembly. We are indeed impressed by the broad range of activities undertaken by her since assuming her functions. We should add, that Norway appreciates the focus put on multiple forms of discrimination, not least the situation of women and girls emanating from their status of women and girls and members of a minority. This may make minority women and girls particularly vulnerable to discrimination. We also know that sexual minorities are discriminated within minorities and these are challenges we have to deal with.

Madam President, we welcome the increased focus by the independent expert on the situation for minorities of religion and belief. This corresponds with an increased focus on this area also in our country. The fact that there are 400 recommendations concerning religious freedom and the rights of religious minorities under the UPR abundantly demonstrates the focus on the rights and security of religious minorities.

Religious minorities, whether Muslims, Jews, Christians, Bahai's, or others are under immense pressure in various regions of the world. So are Humanists and non-believers. We all have a job to do at the national level by strengthening the protection of religious minorities through the rule of law, and at the international level through dialogue and multilateral mechanisms such as the UPR and this Forum. We must hold governments accountable, and support civil society efforts to promote fundamental freedoms and human rights. The legitimacy of any government depends on its ability and willingness to uphold the rights of all citizens irrespective of ethnicity, religion or language.

Thank you Madam Chair.