

Intervention presented by: Iurie Caldarari and Kandya Gisella Obezo Casseres 2012 OHCHR Minorities Fellowship Programme

Mme Chairperson, Mme Independent Expert, Distinguished delegates and colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we mark the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. This anniversary offers an important opportunity for young minority rights advocates to share their views on existing practices and raise awareness on the implementation of the Declaration.

Article 2 of the Declaration states that persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in economic and public life. Furthermore, the Declaration highlights in its Article 4 that States should consider appropriate measures so that persons belonging to minorities may participate fully in the economic progress and development in their country.

Nevertheless, when analysing the implementation of the Declaration, the Independent Expert on minority issues notes with concern, that in spite of existing legal standards "some disadvantaged minority groups in all regions continue to face high and disproportionate levels of poverty and face discrimination and marginalization that impacts on their rights and opportunities in all fields of life, including participation in economic life."

Minorities are often the poorest of the poor and cannot participate in economic life on an equal footing with the majorities. This is not limited to a specific region or minority, but can be found all over the world, from the Roma in Europe to Afro-descendants in Latin America, groups on which we will focus.

The European Commission in its April 2011 Communication stated that many Roma face discrimination and social exclusion, living in marginalised and very poor socio-economic conditions. A survey conducted in the 11 EU Member States shows that the socio-economic situation of the Roma is worse, on average, than the situation of the non-Roma living in close proximity. For instance only one out of 10 Roma aged between 20 to 64 is reported as being in paid employment.

Racism and structural discrimination also have a significant impact on the lives of people of African descent and their opportunities. People of African descent who represent between 20 and 30% of the population of Latin America, continue to experience high levels of poverty, social exclusion and discrimination. According to research conducted by UNDP, Afro-Latinos have access

limited to participation in economic life. For example, women and young people are concentrated in low-paid occupations, such as unskilled and domestic work. In addition, they often work under conditions of informality, such as stationary traders, employees in irregular situations or simply unemployed.

In most countries of the region, as reported by the independent expert on minorities, Gay McDougall, in his visit to Colombia in 2010, the legacy of slavery continues to be manifest in the social and economic marginalization faced by members of the Afro-descendant population.

And despite the special measures that some countries have taken, we are still particularly vulnerable to the violation of our human rights, causing high levels of exclusion in terms of access to and enjoyment of socio-economic and development rights.

Therefore, to address the multiple historical and structural reasons for exclusion that

affect the Afro-descendant population is not easy. As a young Afro-Colombian, who has had to face 4 different forms of discrimination for being black, poor, woman and young, I have decided to play an active role to try to create more awareness about the importance of our rights.

As young activists, we believe that it is necessary to invest much more in education, and by this we mean quality education. We need to be more empowered to have the capacity to work effectively in the implementation of the Declaration on minorities.

Now is the time to really understand and respond to needs, priorities and aspirations of those who have been marginalized and do not have access to the economic opportunities available to other citizens.

In that sense, the twentieth anniversary of the UN Declaration on Minorities brings a valuable opportunity to take stock of what has been done. This is how we are convinced that the effective participation of young people from minorities is fundamental in the fight against inequality, the reduction of poverty and the fight against exclusion. We have to listen to those who have historically been marginalized and promote their voices in decision-making.

We believe that our effective participation in economic life deserves greater attention and we suggest that it be strengthened through the following recommendations: 1. We urge all interested parties to invest more in the training of young people from minorities and women, through the activation and financing of regional networks and innovative initiatives to promote economic participation.

2. We emphasize the need for governments to prioritize the development of sustainable and long-term work plans to improve access to micro-credit and support small and medium-sized enterprises run by people of African descent and Roma.

3. We strongly recommend that governments guarantee the conditions for a lasting and effective participation of people of African descent and Roma in economic life, which implies commitments of cooperation and equality between minorities and majorities.

4. We urge all forum participants to contribute to raising awareness of the Declaration of minorities through the active use of social networks and the design of outreach programs.

Thank you.