

## **6th session of the Forum on Minority Issues**

### **II. Legal framework and key concepts**

Mr Brian J. Grim, presenting on “The connection between government policies and social hostilities toward minorities” on Item II

Thank you.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen and colleagues, a rising tide on restrictions to religion has swept the globe in the past years. Today 40 percent of countries have high or very high restrictions from governments or from actions of groups in society. This is up significantly from just five years ago when just 29 percent of countries had high or very high restrictions on countries or religions. The branch of these restrictions are felt most keenly by religious minorities, attention to these statistics has been given by various organisations, including this past week at the Religions for Peace Night World Congress in Vienna, and at this year’s United Nations’ Alliance of Civilizations Meeting in Vienna, which made the rising tide of restrictions one of its key points of discussions. I will come back to the United Nations’ Alliance of Civilizations at the end of my comments. In particular, 53 percent of countries in the world today have governments that have either displayed violence towards religious minority groups or did not intervened in cases when there were discrimination or abuses to religious minorities. There are very significant patterns in this data: first, and most importantly, when governments have high overall restrictions on religious freedom, minorities groups face even more restrictions. This includes when governments favour one religion above all others, setting minorities at a disadvantage. When they limit preaching, religious literature, religious broadcasting, including the internet, religious conversion, and when constitutions and law are ambiguous or do not provide adequate protection for religious freedom. In these situations, minorities are at risk at four times the level as in countries where religious freedom is protected. All religions face these problems: Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Bahais, every major religious group in the world is facing some problems. But there are patterns that different religious groups face, for instance, Muslims minorities face problems in 92 percent of Muslim majority countries, compared with 52 percent of non-Muslim majority countries. On the opposite, Christians minorities face in 84 percent of countries where they are a minority compared with 63 percent of countries where Christians are the majority. The abuse of religious minorities happens in every region in the world, but is most markedly pronounced in the Middle-East and North Africa, where they face problems in the 92 percent of cases, followed by Asia Pacifica with 76 percent of countries, Sub-Saharan African in 70 percent of countries, Europe in 51 percent of countries, and in the Americas, in more than a quarter of all the countries.

One the positive side, we find in the data that when religious freedom is guaranteed and restrictions are low, religious minorities fear much better. We also find many social benefits in countries where there is high religious freedom, for instance, there is greater capacity for global competition in countries with religious freedom than in countries with religious freedom than there is in countries where religious

freedoms are denied. There is higher economic and intellectual innovation in countries guarding religious freedom.

And coming back to the point I raised at the beginning, perhaps, one of the most underutilised mechanisms in addressing issues for religious minorities is the UN Global Compact. This mechanism allows for issues of religious freedom to be addressed by corporations and businesses of this world. One example of this, is every year at the UN Alliance for Civilization meeting, BMW group promotes a competition for interfaith innovation and interfaith and dialogue, and gives awards for this type of work. And I have seen a number of corporations showing increased interest in addressing these issues. I think this is a fruitful area for the discussion.

Thank you