

Madame Chair

The Forum on minority issues provides an important occasion for exchange among a wide range of persons and institutions concerned about minority rights protection. In this year's forum the issue of religious minorities is addressed and I would like to draw the attention to the good practice and experience gained in Norway in promoting the right to effective participation and consultations with indigenous peoples in Norway, the Sami people, and the possibilities for using this experience when addressing issues which concern decision-making affecting the rights of religious minorities.

Today a public debate on the circumcision of boys is on-going in Norway. Circumcision is practiced by different religious minority communities in Norway. Freedom of religion or belief, minority rights and the rights of the child are some of the human rights brought into the debate. The right of freedom of religion or belief is entrenched in the Constitution of Norway and the constitution will be revised in order to include a catalogue of human rights in which one article should address the respect of the individuals' cultural identity, which in the commentary to the proposal for revision should include the rights of minority persons not to be denied to enjoy their own culture according to article 27 of the ICCPR.

I would like to highlight the possibility of the application of the principle of free prior and informed consent in relation to decision-making which affects the culture and religious practice of religious minorities, such as the circumcision of boys. The Human Rights Committee has interpreted Article 27 of the ICCPR to require that in relation to "measures which **substantially compromise or interfere with the culturally significant** economic activities of a minority or indigenous community" "participation in the decision-making process must be **effective**, which **requires not mere consultation but the free, prior and informed consent of the members of the community.**" (*Angela Poma Roma v. Peru*, para, 7.6.)The question is whether this criterion also could be applicable to the processes which could aim at the limitations of the rights of freedom of religion or belief of religious minorities in accordance with Article 18 ICCPR, such as the regulation of the practice of circumcision of boys according to religious and cultural precepts.

In such process the interfaith dialogue and consultations among different religious minorities is of greatest importance to create a climate of trust and cooperation in order to make it possible to achieve a result which respects the different cultural and religious values of the communities. The State authorities should ensure that acceptable and effective institutional and procedural arrangements are in place. In the case of the Sami people in Norway, the Sameting, the Sami parliament a public consultative body of the Sami people in Norway.

Thank you, Madame Chair for the opportunity to present at this Forum,