



MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN
AFFAIRS OF FINLAND

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6th session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues

Item 3: Protection of the existence of and prevention of violence against religious minorities

Statement by the Delegation of Finland Geneva, 26 November 2013

Madam Chairperson,

According to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, States are required to protect the existence and religious identity of these persons. **The** Declaration provides a larger framework for protection and a source of inspiration for adopting appropriate legislative and other measures to achieve these ends.

Ensuring the rights of persons belonging to religious minorities acknowledges the dignity and equality of all individuals. Furthermore, it furthers participatory development, and thus contributes to the lessening of tensions among groups and individuals. These factors are also a major determinant of stability and peace.

With this in mind we would like to address a draft recommendation number 52 regarding conflict situations. The realization of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, including the right to freedom of religion, can play a great role in resolving conflicts, but also in predicting and preventing them.

Finland takes an active part in international civilian crisis management in conflict areas with a view to promoting transition to democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, good governance and the consolidation of effective civil society structures.

This year the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland funded a publication by the Finnish Ecumenical Council on "Religious Freedom and Foreign Policy — Recommendations for Finland", which seeks to illuminate why freedom of religion cannot be detached from other human rights, and what may occur if religious freedom is not actively promoted and maintained. The report identifies Finnish foreign policy priorities that support freedom of religion and offers recommendations on policy measures and instruments that are needed to safeguard its existence.

The report identifies the inclusion of a religious dimension as an integral part of comprehensive crisis management from preparation and implementation to monitoring activities. As part of crisis management and conflict prevention, it is necessary to create practical arbitration solutions that are locally based and can be integrated into the currently dominant realities. Crisis management operations must incorporate, *inter alia*, knowledge of the religious terrain of the target country and show respect for it when conducting operations, note what connections religion may have to politics and identify the causes of conflict that have religious overtones, but in reality have nothing to do with religion. Human rights violations committed in the name of religion must be prevented, and incidents where the nature of conflict is concealed under a religious guise must be identified.

Thank you.