

Address of Mexico during the Forum on Minority Issues

Sixth Session

Geneva, 26-27 November 2013

Thank you Ms Chair,

Mexico congratulates you on your appointment as Chair of the Forum, and thanks the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the independent expert on minorities, and you for organising the Sixth Session of the Forum on Minority Issues that on this occasion focuses on the topic ‘Beyond freedom of religion or belief: guaranteeing the right of religious minorities’.

Madame President,

For 200 years, Mexico has recognised the freedom of worship. Despite this fact, between 1926 and 1929 we experienced a religious war known as Cristiada or The Cristero War. During this confrontation between the government and Catholics, nearly 250 thousand people lost their lives, which led to the lack of legal recognition of the Catholic Church or any other religious congregation during nearly all of the 20th century. Only in 1992, as a consequence of the promulgation of the Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship and their Regulation, was the existence of different religious groups and congregations recognised throughout the country.

Mexico has ratified the principal international instruments guaranteeing the protection of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. Among them the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in its Article 27, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in its Article 30. Moreover, we endorsed the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

Mexico is a secular State with a clear separation between religious associations and the state. The State guarantees every individual the right to have or to adopt any religious belief they please, and to practice, individually or collectively, acts of worship or suitable rites. Equally, the liberty to change religion or not to profess any belief is guaranteed. Moreover, the Constitution guarantees that no one shall be subject to discrimination, coercion or hostility because of their religious beliefs.

Article 24 of the Political Constitution of Mexico states that each individual is free in professing a chosen religious belief, and to participate in its respective ceremonies, services and acts of worship, provided they do not constitute a crime or an offence against the law. In order to harmonise our legislation with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the above mentioned Article was reformed on 19 of July. It is now guaranteed to participate, individually or collectively, in public as well as in private, in ceremonies, services and acts of worship unless it constitutes an offence

punishable by law. Moreover, it is ensured that no one can take advantage of public acts of expression of this freedom to pursue political goals, promote proselytism or political propaganda.

In 1992, the Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship and its Regulation was established, which is available in the distinct languages of our indigenous groups. The aforementioned Law was reformed in 2006 and Article 8 was added stating that religious associations must 'at all times respect cults and doctrines other than their own, as well as foster dialogue, tolerance and coexistence between diverse religions and faiths with a country-wide presence.'

At the institutional level, the Secretary of Governance is in charge of paying appropriate attention to religious groups and associations and which guarantees the fundamental right to the freedom of religion.

During the last decade, we observed proliferation of different religious groups, as evidenced in the General Population and Housing Census from the year 2000.

Currently, 7550 religious associations are registered, 88% of the population declares the Roman Catholic confession, whereas the remaining part belongs to different Christian, Protestant and Para-protestant confessions and other religions. Religious diversity in Mexico translates to the existence of the following religious groups found in the national territory: the majority of the followers of Luz del Mundo (The Light of the World) are in the central-western part, Muslims live in the south, Jews and Buddhists in the central regions in addition to having numerous beliefs of ethnic origin or indigenous such as the Mennonites in the north of the national territory and the Chamulas in the south, just to cite a few.

This institutional capacity is crucial to resolve religious tensions occurring mainly within the rural communities still subject to a system of traditions and customs. Given this, we count on a unit that undertakes coordinated actions with state and municipal authorities to know the facts and favor discussion and working groups with the objective of resolving issues.

Our State gives a positive assessment to the cross-sectoral approach of the Forum on Minority Issues, benefiting from the experience of different working groups, rapporteurs and entities within the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, its bodies and mechanisms, and to the creation of a participation space for diverse religious groups, women and youth. Mexico believes it is necessary to favour the implementation of common actions with other UN agencies concerned with this topic, such as the UNESCO Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue. In order to achieve that, it is essential to strengthen the relationship with the aforementioned institution, with UNICEF and the World Trade Organisation, following the Convention 111 and 29.

Finally, it is important to conduct a comprehensive analysis on the drivers of tensions and conflicts with religious motives in different countries worldwide, knowing that frequently they are based on political, economic or social reasons, religious division being only one of the symptoms.

Thank you very much for your attention.