

Minority Forum 6st Session 26 -27 November, 2013. Norwegian Statement

Madam Chair

First of all, Norway would like to thank the organizers for making rights of religious minorities the focus area of the Minority Forum's sixth session. No doubt, these are minorities that are put under tremendous pressure in times of crisis and conflict.

Second, the two human rights of women's rights, and freedom of religion or belief, - are sometimes perceived as standing in general opposition to one another. That is why this year's report_ to the General Assembly of the special rapporteur on the freedom of religion or belief was so important.

The Special Rapporteur underlines the positive inter-relatedness of freedom of religion or belief and gender equality. This is a perspective we fully endorse.

Third, it cannot be repeated too often; Freedom of religion or belief does not protect religions per se against criticism but rather aims at the empowerment of human beings, as individuals and in community with others.

Fourth, In May, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a set of guidelines on the protection and promotion of the rights and freedoms of persons belonging to religious minorities, which we find highly useful in considering what to do and what not to do. In launching the publication, my Foreign Minister said:

"The rights of religious minorities follow from key treaties and are a vital factor for democracy. The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is closely related to other human rights, such as freedom of expression, association and assembly. Thus respect for human rights implies that all persons belonging to religious minorities are able to practice their religion freely and are protected against hate crime, abuse and persecution."

Finally, we welcome the draft recommendations presented to us and we are indeed looking forward to the discussion at the Forum. *Thank you!*