

SIXTH FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES
DECLARATION OF THE DELEGATION OF PARAGUAY
Geneva, 26-27 November 2013

Mr President,

The Delegation of Paraguay appreciates the decision to focus the Sixth Session of this Forum on the issues affecting religious minorities.

Regarding the fact that one of the goals of the Forum is to identify the positive measures adopted in order to foster the exercise of individual and collective rights of the minorities, among them appropriate legislation against discrimination, I would like to refer to certain issues mentioned by The Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief, Mr Heiner Bielefeld, in the address concerning his visit to my country.

All measures taken by the State of Paraguay stem from Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the American Convention of Human Rights. Moreover, I would like to recall that Paraguay has ratified ten International Treaties of Human Rights, among them the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, that altogether constitute a frame for any political action of the State.

It is in this regard that the Constitution of Paraguay fully recognises the freedom of religion and belief, as indicated in the very first Article stating that, 'The Republic of Paraguay adopts for its government a representative, participative and pluralistic democracy, founded on the recognition of human dignity.' Moreover, in Article 24 the Magna Carta declares that 'No religious faith will have official character and no one may be interfered with, questioned, or forced to give testimony by reason of their beliefs or of their ideology.' As stated, Paraguay cannot be identified with one religion to the detriment of others, clearly manifesting the principle of secularism and creating the necessary conditions for each individual to freely profess their faith or beliefs.

In order to reinforce the secular character of the State, public education institutions have suspended religion as a subject, favouring the teaching of religious traditions instead of one religion in particular. Such an approach encourages the equality of treatment of all people practicing the 470 religions active in the country. Simultaneously, different religious educational institutions continue to cooperate and share freely their respective confessions and beliefs.

According to the Report of The Special Rapporteur, legal provisions are reflected in reality, that is why Paraguay is referred to as a 'positive example', and government measures addressed to the indigenous peoples are particularly appreciated. As stated by the Rapporteur, initiatives aiming at recovering the cultural, linguistic and spiritual inheritance of the native peoples progress.

Lastly, on behalf of the whole delegation, I would like to express our interest in contributing to the discussions held during this session.