

6<sup>th</sup> Forum on Minority Issues

26th-27th November 2013

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

Madame President,

The prerequisite to be able to protect minorities is first of all a *de facto* recognition of their existence, and therefore the recognition of the collective dimension of minorities, whose protection forms an integral part of human rights.

Whilst a number of states don't recognise the existence of minorities in their territory, as granted by article 27 of the Covenant on Civil and Political rights, the first article of the 1992 Declaration recalls that States are obliged to protect minorities and therefore implicitly confirms that minorities exist worldwide.

This first article also lays down that States should protect the national, ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic identity of those belonging to minority groups. Although the concept of identity has been much debated and continues to be difficult to be defined, it is nevertheless important to agree on the fact that the principles of self-determination should apply in all circumstances. It is thus up to each individual to decide if he or she belongs to a particular religious minority or not.

Mrs Chair,

The protection of those belonging to minority groups is essential and reveals the State's responsibility to protect its entire population. As the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide said this morning, the protection of minorities, including religious minorities, contributes effectively to preventing violence and international crimes, as there is a clear link between protecting their rights and establishing national, regional and international peace and stability. Recommendations 49 and 52 drafted by the Independent Expert respond to this issue and therefore receive full support from Switzerland.

Finally, Mrs chairperson,

States should take all preventive measures to fight against incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence against people belonging to religious minorities. Nevertheless, Switzerland believes that these measures should comply with article 20 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and that the freedom of expression should be guaranteed for all individuals, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Thank you