

## Directory for Savoy Affairs

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all we would like to thank all UN and UNPO members for giving us the chance to take the floor.

We come here today before this assembly to inform the international community of the obstinacy of the French State in suppressing the inalienable rights of the Savoy minority. By virtue of its origin and unique history, the Savoy people have never ceased to exist. They are therefore entitled to minority rights, as established and defended by the UN.

The Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to Ethnic or National, Religious and Linguistic minorities is clearly applies to us, because the Savoy people fully falls under this definition. The Declaration enables us to work for the defense of the rights that we are reclaiming but that the French authorities refuse us.

It is article 1 that seems to us the most fundamental because it states that *“States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity.”*

Despite all the strength the declaration gives to this provision, the French State keeps breaching this principle and victimises us with its repeated violations.

All too often the members of our community are being abused by the French law which not only unduly governs over our minority but is also applied in violation of its own rules and procedures. The rules set forth by French lawmakers are objectively hostile and are an attack on our legitimate and legal actions; this shows how little respect is shown to our rights.

Article 2.4 of the Declaration states that *“Persons belonging to minorities have the right to establish and maintain their own associations.”*

In 2014 we created the Directory for Savoy Affairs (DAS). This is an association under the law of 1901 that aims at the *“promotion and defense of the interests of the Savoy on all its territory as delimited by the border signs presenting the Savoy Cross [...]; issuing documents that enable the recognition of the existence of the Savoy people (identity cards, driving licences, passports, marriage, death or birth certificates); establishing a representation before international authorities [...], embassies, and/or any other internationally recognised bodies.”*

The French authorities recognised the association and conceded its right to activity through the ratification of its statutes on 31 August 2014, when they were published in the Official Journal of the French Republic. It is worth noting that our association never exceeded its rights as defined by the UN Declaration, and this way we were able to raise awareness and promote the recognition of the Savoy people.

In spite of this, the prefect of the Upper Savoy department – an authority that is directly under the responsibility of the French Prime Minister – started a court procedure against us on 25 September 2014. He is suing our Association on the ground that its statutes would be contrary to the constitutional

principle of indivisibility of the Republic, and to the inviolability of its borders according to international law. Indeed, in its current wording, the French Constitution forbids the recognition of the Savoy people.

The French State uses all its legislative fire power to demand the dissolution of our association, established by and for the Savoy people in order to represent them. This constitutes a violation of Article 2.4 of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to Minorities by France. Thus, authorities are questioning the right to establish and manage our own associations, and will possibly withdraw this right from us.

With the removal of DAS from French law we are worried that French authorities might soon take even more restrictive measures as they fear our growing recognition in international bodies. For instance the police might become more watchful regarding the rights we exercise. Although this is not unprecedented and sentences of imprisonment were imposed often on minor grounds and offences (regulatory non-compliance of license plates), this unjustifiable obstinacy is harmful towards our members, our relatives, and our community.

How long will we have to endure oppression by the French State? How long until lawmakers recognise our existence and our legal personality?