

Minority Rights Group International

Agenda item 3: Minorities and the exercise of police powers.

Mr. Chairperson, distinguished delegates:

Minority victims of crimes face many obstacles when approaching the police.

Police killings of African-American men and campaigns such as #BlackLivesMatter have shone a spotlight on discriminatory attitudes among US law enforcement personnel. African-American men are 21 times more likely to be killed by police in the United States than their non-Latino white counterparts. Whenever criminal proceedings against the officers involved are closed (as happened in the cases of Michael Brown and Eric Garner), this leads to severe doubts among African-American victims of crimes that their own cases will ever be treated seriously.

The US government must urgently do more to tackle these issues, especially given the International Decade on Persons of African Descent.

Police officers may also lack the skills and training to carry out their investigations appropriately, especially when the victim is a minority woman or girl. Attitudes of stigma – among police, within the minority community or even the family – may indeed prevent minority women victims from ever filing a complaint.

Minority victims of crimes may also fear that their complaints may lead to negative repercussions. Meskhetian Turks in Russia who were victims of ethnically motivated attacks did not report these instances to the police – due to fear of reprisals. Such hesitancy becomes worse when police officers have been themselves implicated in hate crimes, for instance in Greece.

Police involvement in violence against minorities occurs against a backdrop of other forms of harassment, including ethnic profiling. Data on “stop and frisk” by the New York Police Department shows that 54 per cent of those stopped by police officers were African-American despite making up just 25.5 per cent of the city’s population. Nearly 9 out of 10 of those targetted were innocent, also confirmed by the NYPD’s own reports.

But this is a worldwide pattern – Roma in Europe, Dalits in India, Christians in Pakistan have reported that they face harassment from the very institutions which should be protecting them.

A critical step to address these issues is the setting up of readily accessible, effective and independent police complaints procedures. MRG welcomes therefore recommendation no. 23; we would however expand it beyond issues concerning unlawful force, as police harassment and discrimination of minority communities may also take other forms.