

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

**Forum on Minority Issues
Geneva, 28-29 November 2019**

**SESSION I
28 November 2019 10:00 – 13:00**

Human rights and minority language education

Intervention of the Catalan National Assembly (Civil Society Organization)

Thank you, Mr. Moderator,

My name is Eva Riera, and I speak on behalf of the Catalan National Assembly, the grass-roots organization defending the right to self-determination of the Catalan people.

Since 1992, teaching in Catalan became the educational model throughout Catalonia. An education system that is based on an immersion program that fixes Catalan as the vehicular language for all subjects taught, except for Spanish and English.

So that schools could have the tools they needed, the Government of Catalonia promoted all legal and budgetary measures necessary so that this could be made effective and real.

It is a model capable of bringing pupils together, regardless of the language they speak at home, preparing them to be competent in the world of work, allowing equality of opportunity, without any kind of exclusion.

No one is marginalised due to language issues.

We can say right now that we have the resources and the know-how to run our educational system in Catalan successfully. But then, where is the problem? Why are we speaking here?

Because, while the level of competence in Catalan has reached very high values, our concern today is about the divergence between the value of competence and the social use of the language.

From our point of view, even having enough funds and implementing excellent educational programs in minority language education, the main point should be to respect human rights regarding the use of minority languages, including in life outside school.

We would like to mention two aspects which are now central to the health of Catalan and which, in our opinion, have influence on the prospects for increasing social use. Both aspects pose problems to the extent that they come into conflict with the dominant state.

The first concerns the fact that there is no pact of non-aggression by the dominant state against the minority in terms of education. This leads to very unstable school constructs, in which the efforts of the agents are exposed to constant attacks and the system is often facing court disputes and wasting resources.

There is no stable working framework, because the legislation is constantly being questioned and changed. The educational model is often a topic in election campaigns - but not in a constructive way, and fake news are spread. This prevents somewhat hesitant non-Catalan-speaking families from developing confidence in the school system and doesn't contribute to expand the social use of Catalan in normal life outside the educational context.

The second aspect concerns the fact that the best education in the minority language is useless if the language cannot be used in every area of life. As a rule, there are asymmetric power relationships between the speakers and in which the dominant state is also involved as one of the agents. An important example of this is the judiciary. It constitutes a clear violation of human rights if the defendant is denied the use of their own language, as it was the case in the trial against the 9 Catalan social and political leaders this year.

And now I come to the end and want to ask: How can the Catalan educational system seriously ensure that Catalan speakers are not only able to speak Catalan but that they

are also able to use Catalan in any social setting? Even the best educational system can't do that. We have to be committed to uphold the dominant states accountable.

1. We propose that dominant states are required to sign freedom pacts concerning linguistic legislation regarding minority languages in education. We need consistency and peace in the educational institutions in order to be able to devote ourselves to the real tasks and challenges of everyday life at school and to achieve success.

2. We propose that countries not only have to implement the linguistic human rights in the educational context, but that also take into account the implementation and use of the minorized languages in society. And if these human rights are not respected, there should be international mechanisms that convince or - if necessary - maybe force these states to do so.

It shouldn't be possible to spend resources, and then limit the actual possibilities of implementation of minorized languages.

And it shouldn't be possible to destroy progress achieved in education in minority languages by disregarding the human rights of linguistic minorities in life outside the school.

The job is far from over, just because the minorized languages are successfully taught.

We invite the Special rapporteur on minority issues to visit Catalonia and assess the situation of the Catalan language in the education system, law enforcement, the judiciary and the public administration.