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Item 3, 25.

Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity. We represent a South African NGO, AfriForum and are here out of concern for the lack of protection of South African languages and mother-language education.

Our Constitution recognises 11 official minority languages. Government professes to treasure this diversity, however this offers little protection in practice.

Political will to promote language rights is lacking. English has become the de facto sole official language, denying many South Africans of access to civil services and leaving them vulnerable to exploitation by people more proficient in English than they are.

Whenever a case goes to court to protect the language rights of non-English-speaking South Africans, judgment is in favour of monolingual English language policies, with arguments of affordability and social cohesion.

The Auditor General finds that our education departments misappropriate funds to the value of millions of Euros, but efforts by for example the Afrikaans community to establish and fund own educational facilities using mother-language are vilified by senior government officials, threatening it with closure. Efforts are made to portray this as racism, but the speakers of Afrikaans belong to all races and the education facilities are inclusive to all.

*Constitutional bodies established to protect these rights are dysfunctional.*

By thus inciting distrust amongst communities the misdeeds of officials are concealed.

For indigenous languages and all South Africans to thrive, we need:

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- Political will to promote and protect all languages;
- Clear legislation and an independent judiciary informed about language rights;
- Independent media; and
- Unhampered civil society initiatives to act as watchdogs.

I believe that these are the needs of minority language groups all over the world.

We therefore ask for your support in applying pressure on the South African government to deliver this and for continued international programmes to raise awareness about language rights and the importance of mother-language education.

We also thank the Special Rapporteur and all involved for organising the regional fora. It provided a wonderful opportunity for learning, participating and networking.