

Mrs. Chair President, thank you,

It's my Honor to address the United Nations 14th session of the Forum on Minority Issues. I'm Ghassen Ayari, former fellow to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and representing the Tunisian NGO, Attalaki for Freedom and Equality.

Mrs. President, Tunisia is always portrayed as a homogeneous country, different from the rest of the Arab-Muslim world. Contrarily, it is a country distinguished by diversity on several levels such as: culture, gastronomy, language, but also religious affiliation affirms this diversity. The Jewish presence in Tunisia for example dates back to over 2000 years, the Christian presence to the 2nd century, and the Baha'i community are celebrating this year their 100 years since its arrival to Tunisia, in addition to sectarian diversity.

The diversity that constitutes the very essence of our country is abandoned and even persecuted, since the components of this very diversity are in total uncertainty in today's political and constitutional scene.

Therefore, state institutions in our country must cooperate with civil society organizations to define the constitutional reforms that need to take place, particularly in the area of individual freedoms. The positive measures which are in the process of being implemented by different associations such as the religious dialogue or the use of the arts for the enhancement of religious pluralism must be encouraged and supported.

We, therefore, recommend the following:

- The Tunisian State should initiate legislative reform programs to ensure the recognition of religious diversity in our constitution.
- Relevant United Nations Agencies and Offices should provide technical support to state institutions as well as to religious minority-representing organizations to ensure that minorities are represented in decision-making processes.

Thank you for your attention..

Ghassen AYARI
Public Relations and Partnership Officer

