

**Statement of the l'APFF and the ADHUM  
at the 14th Forum on Minority Issues  
of the UN Human Rights Council**

Conflict prevention and the protection of the human rights of minorities

*4. Minority rights for effective conflict prevention*

**Geneva, 2-3 December 2021**

Madame Chair,

According to many observers, it is a miracle that the linguistic conflicts in Belgium did not have dramatic consequences, especially in Fourons, where shots were fired several times in the 1980s. Or in Ghent, during violent demonstrations in the 1990s, on the occasion of the Exploration du Monde conferences in French. The flaming extremists, chanting "French-speaking Rats, get the hell out!" had come with ambulances promising to leave the scene when they were filled with victims.

L'Association pour la Promotion de la Francophonie en Flandre (APFF), which is also mandated to represent the Association de Promotion des Droits Humains et des Minorités (ADHUM) considers that action must be taken at four levels to prevent conflicts involving minorities.

**Primay : identification of minorities**

Several human rights actors have insisted in previous Minority Forums on "*the importance of having disaggregated data for the implementation and monitoring of the rights of persons belonging to minorities*".

This would be possible in Belgium if the language component of the decennial census was restored, which has not been authorized since a law of July 1961, under pressure from some 300 Flemish mayors.

Without having such data, it is easy for the Flemish nationalists to plead for the abolition of the linguistic facilities granted to French-speakers, in all the municipalities with special regimes located in the Dutch-speaking region, such as in Renaix, on the pretext that they are not numerous enough.

In the absence of a census, we have interesting data on the French-speaking demographic and socio-linguistic reality of Flanders.

By consulting the annual reports of "Kind & Gezin", an organization of the Flemish Community dedicated to early childhood and families, we observe that in Flanders, the percentage of mothers speaking in French to newborns has increased by 50% over the last fifteen years, rising from 4.2% in 2005 to 6.4% in 2020.

This data is obviously not on the same level as the linguistic census, but it provides a good idea of the vitality of the Francophone minority in the North of the country.

**Secondary: recognition of minorities**

For the Flemish authorities, the Francophones who live in Flanders are not a minority. Flanders thus opposes the opinion of the Venice Commission, which identified the minorities that must be protected in Belgium, including the French-speaking minority in Flanders, in Council of Europe Resolution 1301 of September 26, 2002.

### **Tertiary : protection of minorities**

Flanders does not want to hear about a French-speaking minority on its territory, nor about linguistic discrimination. It systematically opposes any measure that would allow Francophones in Flanders to defend their rights.

Belgium has still not ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, 20 years after signing it. Nor has it ratified Protocol 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights. Belgium has not appointed a competent body to fight linguistic discrimination either. And the Federal Institute for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights (IFDH) cannot receive and examine individual complaints and requests.

Faced with this situation, the French-speaking minority in Flanders is left to fend for itself.

Under pressure from Flanders, Belgium informed the UN that it did not accept Switzerland's recommendation, made during its 3rd Universal Periodic Review (UPR) last May, to "ratify the *Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities*". Nor that of Russia to "*take effective measures to fully realize the cultural and linguistic rights of minorities, in particular the French-speaking minority in Flanders*". Or the recommendations concerning the fight against linguistic discrimination.

### **Quaternary : representation of minorities**

It is not acceptable that the Francophones of Flanders do not enjoy guaranteed parliamentary representation in the Flemish Parliament while the Dutch-speaking minority in Brussels enjoys guaranteed representation in the Brussels regional parliament.

We thank you,

### **For more information**

We direct you to the website (<http://www.francophonie.be/ndf>).

### **About the APFF**

The Association pour la Promotion de la Francophonie en Flandre (APFF) simply wants French, one of the official languages of Belgium, to have its rightful place in Flanders on the same basis as any other language.

The APFF implements this promotion of the Francophonie, in particular by publishing on its website the magazine "Nouvelles de Flandre" (<http://www.francophonie.be/ndf>). In addition to a calendar of activities in French, you can find the addresses of French-speaking resources in Flanders, and articles and information on the French-speaking world in general. A newsletter, the paper version of the magazine, is also published every three months.

Anyone interested in the APFF can become a member. The annual membership fee is 20 EUR for Belgium and 40 EUR for abroad to be paid to the account 210-0433429-85 (IBAN: BE89 2100 4334 2985 - BIC: GEBABEBB) of the APFF. Members and donors receive the magazine "Nouvelles de Flandre" every three months.

### **Association pour la Promotion de la Francophonie en Flandre (APFF)**

Secretariat : Spreeuwenlaan 12, B-8420 De Haan, Belgique  
Telephone : +32(0)59.23.77.01  
Fax : +32(0)59.23.77.02  
Mobile : +32(0)479.35.50.54  
E-mail : [apff@francophonie.be](mailto:apff@francophonie.be)  
Site : <http://www.francophonie.be/ndf>