

Prof. Fiona McConnell, University of Oxford

Statement submitted to 15th session of the Forum on Minority Issues, 1-2 December 2022

On the 30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Minority Rights I'd like to take the opportunity offered by the theme of this year's Forum to 'review and rethink' the position of minority rights at the UN. I want to do so by bringing to the fore the principle of self-determination in relation to minority rights.

Working with colleagues at the Unrepresented Nations and People's Organisation we have analysed statements made by representatives of minority communities at this Forum since its establishment in 2008. We have documented that there is significant demand for self-determination in the context of minority rights. In each of the previous 14 sessions Minority communities have used this Forum to: provide evidence of the denial of self-determination and its consequences; set out their claims to and demands for self-determination; call for self-determination in relation to a wide range of rights, including cultural rights, educational rights, the right to participation in public life, and the right to natural resources; and articulate the benefits the realisation of the right to self-determination brings in terms of conflict prevention, stability and peace-building.

In sum, minority communities are calling for self-determination but the international system does not currently have the structures in place to enable self-determination to be discussed in a meaningful and productive way.

We therefore call on the UN, and its member states to act in protecting and promoting the right to self-determination of minority communities. We recommend that greater consideration to the right to self-determination, both within existing processes and through the establishment of specific mechanisms to consider the right to self-determination in the context of minority communities and minority rights.