



Permanent Mission of Finland, Geneva
Mission Permanente de la Finlande, Genève

Forum on Minority Issues

Fifteenth session, 1-2 December 2022

Rethink: Minority rights defenders and their role in promoting principles of the Declaration Statement by Finland

Chairperson, Distinguished Panelists,

We welcome this timely panel discussion focusing on minority rights defenders.

The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities states that persons belonging to minorities may exercise their rights without any discrimination. After 30 years of the adoption of the Declaration, this principle remains highly relevant. All over the world, states continue to deny human rights of minority rights defenders.

We therefore echo the recommendation of the regional forum of Europe and Central Asia and call on States to end all reprisals, including assassination, defamation, prosecution, or intimidation, against human and minority rights defenders.

As the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues has consistently pointed out, women belonging to minorities face unique challenges and multiple or intersectional discrimination due to their status as both members of minorities and as women or girls. These forms of discrimination make women and girls particularly vulnerable to violations of their rights. We need to consider these challenges to be able to effectively support women belonging to minorities defending minority rights.

Chairperson,

Finland has implemented the principles of the Declaration into action through various legislative, policy and practical measures. Last month we published updated Guidelines of the Finnish Foreign Service entitled *Supporting Human Rights Defenders Together*. These guidelines help government officials both in the capital and in our embassies to increase dialogue with and support to human rights defenders. It is our firm belief that we need to work together across our government as well as with civil society and businesses to ensure that human rights defenders are heard and protected.

*Chairperson, distinguished panelists, how can we better acknowledge the important role of minority rights defenders as **partners to governments** in protecting and promoting human rights?*

Thank you.