



15th Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues

Item 4 – Open Dialogue: Urgent Situations of Minorities

Mr. President,

ADF International welcomes the theme of this year's Forum on Minority Issues.

Every girl has a right to enjoy family life, pursue education, and live their childhood free from harm. However, for an increasing number of girls belonging to religious minorities, this is far from being made a reality. In too many parts of the world their abduction, forced conversion and forced marriage remains disturbingly commonplace and remains largely overlooked, requiring a renewed resolve to reverse this tragic trend.

Although the phenomenon of forced marriage cuts across countries, cultures and communities, the incidence of abduction of young girls and their forced conversion in connection to a forced marriage has been rising dramatically for religious minorities, particularly in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. While the vulnerability of girls belonging to religious minorities is aggravated in situations of conflict or insecurity, underlying these horrific practices are structural discrimination, poverty, lack of access to education and social exclusion experienced by their communities.

In many countries, loopholes in legislation, lack of effective enforcement, and even de facto tolerance when such abuses are committed against girls belonging to faith minority groups, allow perpetrators to enjoy impunity. Under these circumstances, a tragic chain of events plays out time and again. This is manifest in the emotional breakdown, self-harm and extreme anxiety of abducted girls who are placed at a high risk of violence and abuse and heightened by the fact that police reports from victims or their family are ignored or dismissed. Their lawyers are then threatened while governments and courts remain reluctant to bring perpetrators to justice in large part due to fears of the mob violence that conversion cases engender.

Mr. President,

It is imperative that States align their legislation with the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, acknowledging its significance in contributing to social stability.

Thank you.