

Speaker: Thank you Mr. Moderator. I am Kareem Abdul [inaudible] and I am representing the Turkish minority of western Thrace in Greece. Dear participants, in today [inaudible] discussion about the role of human rights defenders in the promotion of UNDM I will present questions that the defenders of minority rights in western Thrace have been asking for decades. As well as the treatment they have received for merely raising the issue of minority and human rights. Let me present what we say in every opportunity as human rights defenders to give a voice to Turkish minority. The Turkish minority in Thrace is unable to get a bilingual education in Turkish and Greek at the Kindergarten level which is a curricular age for minority students to acquire their mother tongue and culture. The structural issues at the minority high school in [inaudible] which offers instructions in human conditions inside the former tobacco warehouse represent an additional dimension of Greece's minority policy. Additionally since the Turkish community of Rhodes and Kos islands is not even acknowledged by the Greek government as a minority. They are not able to take advantage of any minority rights including access to minority school and education in their mother tongue, Turkish, as well as religious rights. On the other hand, not recognising minority religious leaders, appointing Muftis, regulating Mufti offices against the minorities' will. Referring to elected Muftis of the Turkish minority [inaudible] Muftis all contradict the UN declaration of religious freedom. We, as the human rights defenders, when speak out about human and minority rights abuses in the region we become targets of some local Greek media organs and subject of criminal or financial investigation in tolerance of state. The most [inaudible] instance in this regard is the targeting of me and other colleagues by a local media outlet after we attended an OSC conference in Warsaw a few weeks ago and raised awareness of related issues we face. The voice of minority right defenders is the voice of suffering people who face.