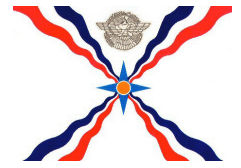




ASSYRIAN UNIVERSAL ALLIANCE



Member, Unrepresented Nations & Peoples Organization (UNPO)
United Nations Forum on Minority Issues
November 27-28, 2012

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Committee on International Organizations

Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities: identifying positive practices and opportunities.

Consideration of future opportunities and initiatives for raising awareness of the Declaration and ensuring its practical implementation

Madam Chair, distinguished delegates:

The current situation of the Assyrians in Iraq is a testament to the need of a particularized focus on security measures in post-conflict situations that pay special attention to the risks facing minority populations. The Assyrians, an ethnic, linguistic, and religious minority, indigenous to the Middle East, once represented a strong Christian population in the region, however decades of sectarian conflict and war have caused the population to dwindle to a mere fraction of its original size.

As a result, the once diverse population of countries such as Iraq has become more homogenous, giving rise to a distinct fear in the Assyrian community to express their cultural and religious identity, and reinforcing the perception of assimilation as the key to peaceful living. The community is forced to choose between cultural expression and safety, a decision which hinders any effective expression of a collective identity for our people.

The Declaration could have given voice to important rights for the Assyrians and important responsibilities for the new government of Iraq, however this did not occur, and the example is now one of a missed opportunity. Our hope is that the current challenges faced by minorities in that country can serve as a learning experience for the international community, so that in the future, minorities trapped in post-conflict situations will not be robbed of the chance to secure their rights.

Our recommendations concerning post-conflict security of minority groups are as follows:

1. To Support the recommendation made earlier to have a UN conference hosted among the MENA countries to reinforce the values of the Declaration, with special attention to Articles 5 and 6.
2. To Develop a mechanism for including the Declaration as an essential drafting tool in all future constitutional draftings that would allow the Independent Expert to utilize her mandate to formally consult with government ministries and minority groups on the relevancy of the Declaration whenever new constitutions are being proposed post-conflict. The creation of a more methodical approach to the use of the Declaration will assist in taking the rights contained in the document beyond merely 'soft' international law by allowing its values to become ingrained in the municipal laws of member states, thus giving minority groups direct access to future claims and reparations for potential violations and abuses of their rights.
3. To Include in Paragraph 23 of the Recommendations specific language regarding the right of minorities to be free from the impunity of those who violate their basic rights by inciting or participating in acts of violence.



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This language should refer not only to the end of impunity by government actors, but must also stress the duty of governments to force private parties to take responsibility for their violations as well.

4. In regards to paragraphs 51-53, we suggest a more explicit relationship between how minorities are expected to utilize the Declaration, and the corresponding responsibilities of the United Nations and its member states. As a youth advocate for the Assyrians in the Middle East, one of the biggest challenges I face is determining how to make international human rights laws and mechanisms I learn about a reality for my own people, rather than a mere topic of discourse. We urge the Human Rights Council and member states to make the United Nations special procedures referenced in Part C of the Recommendations more accessible to minorities, and to implement as soon as possible the proposed Voluntary Fund. In addition, programs must be developed to promote the education of minority groups and their community organizations on the means available for them to utilize the Declaration. A component of this program should include opening the preparatory meetings normally held the day before the opening of the Forum on Minority Issues to all NGO minority representatives. By opening the preparatory meetings to all minority representatives at the Forum, the Human Rights Council will be helping civil society groups to learn how best to utilize the Forum, and will give representatives more time to meet and exchange ideas with other minority groups.

AUA's belief is that these changes in the recommendations and these developments in UN programing will allow minorities to begin to fulfill their own responsibility to assert their rights.

Concluding remarks:

The challenge as we move forward is determining what powers minorities can utilize when they are forced to live in circumstances that do not pay homage to the Declaration.

Thank you.