



Sixth UN Forum on Minority Issues

Beyond freedom of religion or belief: Guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities
Agenda item “protection of the existence of and prevention of violence against religious minorities”

Mr. Pierre Hegay, UNPO
26 November 2013

Thank you Madam Chair.

The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization welcomes the ensemble of recommendations regarding the protection of the existence of religious minorities. Despite these efforts, since the creation of this Forum many religious minorities have been uprooted from their traditional territories or have been facing increasing violence because of their beliefs and cultural practices. This violence has not been limited to certain States or religions, as exemplified by the dreadful violations faced by the Christian Chins in Myanmar, the persecution of Christian Degars in Vietnam, the severe restrictions imposed on the Muslim Uyghurs in China and the massive displacement and killing of the Assyrians of Iraq.

The lack of recognition of these minorities as full contributing elements to societies is often at the root of the problem. Due to State actions or inaction, religious minorities are often perceived as outsiders within the States, leading invariably to persecution. In order to remedy this situation, the UNPO would like to make the following recommendations:

- Pay particular attention to the issue of intersectionality when applying the Forum recommendations. Religious minorities often also belong to an ethnic, national, or linguistic group that is different from the rest of the population, which creates additional challenges. The Forum recommendations must take into account the multiple layers of discrimination suffered by many religious minorities.
- The negative portrayal of religious minorities in the media or in the official discourse plays a significant influence on their perception by the population in general. It is the duty of the States to ensure that hate speech has no place on the public scene; and that the effects of certain policies, in particular anti-terrorism laws, do not arbitrarily target specific religious minorities.
- To promote the participation of religious minorities in public life, States need to remove the obstacles linked to their identity, including rules about clothing or religious holidays. In countries where the State mandates a specific religion or absence of religion, provisions should be adopted to ensure participation and representation of religious minorities in public bodies.

- UNPO particularly welcomes recommendation 35 regarding political and cultural arrangements in areas where religious minorities represent the majority of the population. However, existing autonomous arrangements with religious minorities are often failing and lead to further frustration, either due to partial implementation of such agreements, or because the minorities themselves have not been consulted properly on the conditions of the agreement. To make recommendation 35 effective, it is important to ensure that these agreements are implemented effectively and meaningfully involve the minorities themselves.
- In order to effectively monitor the situation of minorities in general and religious minorities in particular, UNPO recommends the creation of independent regional or national centers on minority rights, gathering amongst others minority leaders and activists, scholars, and experts, in order to analyze in a professional and independent way the situation of minorities in each country and inform policymakers.

Thank you for your attention.