

INTERFAITH INTERNATIONAL

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Intervention by: Dr. Charles Graves, Secretary general

National practices -Providing for the political participation of minorities.

Madame President,

Interfaith International would like to thank the independent Expert, Madame Gay McDougall, for her document. We also congratulate the Secretariat for success in this forum and Mrs. Barbara Lee for her election to the presidency of this meeting which is relative to the objectives of our organization.

It is highly commendable that the world community under the banner of United Nations has pursued Human Rights Council's resolution 6/15 of September-2007 to effectively address minorities issues throughout in its member states. For the world community I intend to identify and analyze practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives for the further implementation of the *Declaration on the human rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities*.

Madame,

It is disappointing that in many countries in the world particularly in the African and Asian regions persons of particular religious and ethnic groups have been discriminated and marginalized by different deciders and policy-making institutions in society. It is an alarming situation in Arab and Asian countries including China and Pakistan where religious and ethnic minorities have been segregated and deprived of fundamental human rights on the basis of their distinct culture and language. I would emphasize that the implementation of the right to effective political participation of minorities is a fundamental responsibility not only of the member states but also of the political parties and civil society organizations operating in these regions.

Common political organizations of Muslim countries which represent the Muslim elite of both Shi'a and Sunnis should be encouraged to address the problems of marginalized Muslim communities in their respective society and member states.

It is dramatic that minorities in the 21st century are not given their rightful place in various societies and that they are at the margins of history; even their cultural and linguistic existence is under threat at the hands of state institutions.

At this august Forum I would like to high-light the plight and miserable life of certain ethnic and religious minorities in the African Grand-Lacs region, in Kenya, in Ouganda and also concerning the Roma in Europe. In various parts of Pakistan Sindhis, Balochis and the people of Gilgit and Baltistan have been discriminated against on the basis of their language and culture. Representation of Pakistan's largest province of Baluchistan is zero at country's decision and policy-making bodies. Same is the case with the people of Pakistani-Administered Kashmir where local people have been discriminated on the basis of their ethnicity and are kept hostage of discriminatory policies of certain state institutions in Pakistan.

Madame,

We are living in the era of globalization as well as social and political transformation today. I would encourage the world community to implement the new millennium development goals (MDGs) by all means so that the people in developing countries could reap and enjoy fundamental social, economic, cultural, educational and human rights including freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of assembly and the right to equal opportunities of development and jobs in state institutions on the basis of merit and social justice.

It is the responsibility of political parties and civil society organizations to accommodate ethnic and religious minorities so that fundamental rights can be protected effectively. They should be constitutionally-protected. Discriminatory clauses must be abolished from the state constitutions and every citizen should be given equal opportunity to seek justice against discrimination in any fashion.

We look forward to a new strategic policy of States based on diversity, tolerance, pluralism and equal opportunity.

Thank you