

Subject: Registration approval for the HRC/Forum on Minority Issues - 10th session: Minority Youth: towards inclusive and diverse societies (To: Barua, Bidduth)

From: FMI-registration@ohchr.org

To: bdagni@yahoo.com

Date: Wednesday, November 8, 2017, 5:43:58 AM GMT+1

United Nations Office at Geneva - Accreditation System

English

Dear Mr. Bidduth Barua,

Your registration for the meeting

HRC/Forum on Minority Issues - 10th session: Minority Youth: towards inclusive and diverse societies

has been **approved**. We are looking forward to welcoming you at the meeting.

If you wish to access your registration form, please click [HERE](#).

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Thank you and best regards,

The Client Secretariat.

Français

Cher(e) Mr. Bidduth Barua,

vosre inscription à la conférence

HRC/Forum on Minority Issues - 10th session: Minority Youth: towards inclusive and diverse societies

a été **approuvée**.

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The Role of Civil Society in Peace building, Conflict Resolution, and Democratization

Presented By - Bidduth Barua , CEO Health-Tech Foundation, 1 December,2017

Dear Participants,

Heartiest Thanks to the organizers for giving opportunity to share my knowledge about the role of civil society in religious and political violence.

During my experience as a professional doctors for about 15 years. so many times i told in different seminar regarding keep peace to the society.

we need to define what we mean by civil society. Everyone talks about civil society, but no one says what it is. And in fact there is no accepted definition of civil society. The World Bank has adopted a definition that refers to the wide array of nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations that have a presence in public life expressing the interest and values other members and others base on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Specifically, the term civil society organizations or CSO for short is used to refer to entities such as community groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), so NGOs are a subset to civil society. Obviously not the whole thing, labor unions, indigenous groups, charities, faith based organizations, professional associations and foundations. And we use the term in our work to refer to all of the civic, social, cultural, and religious institutions and organizations that form the basis of society and operate outside of the state, but within the framework of the law. A civil society is intrinsic to a well-functioned democratic state. In democratic states, the operations of civil society organizations are complimentary to those of the state and are underpinned by liberal democratic assumptions and institutions. Some argue that the development of civil society requires a freedom of speech, of association, of religion and independent judiciary and democratic political institutions. Conversely, there is an inherent tension between civil society and authoritarian state. Especially for civil society organizations become important actors for the delivery of social services and channels for the expression of popular demands. Here it is important to make a distinction among degrees of authoritarianism in relation to civil society. At the totalitarian end of the scale, for instance the former communist states Burma, Syria, Libya, Iraq under the Ba'ath party, the state controls all organized expressions of society. And this is fundamentally different from the authoritarian states especially those where democratic transitions have occurred including; for example the Philippines under Marcos, Indonesia under Suharto, Spain under Franco, Portugal under Salazar, Greece under the colonels, and Brazil, Argentina and Chile under military regimes. And I would argue Egypt under Mubarak and Tunisia under Ben Ali... And many other cases too numerous to mention here, where the authoritarian regime allowed civil society organizations to operate within certain limitations. For instance, religious and social service organizations were able to function as long as they did not involve themselves in politics or pose a perceived threat to stability of a regime. For instance, in Indonesia Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama the two largest Muslim civil service organizations in the world,

with a membership of between 20 and 30 million members each, operated very much without official interference under the Suharto regime. They ran schools, thousands of schools, universities and whole university system on part of Muhammadiyah, hospitals and provided social services and were able to exercise significant influence on political and social issues. The Catholic Church in the Philippines and its leader cardinal Sin under Marcos not only claim its independence, but constituted one of the most powerful political forces in the Philippines and played a critical role in the replacement of the Marcos regime as many of you know. Another case in point is the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood, although I consider this one as a political rather than a religious or social entity. Although it was officially banned throughout most of the Mubarak regime, the Brotherhood was allowed to function, to run the complex network of hospitals and social services. And brotherhood members were allowed to run for parliament and sometimes be elected as independents of course not members of the organization. In many, and I would say most cases, authoritarian regimes allowed the independent media, especially the newspapers, because the regimes were usually more concerned about the electronic media that reaches the masses on paper that were generally led by a small elite of a population. Nevertheless they were allowed to operate and they used censorship as a vehicle to control the message. And this is a fundamental point, because censorship does not imply actual control of the media and in some cases opposition newspapers such as Katimerini under the Greek colonels or La Prensa in Nicaragua where I had served in the 1970s in the late Samosa period in the Foreign Service. They actually became the focal points of opposition to the regime. Now you compare that to the situation in Syria today or Iraq under Saddam where no sign of opposition was permitted. Another important component of NGOs is in the role in building up civil society and promoting democracy. And especially the NGOs are taking role in democracy promotion. Some of them are beneficiaries of international funding. And this international connection has provided NGOs not only with the means to carry out their functions, but also with a degree of protection from the regime, particularly, where that regime receives international assistance and therefore needs to manifest some respect for the values of the donor countries or institutions. Nevertheless, these NGOs operating in an authoritarian environment need to struggle to maintain their independence since they are often viewed with suspicion or hostility by the regime. In most cases, the NGOs have to register with the authorities; they have to meet their requirements that the regime might set for registration, clear security investigations, and promise to refrain from activities that the government might object to. The authorities can and do audit operating budgets, infiltrate agents into the major associations, impose arbitrary fines, and could dissolve the group if found to be in violations of regulations. The governments can pressure international donors to cease founding a group that it objects to as in the case of Mubarak and the United States. Or as in the case of Venezuela under Chavez it could prohibit NGOs from accepting international assistance. Nevertheless, even though they operate under quite severe restrictions, once the transition begins, the NGOs can play and have played a key role in the conciliation of democracy. The point is that preexisting civil society institutions and organizations even if operating under severe restrictions, constitute, judging by the history of successful democratic transitions, a key and maybe an indispensable factor in the conciliation of democratic governance. A body of scholarly leaders illustrates this point and argues that in democratic transitions around the world, civil societies can facilitate the process by restraining state coercion, increasing the costs of repression, and generating international support for the transition. . I mentioned earlier the Muslim Brotherhood, the question is whether an Islamist organization such as the Brotherhood supports

democratic objectives or whether they seek to use democratic means to impose a different form of authoritarianism. Or at least to capture a share of public space for purposes that are not consistent with liberal democracy; or to get away from the problem of Islamism and democracy. In cases where the obstacles to democracy derive from the political culture itself, whether NGO activities are infected by undemocratic practices. For instance, a scholar of Southeast Asia noted that the behavior of some NGOs in the Philippines has sometimes been shaped by the pervasive patron-client system that operates in that country and this is a system that the NGOs are ostensibly dedicated to change. So to conclude my presentation, let me say that yes, it is very important especially as the Arab world moves into the state of transition, for international actors, the United States especially, to engage civil society where there is not enough to veil on a government-to-government basis. We must try to engage these nonstate actors that are driving political change. At the same time we have to be careful whom to engage, and I think that as we have noted in some of our other works, there has to be some criteria for the partners that we could have. For instance, do these actors accept the fundamental, liberal democratic values that we share? Do they respect the rights of women, religious and ethnic minorities? Do they renounce the use of violence and terrorism to attain their goals? And I think this is the direction that we should go. Thank you.