

Statement by the Representative of the Permanent Mission of Nepal at the Third Session of the Forum on Minority Issues, 15 December 2010.

Madam Chair,

We attach high value to the Forum on Minority Issues as a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

Madam Chair,

We have a collective responsibility to ensure that the persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life as enshrined in the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

Driven by the very sense of responsibility as well as recognizing the diversity of our population and culture as important assets for national development, Nepal has taken significant initiatives for the protection of the rights of the marginalized groups including minorities. The representation of the indigenous people including minorities in the Constituent Assembly has marked historic record with one third of its membership being elected from these groups. As we are in an important phase of writing a new Constitution, a separate Committee on the Protection and of the Rights of the Minorities and Marginalized Groups has been formed within the Constituent Assembly to specifically articulate the rights and interests of these groups.

The Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007 guarantees the right to equality of every citizen and provides equal protection of law. The Constitution guarantees civil liberties and fundamental human rights including the right to social justice, right against racial discrimination, right regarding employment and social security, among others. Under the right to social justice, the minorities, among others, have the right to participate in state structures on the basis of principles of proportional inclusion.

The Constitution also guarantees the rights of all communities to preserve and promote their language, scripts, culture, artifacts and cultural heritage. The right to impart basic education in mother tongues of all communities has been recognized.

With a view to enhance the participation and making the State apparatus inclusive, reservation and quota system have been introduced to ensure fair representation of all communities in all state apparatus and decision making bodies, including in the parliament, civil service, police, army and all public sector employment.

Empowerment and enhancing participation of minorities has remained one of the priority agendas of the government. Far reaching reforms in the areas of policy and institutions have been undertaken. The National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities has been established which exclusively works for the development of indigenous people including minorities and preservation of their distinct culture and life style, ensuring their access to resources, and empowerment through their participation in the decision making process. The government has also formed National Dalit Commission (NDC) to promote and protect the rights and welfare of the *dalits*, a marginalized minority group.

Madam Chair,

In conclusion, we believe that our collective efforts, underpinned by the commitment on the part of all, would be able to formulate practical policies and programmes as well as create legal and institutional mechanisms necessary to uphold the inherent and equal rights of the minorities.

I thank you Madam Chair.