

**Opening address by
Ms. Graciela J. Dixon C.
Chair of the fourth session of the
Forum on Minority Issues**

“Guaranteeing the rights of minority women”

Tuesday, 29 November 2011, 10:00 a.m.

Palais des Nations, Salle XX

**Madam President,
Distinguished delegates and participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Friends and colleagues,**

It is a sincere pleasure for me to address you this morning as we open the fourth session of the Forum on Minority Issues on “Guaranteeing the rights of minority women”.

Allow me firstly to thank the previous speakers for their kind words on my appointment as Chair of this fourth session of the Forum on Minority Issues.

I had the great pleasure to participate in the second session of this Forum in 2009 on “Minorities and effective political participation”, and, it is therefore with a sense of pride, strong commitment and understanding of the importance of this role that I’m back for this session in a different capacity.

I particularly wish to congratulate Rita Iszak, the Independent Expert on minority issues, on her recent appointment and of course wish her all the best in the conduct of this important mandate.

I was particularly keen to take up this role in view of the importance of the thematic focus on “Guaranteeing the rights of minority women”. Indeed, in view of my personal background, I am well aware of the relevance of adopting an all-encompassing and human rights-based approach to the situation of minority women. I strongly believe, and can personally testify to the fact, that minority women empowerment can only be achieved through ensuring their effective participation in political, economic, cultural and social life.

Equally, this participation in all spheres of life can in turn only be achieved through first and foremost continuously ensuring their equal access to quality education.

The Forum on Minority Issues provides a unique venue for dialogue, exchange of experiences and constructive cooperation in bolstering minority rights and promoting implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

Previous sessions focused on the challenges that minorities face in the fields of education, effective political participation and participation in economic life, proposing concrete recommendations to counter remaining obstacles.

Previous sessions of this Forum have also consistently highlighted the need to address specifically the situation of minority women. Besides, and as rightly mentioned in the documentation for this fourth session of the Forum, without an explicit recognition of the different life experiences of minority women and men, the intersecting forms of discrimination that they might be subjected to will often go unnoticed and not be addressed adequately.

This Forum has now established itself as a unique opportunity for all stakeholders, including Member States, representatives of civil society, the United Nations, its specialized agencies and other international and regional organizations to share experiences and promote good practices with regard to the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

Let me reiterate at this stage that such a dialogue between all actors is particularly essential in light of the fact that there are clearly no easy answers or one-size-fits-all solutions in this field.

Since its very first session, this Forum has multiplied efforts and successfully given a voice to minorities from everywhere in the world and from totally different backgrounds, from the grassroots level to high level positions in Government.

I am once again this year looking forward to hearing the voices of minority women and benefitting from their specific experiences in their overall struggle for equality.

One key word to be kept in mind during the discussions will certainly be diversity. Diversity in society at large but also within minority groups. We must indeed ensure that the diverse views within all groups, including minority groups, shall be heard and taken into account.

By bringing together different actors from within and outside of the United Nations system, the Forum has proven essential in providing valuable guidance not only to the work of the Independent Expert on minority issues but also to actors at international, regional and national levels.

Such exchange of inspiring experiences can and will indeed assist Governments, political actors, the judiciary, social partners, minority groups and civil society in their efforts to promote equality by replicating or adapting practices to local conditions anywhere in the world.

This gathering is a reminder of the need to continue our work towards greater minority women empowerment and building on the progress achieved so far.

I urge every single one of you to take full advantage of this unique Forum where, while we will hear about remaining challenges and obstacles faced by some minority women in their daily lives, we shall also—and I wish to emphasise this—hear about positive measures that have proven successful towards improving the situation of some minority women.

Finally, I want to call on all participants to adopt and to keep a positive, human rights based approach to the issues that will be discussed during the next two days.

Let us not forget about the work that still has to be done for equality to become a reality for every minority woman and girls, but, at the same time, let us be inspired in this endeavour by the success stories that we will be privileged to hear and to share today.

It is an honour to Chair this fourth session of the Forum on Minority Issues and I'm sincerely looking forward to our constructive, respectful, inspired and indeed positive discussion.

Thank you very much.