

Statement on the Equal Rights of Minority Women in Federal Nepal at the UN Forum on Minority Issues, Fourth Session, 29-30 November, 2011. Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

The Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen.

Thanks so much for giving me the floor at such important event of and for minorities around the globe. I'm Rakesh Karna, representing SUPPORT Nepal from Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. We work to protect and promote the rights of minorities.

Nepal is currently writing our 7th Constitution, and my organization is working to ensure that the rights of minorities, including minority women, are protected under this Constitution. This is a lifetime opportunity for the minorities in Nepal to ensure that the new Constitution respects international mechanisms, including those relating to minority rights, and implements the State's international commitments.

I support these Recommendations, particularly because they will help ensure the Effective Political Participation of Minority Women.

The Interim Constitution (IC) of Nepal 2007, the first constitution in Nepal's history that recognizes minorities, has several positive aspects for protecting and promoting the rights of minorities, including women from minorities. It has strong provisions for ending caste-based discrimination, and includes proportional representation based on population. It also advocates against gender-based violence and provides space for legal treatment upon victimization on the basis of race, caste, religion, sex and other identities. Despite such developments for ensuring the rights of the minorities including minority women, Nepal still has a long way to go to ensure fair and equitable space for minorities and minority women in its future federal settings.

Madam Chairperson,

I fully acknowledge Draft recommendation 60. As Nepal is writing its constitution, through the Constituent Assembly (CA), future laws, policies and provisions should recognize fair representation and participation of minorities including minority women. As Nepal is full of diversity and the situation of one group differs from another, minority women face multiple layers of discrimination and exploitation within and out of the group. So, it is important that they're recognized as special groups within minorities whose rights must be protected and promoted in social, economic and political spheres.

I support Recommendation 61. Concerned committees under the CA are proposing provisions for women's rights and inclusion. But because the issues and concerns of minority in general and minority women in particular are more often neglected by the society and the state, it is obvious that any proposals aiming at women's rights protection and promotion should clearly have specific provisions for minority women—that are developed with and by women.

As stated in 63, minority women should have easy access to voter registration and should receive protective policy and program by election authorities. National government should amend any discriminatory law or policy that hinders minority women's access to citizenship or voter registration certificate. Minority women should be encouraged to stand in election and vote fearlessly and policies should protect such rights.

Agreeing with point 64, minority women should be encouraged to take lead role in public debate and decision making bodies. Women in Nepal have inadequate representation in public life and decision making bodies. The situation is worse when it comes to the inclusion of minority women in such areas. There should be measures taken by concerned authorities to ensure minority women are equipped with relevant skills and resources to entertain such responsibilities effectively.

I support 67 and urge that there should be constitutional provisions to guarantee the rights of minorities and especially minority women by the federal/central constitution to ensure their meaningful representation. Any provincial or local laws or policies should not contradict or curtail such facilities benefitting minority women.

If these recommendations are reflected in the constitution, we would adequately address a lack of a legal framework for the protection of the rights of minorities including minority women.

Thank you.