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Centre for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy

Human Rights Council Forum on Minority Issues 5th Session (27th -28th Nov.2012)

Agenda:

By: AWATAR SINGH SEKHON

Madam Chairperson,

The historic UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities endorsed by the Member States of the UN is a clear profound and conceptually dauntless open testimony that seeks to empower minorities around the world to defend their rights. However, after its adoption now for more than twenty years, the practical use of the Declaration by the members States to protect minorities is still a tough task. This also remains the biggest challenge and obstacle faced by Buddhists religious minorities.

Some of the evidence that we would like to bring to the attention of this Minority Forum is about the proposed destruction of "Mes Aynak" an ancient Buddhist place which is located about 40 kilometers from Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan which used to be a stopover on the Silk Road some 2,300 years ago. The Afghanistan government has granted a concession to the China Metallurgical Group Corporation (MMC) to mine copper in the city of "Mes Aynak" which is commencing in December 2012, in spite of the strong opposition from many Buddhists minorities from all around the world including archeologists and conservatives.

After 30 years of armed conflicts Afghanistan has suffered the loss and desecration of thousands of objects and hundreds of sites such as the city of Al Khanum and Bamiyan, a site that would eventually be enlisted as a site to be protected but too late. Further, the heritage of Afghanistan is once again faced with violation and impending loss, this time in the case of the immense Buddhist site of Mess Aynak.

Mes Aynak is a valuable cultural heritage denoting human endeavor and development.

We believe that while economical development through the mining of precious minerals is necessary, however the justification of the Afgan Government cannot just become an additional tool or excuses for further destruction of an already weakened heritage.

As we are all aware that the 20th anniversary of the adoption of The historic UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities also coincides with the 40th anniversary celebration of the World Heritage Convention which was adopted on 16 November 1972 by UNESCO and is one of the most widely accepted treaties in the world, with 190 States Parties and 962 sites inscribed on the World Heritage List. The World Heritage Convention concluded recently in Kyoto, Japan and outlined the achievements of the past 40 years of the World Heritage Convention, and the importance of people-centered conservation of World Heritage to contribute to sustainable development and ensure a harmonious relationship between communities and the environment, as the best way to ensure long-term protection of the outstanding universal value of World Heritage sites.

Therefore we strongly urge the Minority Forum to request the various UN Bodies including the UNESCO to ensure that the site of Mess Aynak, Afghanistan be enlisted immediately on the list of Endangered Sites and the World Heritage and the Afghan Government must allow the UNESCO to protect and safeguard the site as the world Heritage keeping in mind the concern and aspiration of the Bhuddhist minorities around the globe.