



Forum on Minority Issues - Agenda Item 5

Thank you Madame Chair for handing me the floor. I speak on behalf of SUARAM, a human rights organization from Malaysia who work on civil and political rights.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate the human rights council and all delegates taking part in the 20th year of the declaration on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. This year marks a unique opportunity for all parties to renew their pledge to the declaration and review what actions have taken place to protect the rights of minorities. Clearly there are still many challenges facing the States in implementing the declaration as alluded to by previous speakers.

One observation, we would like to make is that while immense progress has been made in the last 20 years by the UN, not only issuing the Declaration and getting States to adopt it unanimously, but also in establishing mechanisms, procedures and toolkits to help in its implementation, there has been, however a reverse trend in the last 20 years where some States, instead of passing legislation to protect minorities, have instead passed legislation and implemented programmes to advance the position of the majority at the expense of the minorities.

This has definitely been the case in Malaysia. It prides itself on being a multi-racial country. Its majority population are Malays at 60%, 30% are Chinese and 8% percent are Indians. There are also a small percentage (2%) of indigenous peoples and other races. While these communities live peacefully in Malaysia, there remain a series of issues affecting minorities, basically resulting in limited opportunities for minorities to participate at all levels. This is due to the government, over the years passing legislation and adopting programmes to advance the majority Malays without any reciprocal plans for the advancement of minorities. Needless to say, there has been little record of them implementing the Declaration at the national or local level.

Therefore, we strongly agree with statements made by Ms Ilze Brands Kehris that change will not happen unless there are well formulated State policies in place and that mere implementation rhetoric is not enough. We also agree with Mr Carl Soderbergh's statement that the declaration must be publicized, translated and disseminated by the State to its people – both the majority and the minority.

We therefore strongly recommend that the Malaysian government uses this historic year to have the political will to review its policies towards the minorities and pass the appropriate legislation, allocate the necessary funding and establishes programmes to implement recommendations made at this forum. It must be stressed that, and I quote, "all measures taken with a view to implementing the recommendations made at this session should be, to the fullest extent possible, developed, designed, implemented and reviewed with the full and effective participation of minorities". Unquote.

In addition, SUARAM strongly recommends that the HRC puts implementation by member States as a focused priority for the next immediate years and devises adequate mechanisms to review the progress of the States in implementing the recommendations. One way would be for the Independent Expert on minority issues to be given the mandate to carry out periodic reviews at her discretion.

We also strongly urge the Council to set up a fund for minorities which can be used by the people on the ground to advance their cause.

Thank you .