



EUROPEAN UNION
Permanent Delegation to the United Nations Office
and other international organisations in Geneva

**FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES:
Beyond Freedom of Religion or Belief: Guaranteeing the rights of
religious minorities**

6th session, 26-27 November 2013

Item 2 – Legal framework and key concepts

EU Intervention

Madam President,

The promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities and the promotion and protection of freedom of religion and belief are key features of the European Union's human rights policies, and we are pleased that this forum will be addressing both today and tomorrow.

As regards the legal framework for the protection of religious minorities, the EU fully supports the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which we consider to be the key reference text on the rights of persons belonging to minorities at the global level. We therefore welcome draft recommendations no. 17 and 18.

The EU itself is founded on the value of respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, and the prohibition of discrimination on the ground of religion or belief is enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. We have put in place a legal framework to fight discrimination, racism and xenophobia, and have contributed financially to programmes in support of activities aimed at combating these phenomena. Furthermore, all EU Member States have set up independent equality bodies to help people who have been discriminated against pursue their complaints.

Complementing internal EU legislation are various legally and politically binding instruments and mechanisms adopted under the auspices of the Council of Europe and of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which all EU Member States subscribe to.

This past June, the EU Foreign Affairs Council adopted EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief. With these guidelines, the EU reaffirms its determination to promote, in its external human rights policy, freedom of religion or belief as a right to be exercised by everyone everywhere, based on the

challenged. We further agree with draft recommendation no. 21 in the sense that any legislation that provides for discriminatory treatment of persons or groups belonging to different religions or beliefs, or for discriminatory application of nominally neutral legislation, should be condemned.

The EU also encourages States to respect the right to conscientious objection to military service, based on one's religion or belief, and allow for an alternative service of a non-combatant or civilian character.

Finally, Madam President, I'd like to reiterate the EU's pledge to fight against all forms of intolerance on the grounds of religion or belief.

Thank you.