

FORUM ON MINORITIES ISSUES
Agenda Item 2: Legal framework and Keys Concept
(26th November 2013)

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Italy
H.E. Ambassador Maurizio Enrico Serra

Madame/Mister Chair,

Italy very much welcomes the topic chosen for this year Forum. Indeed, just one year ago, we stated that violence and discrimination against religious minorities was a major obstacle to the full implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to Minorities.

[We are convinced that freedom of religion affects the identity and the dignity of the human being, while its protection is essential for a stable and peaceful world.] It is encouraging to observe that the international community is becoming more and more aware of the importance of this issue. As an evidence, we deem it interesting to highlight that during the second cycle of the UPR - whereas 65 countries has been scrutinized so far - 68 recommendations have been devoted to freedom of religious of persons belonging to minorities. A significant number when compared with the 85 recommendations dedicated to the same topic throughout the whole first cycle.

Regrettably, legal restrictions on religion have escalated during the last few years in each of the five major regions of the world. Italy is deeply concerned about such a negative worldwide trend. As to the last developments, we strongly encourage the countries in transition towards democracy to lead their constitutional reform process in full compliance with the international standards on freedom of religion of persons belonging to minorities.

States do bear primary responsibility for setting up a national legal framework in compliance with international human rights law and standards. [However, we believe that international and regional cooperation is of paramount importance in this area.] Consistently, Italy, building on previous initiatives, has financed a project within

the International Development Law Organization, whose goals are: first, to carry out empirical research and analysis of Governments' restrictions on the practice of religions; second, to build an on-line legal global database of existing national legal frameworks on freedom of religion or belief. Afterward, IDLO, in cooperation with the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, will invite governments and other stakeholders to examine the outcome of this research, in order to identify good practices and challenges and highlight areas for possible technical assistance, including on the aspects concerning persons belonging to minorities.

I thank you