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Geneva: 5th session of the Forum on Minority Issues focused on the Minorities Declaration

The Forum on Minority Issues held its fifth session on “Implementing the United Nations Declaration on Minority Rights: Identifying positive practices and opportunities” from 27 to 28 November 2012 in Geneva.

The fifth session of the Forum, which brought together over 400 participants, was chaired by Ms. Soyata Maiga, member of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. In the opening segment of the session the participants were addressed by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (through a video message), as well as by the President of the Human Rights Council, H.E. Ms. Laura Dupuy Lasserre, High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navi Pillay, and the Independent Expert on minority issues, Ms. Rita Izsák.

The 20th anniversary of the UN Minorities Declaration celebrated in 2012 gave the Forum an opportunity to reflect upon this key document for minorities and how much progress has been made since its adoption in 1992. Presentations focusing on how the Declaration has lived up to expectations were made by Mr. Patrick Thornberry,

member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Mr. Asbjorn Eide, former Chairman of the United Nations Working Group on Minorities, and Ms. Gay McDougall, the first Independent Expert on minority issues.

OHCHR Minority Fellows presented their views on the Declaration as young minority rights advocates, and their presentations were followed by agenda items covering the identification of good practices and challenges in the practical use of the Declaration, as well as considerations of future opportunities for raising awareness of the Declaration and ensuring its practical implementation.

Consultation on the role of the UN

A day prior to the Forum, OHCHR organised a consultation on the role of the UN in advancing protection of minorities and combatting racial discrimination, which will feed into the Secretary-General's Guidance note on racial discrimination and protection of minorities, currently being drafted by the UN Network on racial discrimination and protection of minorities.

More information: www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Minority/Pages/Session5.aspx



Video message from the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the opening of the 5th session of the Forum on minority issues.

Agencies' meeting in Montreal

The Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues (IASG) meting at the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal, from 28 to 30 November, 2012.

The meeting was attended by international agency focal points for indigenous peoples' issues, as well as the Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Grand Chief Edward John. Twenty-seven participants from the twenty-one agencies participated in the meeting, including via video-conferencing. The participants agreed on the need for the continuation of training of UN country teams, Governments and indigenous peoples and emphasized the importance of the national and local level implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Areas for cooperation among agencies were identified to maximize coordination and avoid duplication.

IASG Agencies also discussed opportunities to support indigenous peoples in preparatory processes for the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples including through such mechanisms as the provision of funding, making spaces available for this purpose at organized meetings and workshops.

The IASG also identified action plans to ensure indigenous peoples are included in the post 2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals. A collaborative paper was prepared to contribute to the on-line discussion on "Inequalities".

[Full report of the meeting will be available at the PFII website.](#)

Workshop in Namibia

As part of its work to provide guidance for NHRIs on how to advance the principles of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, OHCHR organized a training workshop for the staff of the Ombudsman Office in Namibia and for officials of the Ministries of Justice, Education, and Gender Equality and Child Welfare as well as representatives of indigenous communities.

The event was organized in Swakopmund from 29 to 31 October 2012. Participants identified the key human rights challenges severely affecting the San and Himba indigenous communities and discussed the relevance of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and in particular its provisions related to the right of consultation and participation of indigenous communities in decision-making.

Concrete commitments were made to advance the rights of indigenous communities.

[For more information, contact Samia Slimane at \[sslimane@ohchr.org\]\(mailto:sslimane@ohchr.org\)](#)

Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

- ◆ In September, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous peoples (EMRIP) presented the report of its 5th session at the 21st session of the Human Rights Council.
- ◆ In October, Ms. Jannie Lasimbang spoke at the Southeast Asia Consultation on Development, Access to Justice and the Human Rights of Indigenous Women, in Chiang Mai, Thailand.
- ◆ In October, EMRIP Secretariat met with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Human Rights Committee as part of the efforts to provide a better understanding of the provisions of the UNDRIP to Treaty Bodies.
- ◆ In November, Chief Wilton Littlechild participated in the Indigenous preparatory meeting for the Forum on Business and Human Rights, in Copenhagen, Denmark.
- ◆ In November, Chief Littlechild participated in the 5th session of the Forum on minority issues, where he presented on "Good practices in the work of EMRIP"
- ◆ In December, Chief Littlechild was part of a high-level plenary at the closing session for the Forum on Business and Human Rights. Further cooperation amongst the two mandates is envisaged in 2013. (see photo)
- ◆ In December, EMRIP's members Chief Littlechild and Jose Carlos Morales (as well as Special Rapporteur Anaya) participated at a meeting in Tikal, Guatemala on the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014.
- ◆ In December, EMRIP member Jannie Lasimbang participated in the Chiang Mai Conference on Language Rights, Inclusion and the Prevention of Ethnic Conflicts, in Thailand.

The 6th EMRIP session will take place from 8 to 12 July 2013.

More information: www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/EMRIP/Pages/EMRIPIndex.aspx



Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples

Country Assessments

- ◆ From 22 to 28 September, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples (SR), Mr. James Anaya, visited Namibia to examine the situation of indigenous peoples in that country. (see photos below) This was the first mission to Namibia by an independent expert designated by the UN Human Rights Council to report on the rights of the indigenous peoples. ([statement following his visit](#))
- ◆ On 11 September, the SR made public his report on the situation of indigenous peoples in the United States. The report was developed on the basis of research and information gathered, including during the official visit to the country from 23 April to 4 May 2012. ([full report](#))

Statements

- ◆ On 12 October, the SR, together with a group of other Special Rapporteurs, issued a press release urging the Government of Guatemala to clarify the violent events that occurred on 4 October 2012 in the locality of Cumbre de Alaska, in the municipality of Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán, Sololá that resulted in the death of 6 indigenous persons, as well as 33 indigenous community members and 13 members of the military being injured. ([full statement in Spanish](#))

Promotion of good practices

- ◆ On 2 September, the SR presented his fifth annual report to the Human Rights Council. In the report, he provides a summary of his activities since his previous report to the Council, including his examination of the thematic issue of violence against indigenous women. He also reports on progress in his continuing study of issues relating to extractive industries operating on or near indigenous territories. The SR addresses issues that have arisen during his consultations over the past year with indigenous peoples, business enterprises, States and non-governmental organizations. ([full report](#))
- ◆ On 22 October, the SR presented his fourth annual report to the General Assembly. The report provides a summary of his activities over the past year. The report also discusses the need to harmonize the myriad of activities within the UN system that affect indigenous peoples and provides a review of specific UN processes and programs. ([full report](#))
- ◆ In November, the SR presented his comments to a draft regulation on indigenous consultation and participation developed by the Government of Chile. In a meeting in Tucson, Arizona on 27 November, the Special Rap-

porteur discussed the draft regulation with a delegation of the Government of Chile.

- ◆ On 11 and 12 November, the SR met with representatives of business enterprises and other stakeholders to discuss issues related to natural resource extraction affecting indigenous peoples. The meeting took place in the context of the Special Rapporteur's on-going study on the issue and focused on, among other issues, company policies and practices related to indigenous peoples, case studies involving experiences with negotiations with indigenous communities, and on-going challenges.
- ◆ On 4 and 5 December, the SR participated in the first [Forum on Business and Human Rights](#) in Geneva, Switzerland. The SR spoke at a panel on business affecting indigenous peoples.
- ◆ On 10 December, the SR gave the keynote address at the Commonwealth International Human Rights Day expert panel entitled "Strengthened Rights Protection for Indigenous Peoples", which was organized by the Commonwealth Secretariat to commemorate International Human Rights Day in Geneva, Switzerland.

SR website: [link](#)



UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations

The UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations held an inter-sessional meeting in November and decided on the allocation of two grants.

The Board of the Fund decided to support the participation of indigenous peoples' representatives from Belize and New Zealand in the 107th session of the Human Rights Committee and in the 82nd session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination respectively.

Upcoming Board session

The 26th session of the Board of Trustees of the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations will take place in Geneva from 11 to 15 February 2013. At the session, the Board will review applications, meet with donors, non-governmental organizations and OHCHR staff mem-

bers, and adopt recommendations to the Secretary-General on the activities of the Fund.

GA extended the Fund's mandate

In September 2012, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution expanding the mandate of the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations. The resolution [A/RES/66/296](#) extends the mandate of the Fund to include support for indigenous peoples to participate in the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, as well as in the preparatory process for the conference.

Calls for applications

A call for application was issued on 1 December 2012 for applications to attend the Human Rights Council session, UPR and the treaty bodies sessions taking place from April to June 2013. The **deadline** to receive

applications is **10 January 2013**.

A new call for applications will be issued on 1 March 2013 for indigenous representatives wishing to attend the human rights mechanisms' sessions taking place from July to September 2013.

Application forms and deadlines: www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/IPeoplesFund/Pages/ApplicationsForms.aspx

More information on the Fund: www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/IPeoplesFund/Pages/IPeoplesFundIndex.aspx

OHCHR Indigenous Fellowship Programme

The Geneva part of the 2013 OHCHR Indigenous Fellowship Programme will take place from 17 June to 12 July, with the fellows having the opportunity to participate in the 6th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The candidates selected to participate in the Spanish and French linguistic components of the training programme are:

- ◆ Mr. Alex Guanga Nastacuas, Awa, Colombia
- ◆ Mr. Rafael Angel Delgado Estrada, Bribri, Costa Rica
- ◆ Mr. Jorge Mauricio Tropan Colimán, Mapuche, Chile
- ◆ Mr. Clemente Flores, Koya, Argentina
- ◆ Ms. Monica Michilena Diaz, Charrúa, Uruguay
- ◆ Ms. Blanca Cecilia Cuyo Illaqui-che, Panzaleo, Ecuador
- ◆ Ms. Beatriz Caritimari de Llaury, Shawi, Peru

- ◆ Mr. Pierre Bonkono, Batwa, DRC
- ◆ Mr Amoumoune Ogaz, Touareg, Niger
- ◆ Mr. Boubaker Lyadib, Amazigh, Morocco
- ◆ Ms. Florencine Edouard, Palikur-Téleuyu, French Guyana
- ◆ Ms. Imelde Sabushikime, Batwa, Burundi

Please note, that the selection of the candidates for the English and Russian speaking linguistic components of the programme is in progress and will be finalised soon.

The names of all selected candidates will be posted on the [fellowship website](#).

Senior Fellowship Position
A call for applications for the position of the 2013 "Senior Indigenous Fellow" will be posted in the coming weeks on the fellowship website.

Outreach

A promotional flyer for the OHCHR Indigenous Fellowship Programme has been updated and is available online in [English](#), [French](#), [Russian](#) and [Spanish](#). Please feel free to distribute the flyer as widely as possible.



Please note that a new web page dedicated to updates/news of our former fellows has been created and is available at www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/Pages/IndigenousFormerFellows.aspx

More information: www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/Pages/Fellowship.aspx

20th anniversary activities in Bangkok, Bishkek and Doha

As part of the activities commemorating the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Minorities Declaration, OHCHR organised regional events focusing on various aspects of minority protection in Bangkok, Bishkek and Doha.

Bangkok regional consultation

A regional consultation entitled “The role of the UN and other human rights and development actors in advancing the participation of minorities in poverty reduction and development strategies in South East Asia” took place in Bangkok, Thailand on 25 and 26 September 2012.

The consultation brought together 25 participants, including representatives of OHCHR Regional Office for South East Asia, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDP, IOM, UNFPA, UNESCAP, ILO, UN Women and a UN Resident Coordinator Specialist from the Vietnam Office. As a direct consequence of the consultation, several participants agreed to mainstream minority issues in their work.

Comments and recommendations made at the consultation can be useful also in the on-going and future work on the post-2015 development agenda, and in the inclusion of equality concerns in this process.

Expert workshop in Bishkek

On 18 and 19 October 2012 OHCHR organised in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan a regional expert workshop on minority participation in law enforcement.

The expert workshop “Effective participation of persons belonging to minorities in law enforcement: Building an inclusive and responsive police force and judiciary” brought together over 70 participants. They included representatives from nine countries of the region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Ukraine), international organizations, NHRIs, minority representative bodies, and NGO representatives, as well as international experts in the fields of minority rights, policing and judiciary.

The participants acknowledged the importance attached to deploying effort to further advancing minority rights with the aim of building a responsive and inclusive police force and judiciary in their respective countries. Toward this end, they agreed to a list of concrete and action oriented recommendations which could serve as guidelines in the work they undertake at the national level.

Consultation focusing on MENA

OHCHR also organised a regional consultation “Reflecting diversity in the process of constitutional reforms in the Middle East and North Africa” in cooperation with the UN Human Rights Training and Documentation Center for South-West Asia and the Arab Region in Doha, Qatar (19-20 November 2012).

The event focused on how to reflect diversity in the constitutional reform processes and enabled 25 experts including the Independent Expert on minority issues to explore thematic areas such as: diversity in the process of constitutional reforms, constitution-making towards an inclusive society, and implementation of constitution and human rights.

Participants also examined rapid constitutional developments in the MENA region and their impact on human rights and minorities.

Earlier anniversary events

Prior to these events OHCHR organised a Human Rights Council Panel in March 2012 as well as an expert seminar on the rights of religious minorities, which took place in May 2012 in Vienna, Austria.

More information:

www.ohchr.org/minorityrights2012



Events were held in Bangkok (left), Bishkek (bottom right) and Doha (top right)

Independent Expert on minority issues

The Independent Expert on minority issues, Rita Izsák, continued to raise attention to minority rights violations and to promote implementation of the Minorities Declaration in its 20th anniversary year, including through conducting country visits and sending communications to States.

She undertook thematic work in areas including the rights of linguistic minorities and, as required by the Human Rights Council, guided and prepared the annual session of the Forum on Minority Issues, which took place in November.

Country Visits

The Independent Expert (IE) visited Bosnia and Herzegovina from 17 to 25 September 2012 in order to examine the human rights situation of different minorities, including the Roma and other recognized national minorities, and those constituent peoples - Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs - who are minorities in the regions in which they live. In her

statement following the visit, the IE said that damaging political, ethnic and religious divisions continue to exist in the country. ([full statement](#))

Reports

In October, the IE presented her report to the 67th session of the General Assembly in New York. The report focused on the role and activities of national institutional mechanisms in promoting and protecting minority rights. ([full report](#)) In December she submitted her report to the 22nd session of the Human Rights Council focused on the rights of linguistic minorities which she will present in March 2013.

Statements

On 10 September, the IE joined two other UN independent experts in strongly condemning the destruction of Sufi religious and historic sites in various parts of Libya, and the intimidation and excessive use of force against unarmed protesters opposing the destruction. ([full statement](#))

On 31 October, the United Nations experts on Myanmar, minority issues and internally displaced persons expressed their deep concern over continuing inter-communal violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar that has led to loss of life, destruction of homes and mass displacement, and called on the Government to urgently address the underlying causes of the tension and conflict between the Buddhists and Muslim communities in the region. ([full statement](#))

Meetings

On 19-20 November 2012, the Independent Expert participated in the regional consultation "Reflecting diversity in the process of constitutional reforms in the Middle East and North Africa" in Doha, Qatar. The consultation was part of the activities, commemorating the 20th anniversary of the UN Minorities Declaration. (*see also page 5*)

More information: Independent Expert's website ([link](#))

OHCHR Minorities Fellowship Programme

The 2012 OHCHR Minorities Fellowship Programme took place in Geneva from 29 October to 30 November, bringing together nine minority rights advocates and building their capacity to better defend the rights of their communities.

Through the five-week programme offered in English and Arabic Mr. Iurie Caldarari (Moldova), Ms. Kandya Gisella Obezo Casseres (Colombia), Mr. Jugala Kishor Ranjito (India), Ms. Mabruka Abdulmajid Sebit (Kenya), Mr. Noman Yahya (Yemen), Mr. Irad Beldjebel (Algeria), Mr. Issa Al-Hewetat (Jordan), Mr. Samer Masouh and Ms. Rasha Yousef from Syria had the opportunity to learn more about the OHCHR and UN work to protect the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

They also attended the 5th session of the Forum on minority issues, where they were invited to present as assigned speakers, and benefited from

various workshops and trainings, including a media workshop and training in human rights education methodology. The programme involved 15 partner organisations, including UNITAR, UNHCR, OCHA, MRG International and UPR Info.

The call for applications for the 2013 Minorities Fellowship Programme will be posted on the programme website in March 2013.

More information:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Minorities/Pages/Fellowship.aspx>



2012 Minority Fellows and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navi Pillay.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (HC), has been consistently speaking up for the rights of indigenous peoples' and minorities.

On 10 September, in her opening remarks at the 21st session of the Human Rights Council, the HC said she continues to follow with concern the use of blasphemy laws against religious minorities in Pakistan. When referring to targeting of religious minorities, she stressed: "We need to condemn such acts and root out discriminatory laws and practices. We must not be selective; the rights of all religious minorities, in all regions merit our close attention." ([full statement](#))

On 27 September, the HC delivered a key note address in New York "Religious Minorities and Human Rights: An Urgent Agenda," in which she called for a strong commitment in order to ensure respect for freedom of religion or belief and protection of the rights of religious minorities. ([address in full](#))

On 18 October, the HC at a press conference marking her second term referred to minority rights in

the context of austerity measures and the economic crisis. ([full statement](#))

On 2 November, the HC urged Chinese authorities to promptly address the longstanding grievances in Tibetan areas. ([full statement](#))

On 7 November, the HC made a statement at the Bali Democracy Forum in which she touched upon the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities to full participation in decision-making processes. ([full statement](#))

On 13 November, following her mission to Indonesia, the HC noted that Indonesia needs to take firm action to address increasing levels of violence and hatred towards religious minorities and narrow and extremist-interpretations of Islam". ([full statement](#))

On 6 December, in a statement to the Fundamental Rights Conference 2012 held in Brussels, the HC emphasized the importance of access to justice for members of ethnic minorities, in particular the Roma and Travellers. ([full statement](#))

On 7 December, the HC expressed concern with Egypt's draft constitution, which guarantees freedom of faith, but only mentions three monotheistic religions, raising concern for all other religious groups including resident minorities such as the Baha'i community. ([full statement](#))

On 10 December, marking the Human Rights Day, the HC said that human rights are supposed to apply to everyone. No one should be excluded from any of them because they, inter alia, belong to a minority, worship a certain religion; or belong to a certain ethnic group. ([full statement](#)) On the same day the HC met with a prominent Kaiapo indigenous leader from Brazil, chief Raoni to discuss the impact of deforestation and damming of rivers in the Brazilian Amazon and recent initiatives likely to have further negative impact on indigenous peoples' rights.

Deputy High Commissioner Kyung-wha Kang, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, in a statement on 4 October also addressed the issue of persecution of minorities under the guise of domestic incitement laws. ([full statement](#))

Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council

Bolivia: Important challenges remain in the fight against racism

The Special Rapporteur on racism, Mr. Mutuma Ruteere, noted after his mission to Bolivia that Discrimination against indigenous peoples, Afro-Bolivians and other vulnerable communities and groups still persists, and this is exacerbated by underlying structural inequalities that reinforce their exclusion and vulnerability to racism and discrimination."

Mr. Ruteere also stressed access to justice still poses significant challenges to victims of racism and racial discrimination, in particular indigenous peoples, Afro-Bolivians and other vulnerable communities and groups. "The administration of justice is slow and expensive in general, and in many cases inaccessible for victims of racism and racial discrimination," he said. ([full statement](#))

UN expert calls on the new authorities: Build a new Somalia

The Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia, Mr. Shamsul Bari, welcomed the election of a new President and Speaker of the Parliament by Somalia's lawmakers and stressed that this is an opportunity for them to build a new Somalia.

"Killings of civilians must come to an end. Journalists must be protected. Vulnerable people such as women, children, internally displaced persons and minorities must get more attention. Displaced persons willing to return to their country must be helped to do so," Mr. Bari said.

"Upholding human rights obligations must be at the heart of the action of the forthcoming Government." ([full statement](#))

UN experts on Iran and freedom of religion concerned over situation

The Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, and freedom of religion or belief, Mr. Heiner Bielefeldt, welcomed the release of a Christian Pastor charged with apostasy.

However, they also expressed deep concern over the arrest and detention of hundreds of Christians over the past few years. They called on the authorities to "ease the current climate of fear in which many churches operate, especially protestant evangelical houses of worship."

Mr. Bielefeldt also noted that "the right to conversion in this context is an inseparable part of freedom of religion or belief." ([full statement](#))

Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council cont.

UK needs to keep on building a more inclusive society

The UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent warned that manifestations of racial discrimination that disproportionately affect people of African descent still exist in the UK.

“The move to take a more holistic approach to equality risks masking the inequalities faced particularly by people of African descent,” said Ms. Verene Shepherd who currently heads the group of independent experts, at their first official mission to the UK. “Despite the large amount of detailed data which highlight inequality faced by people of African descent, it does not appear as if the government acts fully on this evidence.”

The Group expressed concern that the austerity measures adopted in response to the current financial and economic crisis, threaten to dilute the UK’s achievements in the fight against racial discrimination. ([full statement](#))

Numerous challenges for Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

The Special Rapporteur on cultural rights, Ms. Farida Shaheed, noted at the end of her mission to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines that the country seems to be at an important juncture in its history.”

“Numerous challenges remain”, Ms. Shaheed stressed, “such as ensuring coherence between national policies on culture and tourism.” The expert recommended a procedure be established guaranteeing that the National Heritage Trust be systematically consulted prior to development projects likely to impact on cultural heritage. “Cultural impact assessments should be made prior to major private or public development projects.”

Ms. Shaheed underscored the importance of ensuring that all communities receive equal recognition, consideration and support from the State. ([full statement](#))

Governments need to protect the right of conversion

The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Mr. Heiner Bielefeldt, urged States to consistently respect, protect and promote the human right to freedom of religion or belief in the area of conversion.

“The right of conversion and the right not to be forced to convert or reconvert belong to the internal dimension of a person’s religious or belief-related conviction, which is unconditionally protected under international human rights law,” said Mr. Bielefeldt presenting his report to the UN General Assembly.

“While some members of religious or belief minorities experience pressure to join a religion or belief deemed more ‘acceptable’ in society, converts are often exposed to pressure to reconverting to their previous religion. Such pressure can be undertaken both by Government agencies and by non-State actors.” ([full statement](#), access to full report - [A/67/303](#))

States and businesses should reduce adverse impact on HR

The UN Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises called on States and businesses to address heightened risk of vulnerability of groups, affected by business activities.

These groups include indigenous peoples, and persons belonging to minorities. “States and business enterprises should adopt clear objectives, with measurable outcomes for implementation, and learn from the experiences of their peers,” current head of the Group, Mr. Selvanathan, stressed.

He urged them to scale up their efforts to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the global standard for preventing and addressing the risk of adverse impacts on human rights linked to business activity. ([full statement](#))

Human rights should lie at the heart of Myanmar’s reforms

The Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar, Mr. Tomás Ojea Quintana, stressed that the underlying causes of conflict between the Buddhist and Muslim communities in Rakhine State must be addressed as a priority.

“It is vital for the Government and all concerned to prevent further violence and to defuse tensions between the two communities,” said Mr. Ojea Quintana “Buddhist and Muslim communities continue to suffer from the violence in Rakhine State, so it is imperative that the Government pursues a policy of integration and long-term reconciliation between the two communities.

This will necessarily involve addressing the underlying causes of the tensions, which includes the endemic discrimination against the Rohingya community,” highlighted the Special Rapporteur. ([full statement](#))

Myanmar: Expert greets latest commitments on human rights

The Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar, Mr. Tomás Ojea Quintana, welcomed the latest commitments from the Government of Myanmar on human rights as significant steps forward in the reform process.

These pledges announced by the Government on 18 November include the resumption of prison visits for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the setting up of a mechanism to review prisoner lists, addressing the situation in Rakhine State, and an invitation to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish a country office.

In Rakhine State, the expert welcomed the commitment to strengthen the rule of law and highlighted the need to address the discrimination against the Rohingya community. ([full statement](#))

Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council cont.

Ensuring that Education for All objectives are met by 2015

The Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Mr. Kishore Singh, called on world governments to ensure that the right to education guides their efforts to meet the Education for All objectives of providing quality basic education to all children, youths and adults by 2015.

The expert called on governments to enact legislation to ensure minimum quality standards are set for teachers and educational curricula, and to address inequalities in education, particularly for girls, minorities and poor children. "States must take their international legal obligations seriously, and must ensure that their domestic legislation meets such obligations," he added.

"We must make sure not just that an ever greater number of students gain access to primary education, but that governments ensure education is an enforceable right for their citizens, is of high quality, and provided equally without discrimination." ([full statement](#))

Iraq: Despite some progress, serious problems remain

The respect and protection of human rights in Iraq remain fragile as the country continues its transition to peace and democracy, says the most recent Report on Human Rights in Iraq.

The report highlights that many ordinary Iraqi women, children, persons with disabilities and members of ethnic and religious groups continue to face varying degrees of discrimination in the full enjoyment of their basic rights – and that many Iraqis still have limited access to basic services, including health-care, education, and employment.

The report, which was produced by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq in cooperation with OHCHR, covers the period from 1 January to 30 June 2012. ([full report](#))

Geneva hosted the first Forum on Business and Human Rights

The first session of the Forum on Business and Human Rights, which took place in Geneva from 3 to 5 December, was attended by over 1000 participants.

The Forum was chaired by Mr. John Ruggie, former Special Representative to the Secretary-General on business and human rights, who stressed that "we have a widely accepted set of Principles for Human Rights and Business. The task now is to get to implementation in practice. To achieve this, we need to build capacity at both the country and corporate levels, and address challenges in specific contexts, such as business risks during conflicts and impacts on indigenous groups."

Puvan Selvanathan, the current Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Human Rights and Business, noted that the high number of participants demonstrates the urgency that people feel about this agenda. ([more info](#))

Syria Commission of Inquiry released a new update

The independent international Commission of Inquiry on Syria released its latest periodic update, covering the period 28 September to 16 December 2012.

The update describes the increasingly sectarian nature of the conflict, with Government forces and supporting militias attacking Sunni civilians, and reports of anti-Government armed groups attacking Alawites and other pro-Government minority communities, including Catholics, Armenian Orthodox and Druze.

Some minority communities, including Christians, Kurds and Turkmen, have also been caught up in the conflict, and in some cases forced to take up arms for their own defence or to take sides. ([full update](#))

Cambodia: Concerns with the implementation of land-titling

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Mr. Surya P. Subedi, conducted his eighth fact-finding mission to the country.

Though he was not able to meet with Government representatives, the expert welcomed the introduction of a land-titling programme by the Government to provide secure tenure for thousands of Cambodians. However, he pointed out, "there are a number of concerns about the implementation of this land-titling programme such as a lack of transparency, its impact on indigenous populations and how communities are chosen to be titled."

Among other observations, the Special Rapporteur expressed his concern about the culture of impunity in Cambodia and about the situation of freedom of expression in the country. ([full statement](#))

Guide to the new UN independent experts and mandates (2012)

In 2012, the Human Rights Council has created new mechanisms on the situation of human rights in Syria, Eritrea and Belarus, as well as human rights and the environment, transitional justice and international order.

The Human Rights Council has also appointed new independent experts for existing mandates. Currently, there are 36 thematic mandates and 12 mandates related to countries and territories, with a total of 72 mandate holders.

You can find more information on the newly established mandates as well as on the new experts, appointed in 2012, in the latest Guide to the new UN Independent Experts and Mandates, available [here](#).

Treaty bodies

Human Rights Committee (HRC)

HRC held its 106th session from 15 October to 2 November in Geneva. Minority issues were raised in the concluding observations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Portugal, and Turkey. Indigenous issues were raised in the adopted list of issues for Australia. ([session website](#))

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)

CESCR held its 49th session from 12 to 30 November in Geneva. Minority issues were raised for Bulgaria, Mauritania, and Tanzania; indigenous issues were raised for the Republic of Congo. Both indigenous and Afro-descendant issues were raised for Ecuador. ([session website](#))

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

CEDAW held its 53rd session from 1 to 19 October in Geneva. Indigenous issues were raised in the concluding observations for Chile. ([session website](#))

Committee against Torture (CAT)

CAT held its 49th session from 29 October to 23 November in Geneva. Minority issues were raised in the concluding observations for Norway and the Russian Federation; indigenous issues were raised for Mexico and Peru. ([session website](#))

Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

CRC held its 61st session from 17 September to 5 October in Geneva. Minority issues were raised in the concluding observations for Albania, Andorra, Austria, and Bosnia and Herzegovina; indigenous issues were raised for Namibia. Both indigenous and minority issues were raised for Canada. ([session website](#))

Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW)

CMW held its 17th session from 10 to 14 September in Geneva. Minority issues were raised in the concluding observations for Bosnia and Herzegovina. ([session website](#))

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPD)

CPD held its 8th session from 17 to 28 September in Geneva. Indigenous issues were raised in the concluding observations for Argentina, minority issues were raised for Hungary. ([session website](#))

More information: www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx

Universal Periodic Review Process

Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review process continued with the 14th Working Group session, held from 22 October to 5 November in Geneva.

In the 14th session minority issues were mentioned in the outcome of the review for Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Ghana, Republic of Korea, and Pakistan. Both indigenous and minority issues feature in the outcome documents for Argentina and Gabon.

At the time of preparing the Newsletter, the outcome documents were not accessible for Guatemala, Japan, Sri Lanka, Peru, and Ukraine.

15th session will take place from 21 January to 1 February 2013. States to be examined in the session are: France, Tonga, Romania, Mali, Botswana, Bahamas, Burundi, Luxembourg, Barbados, Montenegro, United Arab Emirates, Israel, Liechtenstein, and Serbia. ([tentative timetable](#))

Please note the *new modalities for NGOs* to register on the speakers' list for UPR reports' adoption ([link](#)).

More information: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRMain.aspx>

DEADLINES FOR THE CIVIL SOCIETY SUBMISSIONS, 17th UPR SESSION:

4 March 2013: China, Jordan, Mauritius, Mexico, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Senegal.

11 March 2013: Belize, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of Congo, Malaysia, Malta, Monaco.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND MINORITIES SECTION (IPMS)

Location/contacts:

OHCHR - IPMS
48 Avenue Giuseppe Motta
1202 Geneva, Switzerland

Tel: + 41 (0) 22 917 92 20
Fax: + 41 (0) 22 917 90 08
Web: www.ohchr.org

Mailing Address:

OHCHR - IPMS
Palais des Nations
Avenue de la Paix, 8-14
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland

Relevant OHCHR e-mail addresses:

Indigenous Fellowship:
fellowship@ohchr.org

Minorities Fellowship:
minorityfellowships@ohchr.org

**Voluntary Fund for Indigenous
Populations:**
IndigenousFunds@ohchr.org

**Expert Mechanism on the
Rights of Indigenous Peoples:**
expertmechanism@ohchr.org

**Special Rapporteur on the
rights of indigenous peoples:**
indigenous@ohchr.org

**Independent Expert on minority
issues:**
minorityissues@ohchr.org

Forum on Minority Issues:
minorityforum@ohchr.org

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

14 January-1 February: 62nd session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child ([session website](#))

21 January-1 February: 15th Session of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group ([UPR website](#))

11-15 February: 26th session of the Board of Trustees of the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations ([Fund website](#))

11 February-1 March: 82nd session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination ([session website](#))

11 February-1 March: 54th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women ([session website](#))

25 February-22 March: 22nd regular session of the Human Rights Council ([HRC website](#))

11-28 March: 107th session of the Human Rights Committee, Geneva ([session website](#))

8-19 April: 4th session of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances ([session website](#))

15-19 April: 9th session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ([session website](#))

15-26 April: 18th session of the Committee on Migrant Workers ([session website](#))

19 April-17 May: 50th session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ([session website](#))

6 May-31 May: 50th session of the Committee against Torture ([session website](#))

ONLINE DISCUSSION

An online discussion on [Minorities and Inequalities in the post-2015 development agenda](#) took place in early January. The discussion was co-moderated by Mark Lattimer (MRG International), Prof. Joshua Castellino (Middlesex University), Dr. Nazila Ghanea-Hercock (University of Oxford), and Graham Fox (OHCHR).

View the discussion at

www.worldwewant2015.org/node/287098
