In the spotlight:
Why Minorities Are at the Frontline of the World’s Forgotten Crises
On the Frontline: Why Minorities Are the Main Victims of the World’s Forgotten Crises

2 December 2016

Over the past few years a number of countries and regions around the world have seen the start or escalation of large-scale and complex conflicts and natural disasters - something which the media (and by extension the donor community) has rapidly picked up on. However, what is not always covered by the media is that minorities are disproportionately affected by the severe impacts of natural disasters and/or armed conflicts, the most obvious of which are widespread violence, human rights violations, poverty and food insecurity. This is due to the fact that, in most cases, systematic persecution, suppression and exclusion from decision-making processes prior to the escalation of violent conflicts or the occurrence of natural disasters has made those segments of the population much more vulnerable to harmful external shocks. In times of conflict, war and humanitarian crises, already beleaguered minority groups and indigenous people are thus the main victims of mass displacement, sexual violence, massacres, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

One of the world’s oft-forgotten humanitarian crises is the one faced by people of Ogaden, the Somali region of Ethiopia, where a recent drought has aggravated the enormous suffering of a population whose homeland has already been plagued by arid conditions, years of isolation, repression and exclusion from economic development. As a result, many Ogadenis have sought refuge in neighbouring Kenya, with some of them having to languish in refugee camps for months or even years. Meanwhile in Europe, the conflict around Russia’s illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula has lost much of the international attention it initially attracted – notwithstanding the fact that it led to the displacement of tens of thousands of indigenous Crimean Tatars. In Iraq, the plight of minority components, severely affected by the advance of ISIS, has also been largely ignored, despite huge shares of Turkmen, Yazidi and Assyrians being internally displaced and scattered across Iraq, with little to no access to even the most basic services.

In spite of the overwhelming odds they usually face, however, members of minority and indigenous groups are often active agents of positive democratic change and the protection of their respective communities’ basic human rights. While they often bear the brunt of poverty, governmental neglect and human rights abuses, as activists and human rights defenders, they put their lives on the line in defence of human rights and equal opportunities. In most cases, rather than opting for retaliation or revenge, they use non-violent approaches to protest against and change their situation.

By highlighting this fact while also raising the issue of minority protection in contexts of conflicts through events in international fora, such as the annual UN Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) aims to put the forgotten victims of this world’s forgotten crises back into the spotlight. Together with our members, we will continue to support the world’s beleaguered minorities and indigenous groups by all means possible, and to work towards a just global society where every population group - regardless of its size - enjoys equal protection and equal rights.
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT CONFERENCE ON GILGIT-BALTISTAN, BRUSSELS

9 November 2016

The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) organised a European Parliament conference entitled “A Recipe for Disaster: Environmental Degradation and Human Rights Violations in Pakistan-Occupied Gilgit-Baltistan”, which was hosted by Josep-Maria Terricabras MEP (Greens/EFA).

Bringing together leading experts in this field, the conference focused on environmental degradation and its correlation with human rights violations in the region. Apart from looking at Gilgit-Baltistan, the event also raised awareness of the immense human suffering which Islamabad’s policies are causing for the people of Sindh and Balochistan. A declaration adopted by the conference’s participants urges the European Commission to halt its trade incentives to Pakistan until the country fulfils its human rights obligation. To read more about the event, click here.

SPEAKOUT! INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING, THE HAGUE

9-11 November 2016

The 2016 edition of UNPO’s annual SpeakOut! - a three-day workshop which aims to train young activists to become reliable channels of human rights advocacy - took place in The Hague. The workshop focused particularly on youth empowerment, communication strategies and creative activism and included a half-day visit to the International Criminal Court.

MAPUZUNGUN DOCUMENTARY SCREENING AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, BRUSSELS

16 November 2016

UNPO, in cooperation with the Federación Mapuche de Estudiantes (FEMAE) and the Wühlefe Foundation, organized a screening of the documentary film “Zuguleaín (We Will Speak) – The Struggle to Revitalize the Mother Tongue of the Mapuche” at the European Parliament. Hosted by Izaskun Bilbao Barandica MEP (ALDE), the event raised awareness for the cause of the Mapuche and their struggle to keep their endangered traditional language alive. The documentary focuses on the first Mapuzungun language camp which was organized in 2015 in Wallmapu, the tradition territory of the Mapuche in Chile. To read more about the screening, click here.

UPDATE: 10 OUT OF 13 IRA-MUARIANITY ANTI-SLAVERY ACTIVISTS RELEASED FROM PRISON

18 November 2016

On 18 November 2016, after months of lobbying and direct actions, the appeal court in Zouerat has released 10 out of the 13 imprisoned anti-slavery activists of IRA Mauritania. On 18 August 2016, the 13 anti-slavery activists had been sentenced to 3 to 15 years in prison after what had been denounced as a sham trial by local and international observers. The activists had reportedly been tortured in custody, something the prosecution denied. UNPO welcomes the release of ten of the IRA members, but expresses concern over the fate of the three anti-slavery activists still held in prison and urges the government in Nouakchott to immediately put an end to the ongoing crackdown on civil society organisations in Mauritania. To learn more about recent developments in Mauritania, click here.

CONFERENCE ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST, ROTTERDAM

19 November 2016

UNPO, in collaboration with Komalay Jhani Rojhelat, the International Organization for Iranian-Kurdish Women, organised a conference at the Laurenskerk in Rotterdam, Netherlands, on 19 November 2016. The event entitled “The Role of Women in the Middle East: How to Obtain More Rights for Women and Build a Better Democracy?” was followed by a meeting of the members of Komalay Jhani Rojhelat.

WORKSHOP ON MARGINALIZED GROUPS IN ELECTIONAL PROCESSES, STOCKHOLM

22-23 November 2016

UNPO took part in a workshop hosted by International IDEA in Stockholm, entitled “Marginalized Groups in Electoral Processes: Challenges and Strategies for Inclusion” on 22-23 November 2016. The workshop brought together electoral assistance providers, experts on elections and inclusion, as well as IDEA’s regional and international staff. UNPO discussed the challenges faced by marginalized groups in their attempt to effectively participate in electoral processes as voters and candidates and presented good practices to enhance marginalized group’s electoral participation with a particular focus on the case of Ogaden.

XXII. UNPO PRESIDENCY MEETING, GENEVA

26-27 November 2016

On. 26 and 27 November 2016, UNPO convened its XXII Presidency meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, which focused on discussions of past and future activities and strategic goals of the organization, as well as the upcoming XIII General Assembly meeting in 2017. During the 22nd Session, current members of the Presidency also discussed a number of membership applications. UNPO is thus happy to welcome its newest member: the World Sindhi Congress.

TRAIN THE TRAINER SESSION, GENEVA

23 November 2016

The UNPO Secretariat organized the final session of the “Unrepresented Diplomats” project, a Training the Trainers workshop which took place in Geneva on 23 November 2016. The workshop which saw the participation of eleven participants from different communities, served as an opportunity to draw together what was learnt in the three previous workshops of the “Unrepresented Diplomats” project (in Geneva, Oxford and Brussels). Participants learnt different ways to disseminate the knowledge they gained with the aim to strengthen the work of their respective groups and communities.

UN FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES & UNPO SIDE-EVENT ON MINORITIES AND HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES

24-25 November 2016

UNPO representatives partook in the 9th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, taking place in Geneva. On the occasion of this year’s session, UNPO, in collaboration with the Society for Threatened Peoples, convened a side-event entitled “Forgotten Crises, Forgotten Victims: Minorities and Humanitarian Challenges” on 25 November 2016. The event drew attention to the multiple challenges minority groups face in situations of “forgotten” humanitarian crises, and offered a platform for minority representatives to discuss different coping strategies and measures to address various humanitarian challenges, based on their own experiences. To read more about it, click here.
FACT-FINDING MISSION WITH MEPs, BRAZIL

5-9 December 2016

Against the background of the alarming situation in which indigenous people find themselves at the moment, UNPO and Francisco Assis MEP (S&D) will organize a fact-finding mission to Brazil, supported by the Nando Peretti Foundation. The aim of this mission in which four MEPs will participate is to remind the Brazilian government that its actions concerning indigenous rights are being closely watched by the international community. Through an intensive programme which will combine visits to indigenous communities, high-level meetings and hearings at the Brazilian National Congress, the mission will pave the way for the establishment of an EP Support Group for Brazilian Indigenous Peoples.

AHWAZI CONFERENCE AT THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, LONDON

6 December 2016

The Ahwaz Human Rights Organization and UNPO, supported by the Peter Tatchell Foundation, will be organizing the launch of the Ahwaz Environment Report at the House of Parliament. The meeting is sponsored by Baroness Jones of the Green Party. The report covers issues such as man-made desertification and Ahwaz City being the world’s most polluted city, and calls upon the UK and EU to implement corporate social responsibility to ensure sustainable development and enhance environmental protection. For more information, click here.

UNPO FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT, THE HAGUE

11 December 2016

UNPO, in collaboration with the municipality of The Hague and a number of other organizations will be organizing a football tournament for unrepresented nations. Twelve to sixteen teams will participate in the competition.

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EU PANEL WATCH DEBATE ON DIVERSITY, BRUSSELS

12 December 2016

UNPO will take part in a debate by EUPanelWach, focusing on ethnic, religious, linguistic and gender diversity in Brussels-based events. The discussion will be an occasion for local and international NGOs to reflect upon why speaking events in Brussels tend to show a persistent lack of diversity, and on how better, more diverse debates which empower and inspire the next generation of leaders can be achieved.

Upcoming Events:

5-9 December: Fact-Finding Mission with MEPs – Brazil
6 December: Ahwazhi Conference at the House of Commons – London
11 December: UNPO Football Tournament – The Hague
12 December: EU Panel Watch Debate on Diversity – Brussels
12 December: ITI Conference at the Bavarian Parliament – Munich
14 December: Hearing on Iranian Minorities – Strasbourg
15-17 December: European Language Diversity Forum – Donostia/San Sebastián

ITI CONFERENCE AT THE BAVARIAN PARLIAMENT, MUNICH

12 December 2016

The İliham Tohti Initiative (İTI), together with UNPO will convene a joint conference at the Bavarian Parliament, hosted by Ms Margarethe Bause, head of the Bavarian section of the German Green Party. The event entitled ‘Prof İliham Tohti and the Human Rights of Uyghurs’ will focus on the situation of Prof Tohti, an Uyghur academic imprisoned for life for promoting intercultural understanding between Uyghurs and Han Chinese.

DISCUSSION ON IRANIAN MINORITIES AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, STRASBOURG

14 December 2016

During the Plenary Session in Strasbourg, the EP Delegation for Relations with Iran (D-IR) will hold an internal meeting focusing on the situation of Iranian minorities. The meeting will see representatives of several UNPO members take the floor and tell the delegation and other attendees about the situation of their respective communities, as well as giving insights into the general situation of minorities in Iran and the developments following the adoption of the so-called Nuclear Deal.

EUROPEAN LANGUAGE DIVERSITY FORUM & PROTOCOL TO ENSURE LANGUAGE RIGHTS, DONOSTIA

15-17 December 2016

On 15-16 December, the European Language Diversity Forum will be held in Donostia-San Sebastián. The event will gather experts and representatives from organizations working on the defence and revitalization of regional or minority languages. The Forum intends to be a meeting place where civil society organizations, researchers and public administrators will reflect on and discuss the factors having an impact on the development of European languages, as well as analyze the current difficulties and opportunities for further progress in this regard. On 17 December, the Donostia Protocol, finalized by a committee of a variety of organizations including UNPO, will be released and presented to the public. The Protocol will be send to international organizations and shall serve as a guideline to ensure language rights for minority and regional communities in Europe and beyond.

We rely on financial support from our Members and friends to continue our work each year. Such donations are crucial to ensure the continued full participation and engagement of a great number of unrepresented communities, indigenous peoples, minorities and occupied or unrecognized territories.

The 2015-16 Secretary General’s Activity Report provides an overview of the activities we have been working on over the past years with the help of our partners. Please do also spread the word about UNPO or invite your friends to like our Facebook page or follow us on Twitter.

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