

UNPO Side Event Recommendations

Minority Empowerment: A Human Rights Approach to Counter Statelessness

Eleventh Session of the Forum on Minority Issues

In the context of the 11th UN Forum on Minority Issues, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) organised a side event titled 'Minority Empowerment: A Human Rights Approach to Counter Statelessness'. The conference focused on *de facto* statelessness understood as exclusion from effective participation in economy, politics and culture. This was done by analysing the interconnection of statelessness and systematic discrimination. Empowering minorities can thus be argued as viable response, in order to counter statelessness and human rights violations.

UNPO was chairing the conference, which counted speakers from the Ogaden Youth and Student Union, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Foundation, the Non-Resident Madheshis Association, and Friends of Kabylia.

There was a general scepticism towards what was perceived as indifference and inaction from the international community. Thus, all speakers requested a more outspoken human rights centred approach. Additionally, the panel identified a number of root causes to be taken into account and a number of suitable responses relevant for both minority communities themselves, as well as state actors and international institutions. The following are the main conclusions and recommendations from the two panels, addressed to the Forum's Secretariat as a contribution to the reflections of the Special Rapporteur and his team on the topic of statelessness.

Identified root causes of *de facto* statelessness:

- **Economic exploitation and power** are incentives for arbitrarily constructing narratives of false enemies (such as terrorists, insurgents, etc.), which potentially incites discrimination, exclusion and violence;
- **Negligence**, limiting the possibility of effective access to education, healthcare or other forms of basic services and of participation in society, is a key aspect reproducing prejudice and discrimination;
- **All forms of discrimination and exclusion** have to be addressed, whether they are institutionalised, cultural, social, economic or religious, but also when they are internalised by minorities themselves;
- **History** is an essential part of understanding a conflict. Remnants of conflicts and repressions created by colonialist dynamics are still present and reproduced by the more powerful actor;
- **Language barriers** prevent minorities from enjoying effective citizenship.

Identified constructive responses:

- **Working broadly and intersectionally with civil society and communities**, such as community leaders, civil society, teaching institutions, students, companies, etc.
- **Emphasising and celebrating history and culture** can be a way of empowering minorities
- **Making people aware of their rights** and the effective means of how to secure them is essential.
- **Encouraging third parties** (sponsors, partners, companies, governments, etc.), who directly or indirectly cooperate and enable systems of discriminations, to change their practices.
- **Being open and transparent to international observers and media** is key in ensuring accountability in the struggle against statelessness. This includes actively engaging observers and reporters freely.
- **Being aware of how geopolitics can be a challenge/advantage**. Some actors might be opportunistic and others might have other interests which they weigh higher.
- **Organising and including the diaspora** in the struggle against statelessness is important, taking advantage of their privileges and additional opportunities.