Madame Chair,

The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization acknowledges the intrinsic challenges faced by minority populations in participating effectively in economic life. Communities are often numerically small and geographically dispersed, residing in rural areas far from the centers of political and economic power.

However, as we have heard from many at this Forum, these natural and expected challenges are exacerbated by the exploitative tactics of powerful corporations and governments. This is most keenly felt in regions rich with natural resources. Minority communities bear the costs of resource extraction and development projects but they rarely share in the profits. The political and economic marginalization of minorities in these regions leaves them without any recourse for the economic, environmental and social damages wrought by such projects.

This is a key area inadequately addressed in the largely excellent draft paper. Different forms of self-determination may be a concrete step to advance and build the capacity of minorities to participate effectively. As a start, we suggest reference to the very basic concept of Free Prior and Informed Consent, not only in the recommendations to governments, but also those directed at the private business sector, international financial institutions and development agencies.

A second area requiring attention in the draft paper relates to paragraphs 16 and 17. Indeed, targeted approaches are necessary to address socio-economic exclusion of minorities, and in order to do that, quality disaggregated data must be gathered.

However, several states do not allow minority groups to self-identify in their preferred manner. As an example, the Batwa of Rwanda cannot call themselves such – they are instead constitutionally labeled one of several ”historically marginalized communities” – which suggests that they no longer suffer discrimination or marginalization and has the effect of limiting specific and targeted programs to assist impoverished Batwa communities.

If communities cannot identify themselves in an adequate and accurate manner, targeted, affirmative action cannot take place. Equally and very significantly, the level and severity of discrimination cannot be monitored or addressed.

The direct damage caused by the theft of resources is a fundamental barrier to the effective economic participation of minorities. Even more fundamental is the ability of groups to determine and declare their own identity. If minorities are to ever truly achieve effective participation in economic life, attention must be given to addressing these two issues. We therefore hope these points can be incorporated into the final recommendation paper.

Thank you.