

GENEVA (19 March 2014) – The United Nations Independent Expert on minority issues, Rita Izsák, urged greater international and national attention to the plight of disadvantaged minorities, “who are frequently the poorest of the poor and constitute many of the world’s most economically, politically and socially discriminated against and marginalized communities.”

“Millions of people belonging to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities worldwide are trapped in a cycle of discrimination, exclusion, poverty and underdevelopment from which they cannot break free without targeted attention being given to their situations,” Ms. Izsák said during the presentation of her latest report* to the UN Human Rights Council.

“Disadvantaged minorities should be among the first targets of development strategies, yet too often they have been among the last,” the expert stressed. She challenged States and development actors to do more to ensure that the new post-2015 development goals and strategies respond to the situation of the most deprived minorities.

The expert’s report singles out lack of attention to the situation of minorities as one of the most serious deficiencies of the UN Millennium Development Goals. “The rise of inequality has severely undermined the achievements in many States,” Ms. Izsák warned. “Future development goals must include dedicated attention to minorities to contribute to closing the inequality gap.”

“It is crucial to establish specific targets for States on the inclusion of minorities and specific indicators upon which to measure progress within the framework of a strong equality-focused post-2015 development goal or goals,” the expert noted among her recommendations to the UN Human Rights Council.

“The participation of minorities should be ensured and increased in all phases of planning, implementation and evaluation of new development goals,” she underscored.

Ms. Izsák also reminded the Human Rights Council that growing inequalities together with poor governance seriously endanger the peace and stability of societies. She noted the impact on minorities of new and ongoing conflicts, including in Central African Republic, Myanmar, South Sudan and Syria, and pointed to factors including the impact of the global financial crisis on minorities.

UN expert calls for targeted action to confront the plight of deprived minorities globally

The report presents data from various regions highlighting the disproportionate impact of poverty on minorities. In education, for example, in 2009, of the world's 101 million children out of school, an estimated 50–70 per cent were from minorities or indigenous peoples. People belonging to minorities frequently die younger, suffer from higher rates of disease and struggle more to access health services compared to the rest of the population.

“Disadvantaged minorities experience greater food insecurity and often lack adequate water and hygiene facilities or constant and affordable energy,” Ms. Izsák warned. “When natural disaster strikes reports suggest that minorities may be more deeply affected, have weaker coping strategies, and have sometimes been neglected or excluded from humanitarian responses.”

During her address to the Human Rights Council, the Independent Expert also presented her mission report* on Cameroon and the recommendations of the Forum on Minority Issues*.

(* Check the Independent Expert's reports to the Human Rights Council:
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Pages/ListReports.aspx>

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Ms. Rita Izsák (Hungary) was appointed as Independent Expert on minority issues by the Human Rights Council in June 2011 to promote the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. As Independent Expert, she is independent from any government or organisation and serves in her individual capacity. Learn more:
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Minorities/IEExpert/Pages/IEminorityissuesIndex.aspx>

Check the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities:
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Minorities.aspx>

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