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| Forum: | Human Right Council |
| Issue: | Guaranteeing measures to secure and protect the rights of all minorities to ensure the right and ability to vote |
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Introduction

All countries in the world include persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, enriching the diversity of their societies. Although a great variety of minority situations exist, common to all is the fact that, too often, minorities face multiple forms of discrimination resulting in marginalisation and exclusion. Achieving effective participation of minorities and ending their exclusion requires that we embrace diversity through the promotion and implementation of international human rights standards.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities is the document which sets essential standards and offers guidance to States in adopting appropriate legislative and other measures to secure the voting rights of persons belonging to minorities.

Overall, States through their commitments under treaty law, and minorities themselves, or their representatives can influence the human rights monitoring and implementation procedures and work toward securing effective participation and inclusion.

“Minorities in all regions of the world continue to face serious threats, discrimination and racism, and are frequently excluded from taking part fully in the political, social and cultural life available to the majorities in the countries or societies where they live.”

Navanethem Pillay, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (Statement on Human Rights Day, 10 December 2009)

The fundamental pillar of human rights and minority legal protection are the principles of non-discrimination and equality which constitute the basis of all core human rights treaties. They apply to everyone in relation to all human rights and freedoms and prohibit discrimination on the basis of a list of non-exhaustive categories such as race, colour, religion, language, nationality and ethnicity. Through respect for these two principles, the enjoyment of many human rights can be secured, including the right to effective participation in decision-making by minorities and in particular minority women.

Minority rights are being increasingly recognized as an integral part of the United Nation's work for the promotion and protection of human rights, sustainable human development, peace and security. OHCHR has a leading role within the UN system in this respect, as the Office has highlighted countering discrimination as one of its thematic priorities in the period from 2010 to 2013. OHCHR is also taking a lead in the Inter-Agency work on minority issues, in line with Article 9 of the [Declaration](#), by ensuring that coordinated effort is made towards advancing and prioritising minority rights throughout the UN system.

Definition of Key Terms

Minority Group

A category of people differentiated from the social majority, those who hold the majority of positions of social power in a society, and it may be defined by law.

Gender / Sexual Minority

A sexual minority is a group whose sexual identity, orientation or practices differ from the majority of the surrounding society. It can also refer to genderqueer, intersex, transgender or third gender individuals. The term is primarily used to refer to LGB individuals, particularly gay people.

Religious Minority

a religion held by a minority of the population of a country, state, or region. Minority religions may be subject to stigma or discrimination. An example of a stigma is using the term cult with its extremely negative connotations for certain new religious movements.

Political Minority

One of the most controversial minorities in the United States and various other countries has been communists. Along with the Red Scare and execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg the United States ran open campaigns to eliminate communism in the United

States. An important note is that not all people who were persecuted as communists actually were. Many civil rights activists of various types were also seen as pushing a communist agenda of equality.

Ethnic Minority

a group that has different national or cultural traditions from the main population. e.g. an immigrant or racial group regarded by those claiming to speak for the cultural majority as distinct and unassimilated.

Age Minority

The elderly, while traditionally influential or even dominant in the past, are now usually reduced to the minority role of economically 'non-active' groups. Children can also be understood as a minority group in these terms, and the discrimination faced by the young is known as adultism. Discrimination against the elderly is known as ageism.

Key Issues

The Voting Rights Act of 1965

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is a landmark piece of federal legislation in the United States that prohibits racial discrimination in voting. It was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson during the height of the American Civil Rights Movement on August 6, 1965, and Congress later amended the Act five times to expand its protections.

Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act

It is a United States federal law dealing with elections and voting rights for United States citizens residing overseas. The act requires that all U.S. states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands allow certain U.S. citizens to register to vote and to vote by absentee ballot in federal elections. The act is **Public Law 99-410** and was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan on August 28, 1986

Major Parties Involved

United States

Eligibility to vote in the United States is established both through the federal constitution and by state law. Several constitutional amendments (the 15th, 19th, and 26th

specifically) require that voting rights cannot be abridged on account of race, color, previous condition of servitude, sex, or age for those above 18; the constitution as originally written did not establish any such rights during 1787–1870. In the absence of a specific federal law or constitutional provision, each state is given considerable discretion to establish qualifications for suffrage and candidacy within its own respective jurisdiction; in addition, states and lower level jurisdictions establish election systems, such as at-large or single member district elections for county councils or school boards.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

| Date | Description of Event |
|------|---|
| 1790 | Voting Limited to White Male Property Owners Only white male adult property-owners have the right to vote. |
| 1810 | Last religious prerequisite for voting is eliminated. |
| 1850 | Property ownership and tax requirements eliminated by 1850. Almost all adult white males could vote. |
| 1855 | Connecticut adopts the nation's first literacy test for voting. Massachusetts follows suit in 1857. The tests were implemented to discriminate against Irish-Catholic immigrants. |
| 1870 | The 15th Amendment is passed. It gives former slaves the right to vote and protects the voting rights of adult male citizens of any race. |
| | The 19th Amendment guarantees women's suffrage. |
| 1920 | Seventy-two years after the Seneca Falls Convention first called for women's voting rights, the 19th Amendment is ratified. Only one person who had signed the convention's Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, Charlotte Woodward, is still alive and able to exercise her right to vote. |

1957

The Civil Rights Act is the first civil rights law enacted since Reconstruction. It creates the Commission on Civil Rights to investigate voting rights complaints and authorizes the Justice Department to take legal action, but it has a slow start. Sen. Strom Thurmond sustains a one-man filibuster for 24 hours and 18 minutes to try to stop the bill.

1962

Rural citizens, who were mostly white, had greater proportional representation than their counterparts in the cities, where ethnic minorities and blacks primarily lived. Reversing a previous ruling, the Supreme Court says the courts, rather than state legislatures, can resolve the issue. After the ruling, many redistricting challenges are brought to the courts.

1964

Shortly after President John F. Kennedy's death, President Lyndon Johnson proposes and Congress passes the Civil Rights Act of 1964, one of the most important pieces of legislation in U.S. history. The law bars discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, religion and sex in voting, public accommodations, the workplace and schools.

1965

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. launches a voter registration drive in Selma, Ala., where the voting rolls are 99 percent white and 1 percent African American, even though African Americans outnumber whites. No African Americans are added to the rolls. Racial violence in the South prompts President Lyndon Johnson to call for a strong national voting rights law that directly addresses voting discrimination. The law bans literacy tests and sends federal examiners to Southern states to register African American voters.

1971

Voting age for all elections lowered to age 18. The change was largely in response to the Vietnam War and the feeling that young

people who are old enough to die for their country are old enough to vote.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The protection of the rights of minorities is provided for under article 30 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. However, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* is the document which sets essential standards and offers guidance to States in adopting appropriate legislative and other measures to secure the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

Possible Solution

While eliminating all the discrimination towards political minorities, religion minorities, sexual minorities, age minorities, and ethnic minorities is arguably the “best” solution, it is usually not the easiest and fastest solution as discrimination is hard to be eliminated at all and requires long process.

In addition, education and public awareness, while seemingly trite and inefficient solutions, can help to protect and secure the voting right of minorities by making the population aware of the threats posed by majorities.

The issue of lesser developed countries is yet another concern. Since they have low quality of education and public awareness about voting right discrimination towards minorities. We need more attention about this issue from its government.

For example, to protect the voting right of gender minorities such as women, Legislation in some States contains provisions to ensure gender equality and to promote the participation of women in political life. Such legislative measures to enhance gender equality include the adoption of specific legislation to promote women’s participation, in addition to general non-discrimination provisions. This usually implies the introduction of temporary special measures, most often candidate quotas for the underrepresented gender and at times with additional ranking requirements. In other states gender equality legislation is completely lacking.

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