

MRG Statement at the UPR Pre-session on 8th December 2021 at 11h00 CET

Excellencies, state delegates virtually present! I thank you all for giving me this opportunity to make this statement on behalf of Minority Rights Group International (MRG).

MRG works to secure the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples, and to promote minority rights and cooperation between communities worldwide. The statement I am presenting relates to the human rights of minority and indigenous communities in Uganda with a focus on education, health and land. It should be remembered that in the previous review there were no explicit recommendations addressing issues of minority and indigenous communities

As a country, Uganda is endowed with multi-tribal population composition and the 1995 constitution explicitly recognizes 56 tribes and recent amendments place them at 65. Among these tribes, some have become minority, not only in numbers, but also in terms of their socio-economic and political inclusion. The minority communities are found in different regions of the country.

Although there exist many good national legal and Policy frameworks that spell out how citizens' rights should be respected and protected, there have been inequalities among various communities in Uganda stemming from lack of mechanisms to ensure all citizens enjoy government services evenly. The most affected communities have been minorities who lag behind as far as development programmes are concerned. For example Bagungu, Banyabindi, Batuku, Batwa, Benet, Maragoli, Ngikutio and Tepeth in Uganda continue to suffer disempowerment and discrimination on economic, social and cultural grounds. I will make three points.

Firstly, regarding access to health. Although all communities in Uganda are expected to access available health services without discrimination, there is limited statistics on the levels of access and use of health services by ethnic minorities. No disaggregated data on access to health services by ethnic minorities is readily available to inform planning of health programmes.

The Benet who are still squatting on the national park land face somewhat peculiar challenges since no health facilities can be constructed on such land. They have to go down mountain for health services which poses a great risk in case of emergencies such as maternal related services or epidemic outbreak.

Secondly, regarding access to education. The ethnic minorities are found in the remotest parts of the country. The schools available are universal primary free schools often characterized by poor quality in terms of infrastructure and teachers. Children belonging to ethnic minorities have to trek long distances to reach these schools. For example, the Batwa and Benet who live at the peripheral of other communities walk long distances to access schools.

Children of ethnic minorities like Batwa do not attend school regularly and experience high school dropout rates since they cannot afford the cost of education such as school uniform, scholastic materials among others. Lack of income make it impossible for minority peoples to afford quality education majorly offered in private schools concentrated in urban areas and very expensive.

Finally, regarding the issue of land. Most of the minority and indigenous peoples were evicted from their ancestral land with an aim of creating national parks. This resulted into persistent landlessness, extreme poverty conditions, isolation, exclusion and discrimination affecting their economic livelihoods and social cultural lifestyles. These communities live as squatters on other people's land,

for example, some Batwa in Kisoro and Kabale, Banyabindi in Kasese and Benet on land belonging to Mt Elgon National Park.

The discovery of natural resources such as oil and gas and gold in Albertine and Karamoja regions respectively came as a blessing in terms boosting economic growth and creating jobs to Ugandans. However, the Bagungu in Buliisa district continue to lose land to the oil and gas sector with no adequate compensation, hence affecting their livelihoods that heavily depend on land.

I'd like to end with 5 key recommendations. Minority Rights Group, therefore, invites states to call on the government of Uganda to:

- *Construct and adequately equip more health facilities in areas occupied by ethnic minorities so that all health services come nearer to the local community to minimize death that are occasioned by long distances.*
- *Build schools in areas occupied by ethnic minorities with qualified and enough teachers and adequate learning/teaching materials to improve and increase access to education and enhance retention in schools and completion.*
- *Institute bursary schemes for secondary schools and higher institutions targeting ethnic minority children as a way of affirmative action.*
- *Pay prompt, adequate and fair compensation to ethnic minority communities that have been displaced from their ancestral lands by government actions that include preservation or conservation and exploitation of extractives.*
- *Adopt appropriate national legislation and policy to address the landlessness among ethnic minorities and indigenous communities caused by the creation of conservation areas.*

I thank you