



(13)

**NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF NIGERIA INTERVENTION ON THE DRAFT
RECOMMENDATION OF THE FIFTH FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES HOLDING IN GENEVA. 27-28 NOVEMBER,
2012**

Mister/Madame Chair,

Thank you for giving me this opportunity. On behalf of the National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria (NHRC), I would like to sincerely commend the efforts of the organisers of this forum.

Nigeria is a diverse country with at least 450 distinct ethnic groups. One could say that majority of Nigerians are minorities and therefore minorities are actually in the majority. In recognition of this fact, the Commission has created 'Minorities' as one of its core thematic areas of focus and is promoting the mainstreaming of minority rights in its human rights education outreach.

The recently amended NHRC Act gives the commission broad powers to adequately fulfil its mandate and implement various human rights instruments including the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

In line with the draft recommendations, the NHRC is in the process of opening offices in all 36 states of Nigeria, to *inter alia* increase knowledge of local minority issues, monitor situations and respond to complaints on minority issues. All offices of the Commission have staff that are proficient in the local languages and dialects of the resident minorities. The commission is also in the process of training and deploying desk officers to all Federal Ministries and Government departments to serve as a focal point on minority and other human rights related issues.

Nigeria is currently going through security challenges that have as an underlying cause, the alleged marginalisation of certain minorities. What is perceived, as religious violence is often agitation structured around competing identity claims based on ethnicity and the competition for land and other natural resources. The NHRC is working with the National Assembly of Nigeria to encourage the amendment of the Constitution to resolve the indigene verses Citizen question that will ensure the protection of migratory minorities amongst others. The National Assembly of Nigeria has sent a powerful delegation to this Forum to show its commitment to the protection of minorities.

20 years after the Declaration, it still remains crucial to the work of the NHRC. As we seek to build on the progress we have made in the protection of minority rights, the draft recommendations will take us one step closer to that goal of equal treatment, equal protection, and equal rights of men and women of all nations.

Thank you.

-Professor Bem Angwe,
Executive Secretary and CEO, National Human Rights Commission, Nigeria
bemangwe@yahoo.co.uk
www.nhrc.gov.ng