

A woman in traditional white and black attire is performing a dance in front of a wooden building. She is wearing a black headpiece with white beads and a long white skirt with a black sash. Her arms are raised, and she is looking to the side. The background shows a wooden building with a corrugated metal roof and a window. The sky is blue with some clouds.

minority
rights
group
international

Strategy 2013-2016



Cover: An Armenian girl performs a traditional dance in Tbilisi, Georgia. Iva Zimova/Panos.



Back cover: Mbororo families in this village in Cameroon suffer grinding poverty and have virtually no possessions apart from a few cooking pots and basic furniture. MRG/Emma Eastwood.

Who we are

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Minority Rights Group International (MRG) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) working to secure the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples worldwide and to promote cooperation and understanding between communities.

Our activities are focused on international advocacy, training and education, legal cases, publishing and media. We are guided by the needs expressed by our worldwide network of partner organizations which represent minorities and indigenous peoples.

MRG works with over 150 organizations in over 50 countries. Our governing Council has members from 10 different countries.

MRG has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

MRG is registered as a charity, no. 282305, and a company limited by guarantee in the UK no. 1544957.

Introduction

Around the globe, a large number of people are struggling to create decent lives for themselves and their families, the odds stacked against them from birth. They are only asking for a fair chance on a level playing field. Instead, their chances are blighted by racism, by ignorance, by prejudice and by silence.

They may struggle to get a good job (or any job) simply because they belong to a community which is seen as inferior.

Their children may struggle to get a good education as schools are too far away, overcrowded, or under-resourced.

Their voices are ignored by the rest of society. No one values their opinion. They are rarely seen anywhere close to the corridors of power.

They just don't count.

The list of communities they belong to is a long one. From Afro-Descendants in the Americas, Batwa in Central Africa, Dalits in South Asia, Roma in

Europe, through to Yezidis and Zoroastrians in the Middle East, and so many more... .

They represent humanity in all its diversity but they all have in common the fact that they are among the most excluded, the most threatened and often the poorest, communities worldwide: minorities and indigenous peoples.

For over 40 years, we at MRG have worked with minority and indigenous communities.

We work with them to tackle the discrimination they experience.

We empower them to speak out about the injustice and violence that they suffer.

We document how their needs are not being met, and how their communities are threatened.

We enable them to claim their human rights.



Above: Activists gather in Avinada Paulista, São Paulo, Brazil, to protest against the Belo Monte Dam in June 2011. Pedro Ribeiro.



Minorities of concern to MRG are disadvantaged ethnic, national, religious, linguistic or cultural groups who are fewer in number than the rest of the population and who may wish to maintain and develop their identity. MRG also works with indigenous peoples.

The challenges today

Threats to minorities and indigenous peoples around the globe have changed since MRG was founded over 40 years ago.

Nearly two decades after the Rwandan and Bosnian genocides, it is clear that levels of inter-community and religious tension are again rising fast in many parts of the world. The resurgence of ethnic and religious nationalism, fractures associated with the 'war on terror' and a backlash at growing levels of migration have all placed minority communities under renewed threat. In particular the huge changes taking place across the Middle East and North Africa, while increasing hopes for democratisation, have left many minorities living in fear.

At the same time, studies by UN agencies and the World Bank show that a large and growing proportion of those communities left behind in the race to meet the Millennium Development Goals are in fact minorities and indigenous peoples, with poverty rates typically double national averages. Development programmes can perversely have the effect of

increasing inequality unless minorities are able to participate and their rights are protected. Climate change and unprecedented demand for the world's remaining resources are increasing competition over land, but minorities and indigenous peoples are in a weak or vulnerable enough position that governments and corporations can take away what they have, knowing there will be few repercussions.

That these grave challenges are now being officially recognized by leading agencies nonetheless presents a major opportunity. There is now an international legal framework to protect minority and indigenous rights, but we need to ensure that these standards are implemented on the ground and that the fruits of democratisation are enjoyed by all.

The social media revolution and the expansion in mobile technology mean that, with the right support, the voices of minority and indigenous communities can be heard globally as never before. These opportunities cannot be missed.



Above: Roma children in Azerbaijan.
MRG/Neil Clarke.

Left: Members of Pakistan's Sikh minority pray at a temple in Hassanabdal.
MRG/Jared Ferrie.



Our approach to bringing about change

Our approach is to support the voices of minority and indigenous communities on the ground and to strengthen international systems for minority protection in order to bring about positive changes in laws, policies and practice. We believe this is the best way to ensure that the basic minimum protections offered by human rights law to minorities and indigenous peoples are available and effective.

In defending their rights, minority and indigenous communities need to be able to determine their own priorities and how they should be achieved. We therefore partner with approximately 150 NGOs defending minorities or indigenous peoples in 50 countries, some working at great risk. In each country and programme we tailor what we do in order to ensure that we respond to the real needs and priorities of the communities in question.

Participatory approach: Each project and campaign is designed alongside partners and communities, who are actively involved in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all our work.

Partnership approach: We build long-term partnerships with minority and indigenous organizations and support them to strengthen their capacities and share learning across issues, sectors, movements and geographies. We recognize the approach of our partners may be different from our own. Yet cooperation will always be based on a shared commitment to and respect for human rights.

We have also developed operational partnerships with inter-governmental agencies, including with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Development Programme, UNICEF, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and the Council of Europe. Together with our strong relationship with the European Union, this enables us to consistently punch above our weight, helping shape genuinely global programmes promoting minority and indigenous rights.



Inclusive approach: Minority and indigenous women face discrimination from both outside and within their own communities. We seek to promote the participation of women, and other potential victims of multiple discrimination, in all our activities, working to ensure that the specific needs and priorities of women and girls are met.

Monitoring and evaluation framework: We measure the results of our projects as they are implemented and also once they have come to an end. Our organization-wide strategy, as well as individual projects and campaigns, are evaluated independently against agreed objectives. We draw lessons from what has worked well, and what hasn't; and we share this transparently within the organization and externally.

Left: Roma woman and child in Cserehat, Hungary. UNDP in Europe and Central Asia.

Above: A woman from a Dalit Sweeper colony in Dhaka, Bangladesh. MRG/Livia Saccardi.



In Tanzania, MRG is supporting pastoralists who have been forcibly ejected from their land by a private tour operator, and who continue to be subjected to harassment, beatings and arrests when trying to access water.

MRG's 2013-2016 strategy

This strategy has been developed through a consultation process with many minority and indigenous organizations, as well as decision-makers and experts.

Taking all these views into account, we have reviewed our priorities in order to meet the challenges of today's world and agreed on three overall objectives for our work from 2013 to 2016:

1. Countering discrimination against minorities and indigenous peoples and ensuring they benefit equitably from development
2. Protecting the existence of communities under threat and those persecuted for their minority or indigenous identity
3. Strengthening the voices of minorities and indigenous peoples.

In the Balkans, MRG will continue to support our partners in bringing legal action to challenge discrimination in access to health and other public services. Establishing legal precedents also assists others seeking redress. In Bosnia we will focus on legal training for members of the Roma community, based on a successful model developed in Hungary.

Left: Maasai women of Sukenya village, Tanzania. MRG/Carla Clarke.

Objective 1:

Countering discrimination against minorities and indigenous peoples and ensuring they benefit equitably from development

Minorities and indigenous peoples are over-represented among the world's poor. Their poverty is a symptom of the common experience that unites otherwise disparate groups: the experience of discrimination and exclusion. Their communities are routinely denied equal access to education, housing, employment, healthcare and other opportunities.

Official evidence increasingly shows that minority and indigenous communities have been left behind in the race to meet the Millennium Development Goals. It is estimated, for example, that more than 50 per cent of the children out of school worldwide are members of minorities, or belong to indigenous peoples. Maternal mortality is often much higher among indigenous and minority communities, particularly those in remote areas, where it can be two or three times the national average. Minority and indigenous children are also more likely to die from malnutrition or preventable diseases at an early age.

Development opportunities often do not reach the communities most in need. This is because minority and indigenous communities too often live outside "investor-friendly" areas, are

rarely involved as plans are made, or may be deliberately excluded by officials. Breaking deep and intractable cycles of discrimination is vital to ensure that minorities and indigenous groups can enjoy the same development opportunities as others in society.

In some cases, development projects will actually leave communities poorer. In every region of the world, minorities and indigenous peoples are being evicted from their ancestral lands to make way for dams, national parks, mines, roads, or pipelines. Rarely are communities properly consulted or compensated.

To achieve this objective we will:

- Ensure that minorities and indigenous peoples have the right to peaceful enjoyment of their lands and natural resources
- Make sure minority and indigenous issues are included in the policies and practices of international development agencies, and improve their representation in the post-2015 international development goals
- Remove inequalities in education provision for minority and indigenous children
- Counter discriminatory attitudes in society and improve government action to address discrimination



In the Dominican Republic, MRG is challenging public prejudice against Dominico-Haitians, including through the use of street theatre which has proven to be a powerful way to challenge racist attitudes towards minority and indigenous communities.

Above: Street Theatre Programme rehearsals in the Dominican Republic.
MRG/Sofia Olins.

Case study: Defending land rights in East Africa

The Ogiek are an indigenous community established in the Mau Forest of Kenya; they are currently at great risk of being forcibly evicted from their ancestral land. The Ogiek have no papers to prove they own the land although they have lived there for generations. Highly vulnerable, they are at risk of losing everything: their home, their culture, and even their lives.

In the words of a member of the Ogiek community in Kenya: 'Mau forest is our home: we are not encroachers, we are forest dwellers; we don't cut trees, we nurture them for our livelihood; we hang our beehives, it's our sure "hospital" where we get herbs, it's a sacred mother earth to our traditions.'

Ogiek have been subject to repeated mass evictions from the Mau Forest since colonial times. Most recently, in 2009, the Kenyan Parliament authorized, without proper consultation, the eviction of all inhabitants from the forest. This was ostensibly for conservation purposes, although the

forest is seen as a key area for the development of tourism, as well as power generation projects and tea plantations. Many Ogiek now live in shacks around the forest with no way to earn a living.

MRG is currently supporting the community to challenge this threat of eviction before the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights. This has meant documenting the community's customary land ownership and meeting with legal experts to build a strong case. It has meant campaigning tirelessly to raise awareness both nationally and internationally about the plight of the community.

The Court has the power to stop this eviction and to guarantee that the Ogiek community can stay in their villages in the forest. This will be a key step to safeguarding the future of the whole community, as well as other indigenous communities in Africa.

'Once more thank you very much for keeping the fire for the case alight'

Daniel Kobei, director of Ogiek People's Development Programme

Right: An Ogiek family in Kenya.
MRG/Ishbel Matheson.





In Mauritania, where 20 per cent of the population still live in slavery, Haratine women face double discrimination both as members of the “slave caste” and because they are women. MRG helped win the first successful prosecution of a slave master under new national anti-slavery legislation.

Above: A Haratine woman in Sawab village, Mauritania. MRG/Shobha Das.

Objective 2: Protecting the existence of communities under threat and those persecuted for their minority or indigenous identity

Senior UN officials now repeatedly quote MRG research showing that over 55 per cent of violent conflicts of a significant intensity between 2007 and 2009 had violations of minority rights or tensions between communities at their core.

The marginalized position of minorities makes them even more vulnerable when war breaks out, and women and girls belonging to minority communities are often more vulnerable to the worst effects of the violence – including sexual violence.

Today, around the world, millions of people continue to be persecuted for their ethnic identity, religious beliefs or because of the language they speak.

Risks to religious minorities are increasing. Even as autocracies fall and the potential for greater freedom opens up in the Middle East and North Africa, threats to minorities have escalated amid the challenges of social and political transition.

Every year, MRG publishes ‘Peoples Under Threat’, an internationally acclaimed index of those countries around the world where the risk of mass killing is greatest. This index is already being widely used as an early warning tool by UN officials and other human rights and conflict prevention practitioners.

MRG trains and supports local human rights monitors to ensure that governments can never claim that they didn’t know what was happening, and to press for better protection. We are also involved directly in initiatives to promote inter-community understanding and reduce tensions, whether in Egypt, Pakistan or Sri Lanka.

We work closely with our local partners and minority rights activists and experts to ensure that abuses of minority rights today do not feed into new or renewed violence tomorrow.

To achieve this objective we will:

- Improve protection for minority or indigenous communities in states in political transition or those facing or emerging from conflict
- Build the capacity of civil society to monitor and publicize gross or systematic abuses of the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples and to advocate internationally for better protection
- Seek specific protection for women and other members of minority and indigenous communities who are vulnerable for multiple reasons
- Improve understanding and cooperation between communities in order to prevent future conflicts

Case study: Protecting persecuted religious minorities in the Middle East

Before the US invasion of Iraq, the Christian communities of Chaldo-Assyrians and Armenians numbered over 1.2 million, or up to five per cent of the Iraqi population.

It is now estimated that the population is less than half that, following waves of violent persecution that have seen thousands killed and hundreds of thousands fleeing the country. Christians in Iraq are at particular risk because of their religious ties with the West and the fact that many are based in parts of the country contested by larger groups. The persecution continues to this day.

Louis Climis, Vice-Chairman of MRG's partner organization the Iraqi Minorities Council (IMC), and his youngest son, were attending mass at the Our Lady of



Salvation Church in Baghdad when extremist gunmen, and then later Iraqi security forces, stormed the place of worship. Both were wounded in the attack, and he says they escaped death only 'by a miracle' and witnessed the murders of 50 members of the congregation, including two priests.

Since 2005, MRG has worked with the IMC, which brings together ethnic and religious minorities, both Muslim and non-Muslim, to secure practical help and protection for marginalized communities facing systematic violence.

This partnership has brought about positive change. Minority organizations have become more effective at monitoring human rights abuses and alerting influential people to the situation on the ground. As a result, police protection has improved. Minority activists have become more vocal and organized and minority representatives have gained seats in parliament and positions in government.

Much more work is needed in a country where sectarian violence and extrajudicial executions account for over 300 deaths a month. Grave challenges throughout the Middle East and North Africa makes this a pressing priority for MRG's work over the strategic period.

Left: A man and his Aramaic-language bible in the small Christian village of Malkiye in northern Iraq. Alfredo Caliz/Panos.

Above right: A Muslim girl in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka. james_gordon_losangeles.



In Sri Lanka, Muslims suffered violations from both sides during the long civil war. MRG now works with minority organizations to promote both justice and reconciliation.

Objective 3: **Strengthening the voices of minorities and indigenous peoples**

We feel that the most effective way to protect the rights of minority and indigenous communities is to ensure that members of these communities can participate fully in society and in decisions that affect their lives.

MRG has always believed that the best advocates for minority rights are members of minority and indigenous communities themselves. This is why we train minority and indigenous activists in how to peacefully advocate for their rights, and support their organizations to become more effective and more accountable.

We have provided intensive training programmes on advocacy and human rights for thousands of minority and indigenous leaders worldwide, starting a sustainable movement for change. We have now established an online training course (available in French, Russian, Spanish and Arabic), which hundreds of activists have completed.

This has enabled even minority and indigenous representatives based in very remote or insecure locations to understand their rights and develop advocacy skills.

One outcome is to enable members of minorities and indigenous peoples to stand for public office or have their voices heard in government, a key to the fuller realization of their rights. Finally, we know that decision-makers are influenced by what they see in the media, so we will work with the media

to portray the realities of discrimination and persecution and use the latest technology to support minority and indigenous communities to get their messages heard.

During this strategic period we will seek to:

- Improve the participation of minorities and indigenous peoples in government and other areas of public life
- Strengthen minority and indigenous organizations and help build stronger civil society networks to represent them
- Enable the real experiences of minority communities to be communicated to key officials and the media

‘When I did your training in minority rights, I did it only to be more empowered as an activist. Little did I dream that this training certificate would catch the attention of the federal government so as to nominate me to the State Minority Commission’

Minority rights activist from Rajasthan, India



‘If they come and take the fruits of our labour away from us, then what will happen to us? We’d have to leave here, but I think the only way we would leave is in our coffins.’

Jazmín Mina, Afro-Colombian miner, La Toma, Suarez, Colombia, speaking in an MRG documentary that has so far been screened in Colombia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.

Above: Jazmín Mina, an Afro-Colombian miner.
MRG/Morris Producciones.



In Botswana, we are supporting the Wayeyi in their legal struggle for non-discriminatory access for minority tribes to the House of Chiefs. Elsewhere we are working to ensure that other minorities can stand for public office and are included in constitutional processes or electoral systems.

Case study: New technology leads to new representation for minority women from Central Asia

Dildora Khamidova is a Kyrgyzstani Uzbek. Uzbeks are the largest ethnic and linguistic minority in Kyrgyzstan, making up around 20 per cent of the population.

In 2010 violent unrest erupted between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in southern Kyrgyzstan, during which over 400 people died and many more were wounded and displaced.

During and after the conflict in Dildora's hometown of Osh, ethnic Uzbeks reported widespread rape and sexual violence. Security concerns led to Uzbek women dropping out of education, girls being married early, and women not daring to go to health care facilities. Many Uzbek women also



Left: Wayeyi children in Botswana. MRG.

Above: Children in a damaged mahalla or Uzbek neighbourhood in southern Kyrgyzstan. Sofia Skrypnyk/ Nonviolent Peaceforce.

lost their jobs, or were forced to abandon market stalls.

At a 2010 MRG training programme in Geneva, Dildora had the opportunity to give a statement about how ethnic violence had affected Uzbek women. Her speech at the UN was filmed and uploaded onto MRG's online newsroom, which provides a multi-media platform for minority activists and journalists to tell their stories to a global audience. Dildora was one of the first minority activists to speak at the UN immediately after the 2010 conflict and the only minority woman.

This video changed her life, Dildora says. Suddenly, she became the first point of contact for inter-governmental bodies, NGOs, researchers and academics, who wanted to know more about issues affecting minority women in Kyrgyzstan. She now hopes that other members of minority communities can similarly become role models to motivate others. MRG will continue to support minority and indigenous leaders, journalists and lawyers to develop their skills and influence in practice.

We will develop our global information resources, our publications and films, our online newsroom and use of social media to ensure that minority and indigenous voices reach a wider and more influential audience.

Over to you

There are many ways for you to find out more or get involved with MRG's work:

You can receive regular updates about our work and news from our partners around the world by **subscribing to our free monthly e-bulletin:** www.minorityrights.org.

If you would prefer to receive hard copies of our detailed regular reports, you can **subscribe to our publications package:** www.minorityrights.org/publications.

You can **visit our Minority Voices Newsroom** to access news stories – video, audio and written reports – uploaded by members of minorities and indigenous communities around the world: www.minorityvoices.org.

Finally, because our resources are limited and are always exceeded by the communities that need our help, you could **set up a direct debit** to support our work or make a **one-off gift** at: www.minorityrights.org/donate.

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