



minority
rights
group
international

Strategy 2021-2024



Cover:
A Roma woman in
Ukraine.



Back cover:
An Ogiek woman
making bread. Kenya.
Zsuzsanna Fodor.

Minority Rights Group is the **leading global organization** working for and with **ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities**, and **indigenous peoples** worldwide.

Our activities are focused on international advocacy, training and education, strategic litigation, cultural programmes, research and publications, and media work. We are guided by the needs expressed by our worldwide network of partner organizations which all represent minorities and indigenous peoples.

Minority Rights Group has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and is a civil society organization registered with the Organization of American States (OAS).

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Our vision

We believe in human potential.
All human potential.

We know that in the tremendous ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity that exists all around us are the lived experiences, insights, knowledge, skills and empathy that are needed to build a better world.

We are familiar with the histories of discrimination in every setting around the globe and testify as to how the marginalisation of individuals and communities, based on narrow perceptions of their worth, have left us all worse off.

We strive to overcome these barriers because of our belief in people, but more pragmatically because we know that the future is only secure for us all when we build it together.

Our work is thus about people, communities and structures, and how in combining these equitably, we can overcome the toughest odds that stand in the way of human progress.

We are working with **minority and indigenous communities** towards a

world where they can live peacefully on an **equal basis** with others.

What we do to achieve change:

- **Combatting persecution** by identifying communities at risk and supporting those working to defend them
- **Challenging marginalisation** by promoting the inclusion of minorities and indigenous peoples in sustainable development and society
- **Realising climate justice** by ensuring that the voices, lived experience and knowledge of minorities and indigenous peoples are included in debates and policies addressing the climate crisis

To be closer to local partners, we are supported by three regional offices: Minority Rights Group Africa (Uganda), Minority Rights Group Europe (Hungary) and Minority Rights Group (Brussels). We also have a permanent presence in Geneva and an increasing number of staff based in the countries where we run programs, such as Tunisia and Kenya.



Above: A Sikh devotee waits to take part in a religious ceremony during the Baisakhi festival at Panja Sahib shrine in Hassan Abdal, Pakistan. *Saiyna Bashir.*



Above: Minority Rights Group staff and partners at the UN Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva, Switzerland, November 2019.

Who we are

For **over 50 years**, Minority Rights Group (MRG) has campaigned alongside minority and indigenous communities to achieve more equitable, inclusive and peaceful societies.

In recent years, we have seen **spikes in violent attacks** against minorities and indigenous peoples because of their ethnic or religious identities. **Online hate speech** against these communities is rampant, and **those defending minority and indigenous rights are increasingly under attack**. Minorities and indigenous peoples are targeted by populist governments and presented as **scapegoats** for serious governance failures in addressing economic and social issues and combatting the climate crisis.

Today, rights-based organizations like ours have been forced into **defending** spaces that were uncontested prior to the rise of populism.

We are strongly committed to defending the human rights of minorities and indigenous peoples and will not rest while these attacks continue. We know that much remains to be done.

Still, by 2024, we dare to believe that the world will be a different place for minority and indigenous communities.

It will be a place where:

- Minorities and indigenous peoples' needs will be better understood as they, **with our support**, will have informed officials, intergovernmental bodies and other organizations about issues affecting their communities through regular, timely and authoritative reports, documentary films and other materials.
- From Mauritania to Myanmar, discriminatory laws and attitudes will have changed leading to children from minority and indigenous communities **getting a quality education that meets their needs** without fear of racism, following MRG's campaigns to denounce rights violations and abuses.
- Across Central and East Africa, indigenous communities will live on their ancestral lands without threat, as a result of MRG's strategic **litigation**.
- In countries such as India and Iran, those defending the rights of their communities will not fear reprisals and violence anymore as our work to **challenge** persecution will have led to greater recognition and protection.
- Communities such as Roma in Central Europe or Maragoli in Uganda and those representing them will be **supported** as they stand up for their rights.
- The number of those standing in solidarity with minorities and indigenous peoples will have increased significantly as we **connect** journalists, majority activists and officials with community representatives to work together and find long-term solutions.

Combatting persecution



Many minority and indigenous rights defenders operate in increasingly **hostile environments**, often in countries where **democratic space is shrinking** drastically and where **persecution** and **intimidation** are taking new forms. Targeted online hate speech is increasing exponentially, affecting more and more communities – as clearly demonstrated by the role social media played in the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar.

These tendencies are echoed in countries as varied as Egypt, India and the Philippines, and affect communities as diverse as Roma in Europe and religious minorities in Pakistan which experience online hate daily.

Combatting this **identity-based persecution** is one of our main objectives.

MRG has campaigned against persecution and intolerance for **decades**

and is familiar with the complex and rapidly changing set of behaviours that lead to violence and intimidation by states and other actors. Building on this experience, we co-design programmes with communities using human rights-based approaches that emphasize **defence, remedies** and **restitution**.

All our programmes are tailored to **address the needs** of minority and indigenous communities as well as of those working to defend them and are **specific to the contexts** where they will be implemented.

Left: Rohingya girl in Myanmar.
Steve Gumaer.

Right: Yazidi men rebuild religious temples that were destroyed by ISIS in the town of Bashiqa, Iraq.
Andrea DiCenzo.



Sanabil

Sanabil is a micro-biology student from Lahore in Punjab, Pakistan.

Over 80 per cent of Pakistani Christians, traditionally from lower agricultural castes, live in Punjab where they face double discrimination on account of their religious and social exclusion. Sanabil had a relatively protected childhood, but after joining college she started facing persecution, including hate speech and insulting stereotypes about her Christian community. At her college, one of her teachers even asked her to change her religion in exchange for better academic grades.

Sanabil felt that she had no choice but to keep quiet.

Eventually she joined a discussion group on hate speech for young people organized by MRG's partner organization. It encouraged her to speak up.

She shared her story, which inspired her peers to talk publicly about their own personal experiences of discrimination. She wrote an article about her own experience, which was published on a news website and was very well received. Ever since, she has been invited by many anti-discrimination organizations as a young panellist and speaker, including on TV.

MRG's work on hate speech and challenging discrimination on religious grounds will carry on for the next four years, so that people like Sanabil can feel empowered to stand up against persecution.



Above: Portrait of Sanabil



Image:
Indigenous people react during protests
against Ecuador's President Lenin
Moreno's austerity measures in Quito,
Ecuador. *Reuters/Henry Romero*

Challenging marginalisation & securing inclusion

Minority and indigenous communities are often forced to live on the **outskirts of society, robbed of opportunities and livelihoods, and deprived of access to basic public services** such as **health and education**.

Our work ensures that marginalized communities and those who seek to foster inclusion can gain **access to every opportunity**.

Supporting communities in this way will ensure a more **sustainable** world for everyone and means that more people are **empowered to challenge marginalisation and exclusion** when they arise.

Reaching excluded communities is central to MRG's work, and we support our partners to ensure that **development policies are based on human rights** and are both **inclusive and equitable**.



Left: Members of the Sengwer community protest their eviction from their ancestral lands in the Embobut Forest, by the government for forest conservation in western Kenya.
Katy Migiro.

Above: Chechen women in Poland during a meeting with European journalists organised under MRG's 'Media, Minorities and Migration' project. The women shared their stories about spending weeks at a train station on the Belarusian-Polish border.
Slawek Kamiński



Salem brothers

Said and Yarg are brothers, born into slavery in Mauritania.

Slavery, underpinned by deep-seated discrimination and marginalisation, remains a common practice in Mauritania regardless of its prohibition under the law. Slave status is hereditary (passed from mother to child) and the brothers, born in 2001 and 2003, became slaves to the El Hassine family at birth.

The boys escaped their enslavement in 2011, and later that year, their master was found guilty in the Criminal Court for holding them in slavery and depriving them of schooling. In the first ever successful prosecution under Mauritania's 2007 anti-slavery legislation, he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment and ordered to pay compensation. The sentence and compensation awarded were far below the penalties provided in law and were appealed with the support of MRG in 2010.

In 2016, while the Court of Appeal increased the level of compensation, the former slave owner's sentence remained unchanged, requiring him to serve only the remainder of his original two-year sentence. MRG and other NGOs took their case to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which in January 2018 delivered a landmark ruling compelling Mauritania to provide Said and Yarg with appropriate compensation, psychosocial support and education while ensuring that all perpetrators were brought to justice. Mauritania was also obligated to take wider steps to eradicate child slavery, including through providing special measures to address the needs of child victims.

Fair compensation and justice were important for Said and Yarg and for the many still entrapped in slavery in Mauritania. In the coming years we will continue working in Mauritania while seeking to expand this work to Niger and Mali, where freed slaves have no land or jobs and face exploitation even after their slavery has been formally ended.



Above: Silhouettes of brothers Said and Yarg

Realising climate justice

The marginalisation of minorities and indigenous peoples is also reflected in the **climate crisis** the world is experiencing.

These communities, which have often **contributed the least** to the damage being inflicted to the planet, are among those which now are asked to **pay the highest price**.

Minority and indigenous communities are more likely to live in areas which are more seriously affected by **environmental disasters** like flooding and other facets or effects of the climate crisis. They are also more likely to experience the adverse effects of environmental degradation on their livelihoods, such as through overfishing or deforestation.

At the same time, the representatives of minority and indigenous communities are **hardly ever in the room** when decisions are taken that affect them.

We have seen many states, organizations and individuals use 'environmentalism' as a rationale for the maltreatment and



persecution of minority and indigenous communities **which are forced to move to make way for game or nature reserves** or **whose way of life is wrongly blamed for environmental changes**. This is deeply ironic when it is these communities which have the best track record of environmental safeguarding in practice.

Climate justice can only be achieved by ensuring that the **voices, lived experience** and **knowledge** of minorities and indigenous peoples are included in the **debates and policies** addressing the current crisis.

Above: A boy with a fish spear walks along an ineffective seawall on Saibai Island, Australia. Suzanne Long.



Main image:
A Sami woman
herding reindeer in
Árdni, Norway.
Abbie Trayler-Smith.

Archana

Archana Soreng is a passionate and skilful young environmental activist who has witnessed the marginalisation of her community. She is determined to ensure that her community's way of life, especially as environmental custodians, can have a meaningful impact. Archana belongs to the Khadia tribe in Odisha, India.

The tribe is an *Adivasi* community (India's indigenous peoples) that lives in a mineral-rich part of the country. The consequence of this wealth is that successive governments - colonial and post-colonial - have seen greater value in the land than the people. Archana is determined to document, preserve and promote traditional indigenous knowledge, and galvanise awareness and action towards bringing indigenous world views to bear upon the urgent global climate crisis.

Archana's activism is based on her own deep understanding of indigenous cultural know-how and a formal education that includes a Master's degree in regulatory governance. In recognition of the authority she brings to her work, Archana was selected as one of seven members of the Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change established by UN Secretary-General António Guterres to advise on global environmental policy.

MRG is proud to support Archana's work, to learn from her and her community, and to work to ensure that indigenous-led solutions are brought to where they belong: not only at the centre of climate mitigation and adaptation strategies, but also in offering meaningful alternatives to the consumption models that have destroyed circular economies and brought the globe to the brink of extinction.



Above: Portrait of Archana Soreng.

Our approach



Above: Filmmakers creating 'Even After Death', a documentary co-produced by MRG and ReFocus Media Labs. The film was conceptualised, written and filmed by refugees who survived the Mediterranean crossing and felt compelled to tell their collective story. Lesbos, Greece. *ReFocus Media Labs*

All our work is rooted in four key principles:

Human rights-based approach:

We identify rights holders and duty bearers, assess power dynamics and capacities, and embed the principles of community ownership, transparency and accountability into all our projects.

Participatory planning:

We only respond to needs identified directly by communities through their representatives and always involve those affected when planning our activities.

'Do no harm' perspective:

We do this by identifying and highlighting risks continuously with support from our partners and ensuring that we mitigate against those risks wherever possible.

Inclusive approach:

We recognise that there are people who may face additional discrimination within minority and indigenous communities (such as women and girls, older people, persons with disabilities, and those belonging to the LGBTQ+ community) and take significant steps to ensure that all these groups of people are included in the design and implementation of our projects.

What you can do

Anti-racism

We realise that we too are implicated in a system that has produced and upheld racism and continues to do so today. We have committed to reflecting on and evaluating the stances we take as well as our policies and practices. We also commit to making our progress public and transparent, so that we can guard ourselves against contributing, even indirectly, to racial injustice and hold ourselves accountable.

Forming partnerships

We form partnerships with organizations which share our objectives and values. Some approach us and ask for our support; other partnerships are formed when we identify communities at risk and establish contact with their representatives. Relationships can also build on connections that are made when activists attend our training and other events.



Above: Saadia Mosbah, Founder of Mnemty, holds a sign that reads "I am for a beautiful and plural Tunisia. I fight for diversity, difference and equal opportunities." MRG partners with Mnemty in Tunisia.

Our work is only possible with the belief and support of people like you. Here are some simple ways for you to get involved:

Subscribe

Sign up to our free newsletter to receive regular updates about our work and news from our partners around the world. minorityrights.org/newsletter

Read more

Gain detailed information on minority and indigenous communities for your work or activism by using our range of resources. minorityrights.org/library

Donate

Make an immediate difference by supporting us with a donation at minorityrights.org/donate. Your contribution will help us to continue amplifying the voices of minority and indigenous communities.

Follow us

Engage with our work online by following us on social media:





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