



minority  
rights  
group  
international

**Countering  
persecution,  
promoting  
inclusion**  
Strategy 2017-2020

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Minority Rights Group International (MRG) is a non-governmental organization 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, 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.

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

MRG 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).



Cover:

**A Bangladeshi Hindu, wearing a saffron coloured head dress, attends a festival.**

G.M.B. Akash / Panos.

Back cover:

**Protesters speak out against hate incidents in Washington County, Maryland state, US.**

Stephen Melkisethian.

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



# Today's global priorities

Religious and ethnic persecution, forced migration, persistent inequality and environmental degradation are among the greatest challenges facing the world today. They are driven by a growing tide of hate speech and intolerance that is dividing societies in Africa, Asia and the Middle East – as well as in Europe and the Americas.

For many minorities and indigenous communities, the situation is critical. They face hate crimes, routinely high levels of discrimination and even mass killing. For others, long-term exclusion is trapping communities in poverty and threatening ways of life that have been sustained for generations – until now.

Our work over the next four years will be focused on the twin objectives of countering persecution and promoting inclusion. To the growth of hatred and intolerance we offer a vision based on defending rights and bringing communities together.

We believe that this vision will benefit not just minority and

indigenous communities themselves but ultimately society as a whole, lowering risks of conflict and promoting cooperation. Equality, respect and inclusion are key to delivering a more sustainable and peaceful future for all.

## Today's challenges:

- A shocking rise in religious and ethnic persecution, with entire communities in some world regions targeted for mass violence.
- An unprecedented increase in forced migration, both disproportionately affecting persecuted minorities in countries of origin and creating new minorities in countries of refuge.
- The persistence of global inequality, between but also within states, with current interventions to address the gap still leaving many communities behind.

- Accelerating environmental degradation, with the indigenous guardians of the land in many regions facing land-grabbing and expropriation.

**‘MRG’s greatest strength is its proven and unshakeable commitment to indigenous and minority issues’  
Commissioner at the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights**

Above:  
Yezidi refugees in  
Kurdistan Region of Iraq.  
Defend International.

# Our strategy 2017-2020



# Objective 1: Countering religious and ethnic persecution, a root cause of forced migration

**Key programme places: the Middle East and North Africa, South and South-East Asia, and refugee-receiving countries**

Religious and ethnic persecution is the foremost concern for minorities and indigenous peoples in many countries across the globe: in the Middle East alone, minorities have faced mass killings, forced displacement and, in some cases, genocide. Today, millions of people are persecuted for their beliefs or their religious or ethnic identity.

Persecution ranges from mass killings (whether perpetrated by states or armed opposition groups), arbitrary detention and torture, to everyday harassment and measures which prevent communities from peacefully following their culture, conscience or traditional ways of life. Women and girls from minority communities are often particularly vulnerable to violations of their rights.

While persecution is causing people to flee their homes in unprecedented numbers, global attention has been focused on the symptoms of the

migration crisis rather than its root causes. We need governments and the international community to address religious and ethnic persecution and protect minorities at risk, both in their home countries and in countries of displacement.

We train activists and civil society organizations on the ground to monitor and report persecution. We support them to bring their cases to governments, to official bodies and to the UN. We are the world's leading publisher of authoritative information on the situation of minorities, enabling policies to be made based on facts, not stereotypes. We also work with the media and opinion formers to increase the visibility of persecuted minorities, ensuring greater awareness and sensitivity among key audiences with the power to influence change.

The combination of strengthened grass-roots capacity with international visibility and support we believe is the most effective for winning reform.



## To achieve this objective we will:

- Equip civil society organizations representing minorities and indigenous peoples with the knowledge, skills and strategies to monitor persecution, and advocate effectively for rights protection.
- Publish comprehensive and reliable evidence on both religious and ethnic persecution around the world.
- Improve understanding of persecution as a root cause of forced migration, including among the media and other opinion formers.
- Increase the commitment of governments, international bodies and other decision makers to implement policies addressing religious and ethnic persecution.

Far left:  
**Ogiek women in Kenya.**  
MRG.

Left:  
**Kurdish people flee  
Syria to seek refuge in  
Turkey.**  
EC/ECHO.

## Objective 2: Promoting inclusion of minorities and indigenous peoples in sustainable development and society

**Key programme places: Africa,  
Europe and Latin America**

Minorities and indigenous peoples are often among the poorest communities in their countries. The entrenched poverty they experience is not only a failure in development, but also a direct result of discrimination and exclusion.

Minorities are routinely denied equal access to basic services including education, housing and healthcare, and discriminated against in

**‘MRG stands head and  
shoulders above other  
NGOs on minority and  
indigenous issues’  
Lecturer, School of  
Advanced Study,  
University of London**

employment and in public office. This is particularly the case with historically marginalized communities such as Roma, Afro-descendants, or those ethnic- or caste-based communities which are subject to modern forms of slavery.

The new global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their overarching commitment to ‘leave no one behind’ offer an opportunity to tackle exclusion. But if the promise of reducing inequality and promoting inclusive societies is to be realized, the new development agenda needs to have the concerns of minorities and indigenous peoples at its heart.

For indigenous peoples in particular, peaceful enjoyment of their land is essential both to their identity and to their development. But it is a right that is increasingly under attack from land-grabbing and so-called development projects that actually leave communities poorer or displace them en masse. The effects on the natural environment can be equally catastrophic. We stand with indigenous communities to defend their land rights and their vital role as guardians of the environment.

We support minorities and indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making processes, represent their communities and challenge exclusion. At the same time, we will tackle the most significant barriers to their inclusion, tailoring our work to the obstacles and issues faced by the communities themselves – from protecting land rights and countering racist or sectarian hate speech to promoting greater participation in governance and an end to discrimination.

## To achieve this objective we will:

- Strengthen the capacity of minority and indigenous activists to use legal and political mechanisms to challenge exclusion and advocate for the human rights of their communities.
- Promote the participation of minorities in governance and decision making.
- Reform development policies to promote the inclusion of highly marginalized minorities such as Roma, Afro-descendants, and ethnic- or caste-based communities affected by modern slavery.
- Secure improved legal recognition of indigenous peoples' rights to land and resources, as well as equitable benefits from any development of those lands and resources.
- Increase the public participation and visibility of minority communities, with improved strategies to combat hate and racist, sectarian and xenophobic discourses.

Right:  
**Indigenous Kuna woman  
in Panama.**  
Marc Veraart.



# How we can achieve change

MRG is the leading organization working for the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples worldwide. We have decades of experience combating discrimination and securing rights, and our work is more relevant than ever today.

Our approach is to support the voices of minority and indigenous communities on the ground, working with them to build evidence of human rights violations and bring their concerns to officials and decision makers. We believe the voices of minority and indigenous women need particular support. Together we aim to strengthen international systems for minority and indigenous protection, in order to bring about positive changes in national policies and practices. We believe this is the best way to ensure that the basic guarantees offered by human rights law to minorities and indigenous peoples are respected.

In each country we tailor what we do in order to ensure that we respond

to the real needs and priorities of those with whom we work. As well as collaborating with local minority- and indigenous-led organizations, we also work with inter-governmental bodies, including the United Nations and its agencies, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Organization of American States, and the European Union, the OSCE and the Council of Europe. This enables us to punch consistently above our weight, shaping genuinely global programmes that promote minority and indigenous peoples' rights.

**'With the support of MRG, the Ik indigenous community finally feels recognized and better protected. We have found our voice!'**  
**Ik rights activist, Uganda**

## Over to you

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

Our resources are limited and are always exceeded by the needs of the communities we help. Please support our work by making a donation: [minorityrights.org/donate](https://minorityrights.org/donate)

You can receive regular updates about our work and news from our partners around the world by subscribing to our free monthly e-bulletin: [minorityrights.org](https://minorityrights.org)

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