



minority  
rights  
group  
international

# Annual Report

2017

*"I have learned that all humans are equal and recognised that minorities should be given equal rights."*



# About us

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

## Our beneficiaries

Minorities of concern to MRG are disadvantaged ethnic, national, religious, linguistic or cultural groups and indigenous peoples, who strive to maintain their rights in all areas of life: to access their ancestral land, send their children to school, speak their language or even their mere survival. Communities we work with are as diverse as Batwa in Central Africa, Roma in Europe, and Ogiek in Kenya to name but a few.

## Our Vision

MRG believes that minority and indigenous communities should be empowered to speak up for their own rights. As such, we always adopt participatory and sustainable approaches in close relation with concerned groups. We campaign worldwide with more than 130 partners in over 60 countries, to ensure that highly disadvantaged groups, often the

poorest of the poor and the most marginalized, can make their voices heard. Although we are based in London, we have two overseas offices (Kampala - Uganda and Budapest - Hungary). MRG also benefits from locally based staff in some project countries.

## Our tools




Our work encompasses diverse activities such as building the capacity of activists and organisations, empowerment of communities, strategic litigation, advocacy, and research and publications, all guided by the needs expressed by our worldwide network of partners. Our work offers overwhelming evidence that the meaningful inclusion of minority communities leads to stronger, more cohesive societies. MRG also understands how multiple discrimination can have an aggravated impact on already disadvantaged minorities, and our campaigns aim to eradicate such attitudes.

## Our presence

MRG has a very positive reputation among minority communities, governments, and UN human rights bodies alike. We have 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 has also acquired a strong international reputation as a leader in the field thanks to its provision of sound information and advice in sensitive areas, as well as its capacity to deliver high-quality programme work, ground breaking strategic litigation cases, publications, and advocacy for and alongside minorities and indigenous peoples.

## Follow us:

 [www.facebook.com/minorityrights](http://www.facebook.com/minorityrights)  
 [@minorityrights](https://twitter.com/minorityrights)  
 [www.youtube.com/minorityrights](http://www.youtube.com/minorityrights)



**Front cover:** Hindu woman in Bangladesh. MRG.

**Back cover:** Sidi woman sewing in Mohan, India. MRG.



**RIGHT:** Women waiting for food aid in Somalia. MRG.

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# Director's foreword

Supporting minorities and indigenous peoples to claim their rights was both challenging and rewarding during 2017. MRG's work felt increasingly relevant as hate speech and discrimination against migrants and particularly those of other faiths and ethnicities rose to prominence in an unprecedented populist agenda in Europe, the USA, as well as continuing a longer trend in Myanmar and parts of Africa; Central African Republic, Nigeria, South Africa, South Sudan. Gains that had been made over a previous decade in terms of the most commonly held view being one that sees diversity as positive and inter-religious respect a given, were under threat. Statements that would have been socially unacceptable a year or two ago, were now

common parlance. MRG's long experience of minority rights, diversity and inclusion was called upon to counter new narratives and to support media and legal argument against what risked becoming a "new normal". Simultaneously, many states moved to restrict the actions of human rights NGOs and human rights defenders with widespread assassinations, arrests, harassment and interference with activities. Even our ability to transfer funding to organisations to carry out projects became impossible or very complicated in many contexts.

Despite this difficult environment, our partners continued to work tirelessly, against the odds, to collect and report data, make voices heard and claim

rights to equality and respect. Partners worked on many issues from persecution, land rights, participation in decision making, and equal access to education, jobs and health services. With our support, partners worked at all levels, from conversations with decision makers at the district level to lobbying the UN Human Rights bodies and everything in between.

MRG is extremely grateful to all those partners who took personal risks to claim rights and equality as well as to all those who have supported our work financially or through using their influence to support our advocacy and lobbying efforts over the course of 2017.

*Claire Thomas, Interim Director  
August 2017*





# Our strategy 2017 - 2020

Every four years, MRG adopts a new strategic plan building upon feedback from minority and indigenous partners, activists, communities, like-minded organizations and a wide range of other stakeholders. This allows us to better respond to actual needs on the ground, and to adjust our strategy to the threats and opportunities the current global context presents.

2017 saw the launch of our new strategy covering the 2017-2020 period, focusing on **countering the rise of intolerance**. To the growth of hatred and intolerance we offer a vision based on defending rights and bringing communities together, focused on the twin objectives of countering persecution and promoting inclusion with a number of clear targets to deliver:

## OBJECTIVE 1

Countering religious and ethnic persecution, a root cause of forced migration

**400**

Activists on the ground supported to monitor persecution and defend community rights

**60**

Expert submissions filed to the UN and other international bodies on cases of religious and ethnic persecution

**36**

Decisions or resolutions secured by national governments or international bodies to provide greater protection for religious and ethnic minorities

Publish comprehensive information on the situation of minorities and indigenous peoples and ensure evidence on persecution reaches a global audience

Improve official consideration of minority persecution criteria in asylum decision-making processes.

## OBJECTIVE 2

Promoting inclusion of minorities and indigenous peoples in sustainable development and society

**1200**

Train 1200 civil society organisation staff on rights and techniques for inclusion

**15**

Support 15 instances of rights claims made to national or international legal or political mechanisms to address violations and discrimination

**180**

Brief 180 officials and authorities on the needs of excluded minority and indigenous communities

**5**

Implement 5 new mechanisms or programmes to ensure public participation of minority communities

Secure legal recognition of indigenous land rights in Africa.

# Achievements & Performance

## OBJECTIVE 1 – COUNTERING PERSECUTION

MRG and partners' efforts to counter religious and ethnic persecution have been productive in 2017.

**To equip CSOs representing minorities and indigenous peoples with the knowledge, skills and strategies to monitor persecution and advocate effectively for rights protection**

Building the capacities of activists, CSOs and communities on the ground is one of the cornerstones of MRG's vision and way of working: we believe that it's the combination of strengthened grass-roots capacity and international visibility that is most effective for winning reform. Our capacity building efforts have continued to thrive in all our programme countries: many training events were delivered, receiving excellent reviews from participants, who were also given opportunities to use their newly acquired skills through pilot projects and small grant schemes. As such, in Egypt, four civil society organizations working on minority rights have been granted financial support to implement projects advocating for minority rights in their respective communities. In Iraq, six or-

ganisations received small grants to carry out monitoring/documentation and advocacy projects – all focusing on the rights of religious minorities. We also continued our support to networks of CSOs working on Freedom of Religion or Belief in the Middle East and North Africa. Among other activities, we held training and networking events to bring activists from the region together in Tunis (May 2017) and Geneva (November 2017). In Asia, a regional network for minority and indigenous CSOs (The South Asia Collective, established with MRG's support) remains active since its launch in 2016 with on-going advocacy including a joint submission on Sri Lanka to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) in May 2017 and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in November 2017.

## Objective 1

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

**Key targets:** capacity building; data collection/publication; advocacy; and the media

## Key achievements of 2017:

- 250 activists trained (including 121 women);
- All partners who reached out to MRG for help when facing significant new safety threats report being better able to defend themselves / maintain their operations;
- 27 new international advocacy submissions / interventions by partners and MRG.

**LEFT:** Indigenous People protest for land rights in 2017 in London, UK. MRG.



## To publish comprehensive and reliable evidence on religious and ethnic persecution around the world

To raise awareness on religious and ethnic persecution as a root cause of forced migration, we published a number of media friendly tools, easily available online. These have included our annual Peoples Under Threat (PUT) index/map in July 2017 and new materials throughout the year, focusing on countries like India and Iraq and a wide range of issues including forced displacement and statelessness. The production of authoritative, accessible publications and data on these communities and the challenges they face is key in countering persecution: it ensures greater awareness and sensitivity among key audiences and enables policies to be based on facts, not stereotypes.

## To improve understanding of persecution as a root cause of forced migration, including among the media and other opinion formers

With the rise of hate speech, the need for a strong counter narrative in the media to increase public understanding of discrimination and migration and address misleading representations is greater than ever. MRG has always proactively trained journalists and built a highly visible online presence. In 2017, 20 journalists were successfully trained as part of our new project in Mauritania to develop the media's ability to promote anti-slavery / anti-discrimination messaging.

The second half of the year saw the launch of a major initiative targeting media in Europe to promote better quality coverage

of development, migration and minorities. This much needed initiative will tackle rising intolerance towards those arriving on European shores, notably in the new EU member states. In parallel to providing opportunities to the media, MRG maintained a strong online presence to showcase issues facing minorities and indigenous peoples across the world.

**RIGHT:** *Yezidi refugees in Kurdistan.*  
Defend International.

**PAGE 9:** *Yezidi refugee girls dancing.*  
Panos Pictures.

## Key achievements of 2017:

- Peoples Under Threat index launched;
- 40 major country entries on the World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples updated by the end of 2017.

## Key achievements of 2017:

- 20 journalists trained on sensitive reporting with particular emphasis the on relationship between discrimination, persecution and migration;
- 515 new media mentions and 338,031 unique users on MRG's web platform.

**“In 20 years of my teaching experience, I have not been through such incredible event. This training made me realise the importance of unity and togetherness. I have learned that all humans are equal and recognised that minorities should be given equal rights.”**  
Saleha Karak, Teacher at Wadhat Colony Girls High School (Quetta, Balochistan)



## To increase the commitment of governments, international bodies and other decision makers to implement policies addressing religious and ethnic persecution

Together with partners and trainees, we undertook significant advocacy campaigns at all levels. For example, in June 2017, MRG made an oral statement at the 35th session of the UN Human Rights Council under item 4 ('situations deserving the attention of the Council') to draw attention to the conditions and needs of displaced Iraqi minorities in the midst of the on-going fighting in Mosul. MRG called for a Human Rights Council mandated mechanism to monitor violations committed by all parties during the conflict. This recommendation was followed by the authorisation by the UN Security Council in September 2017 of an investigation team to sup-

port domestic efforts to hold the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) accountable for acts that may amount to genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Twenty-four other influential recommendations were made by MRG in 2017. MRG's continued advocacy efforts have also led to actions taken by officials towards the improved protection of minority groups, even contributing to a precedent-setting decision in the United-States (US). The Hamama v. Adducci case concerned the removal of Iraqi nationals from US territory. Information provided demonstrated that individuals arrested by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement would face persecution, torture or death if

returned to Iraq. In July 2017, a preliminary injunction against the removal of Iraqi nationals in the US was granted, allowing time for individuals to seek relief from removal.

## Key achievements of 2017:

- 24 new recommendations to governments addressing religious or ethnic persecution;
- 2 occasions where duty bearers acted to improve protection of religious and ethnic groups;
- 1 precedent-setting decision reached in the US displaying improved consideration of minority persecution criteria in asylum decision-making.



## Objective 2

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

**Key targets:** Advocacy and legal capacity building, strategic litigation, sensitization and advocacy.

MRG continued to organise many legal empowerment training events to support activists and communities across the world. Among other projects, MRG organized paralegal training in Botswana for members of the Babirwa, Bakgalahari, Basubiya, Batswapong and Wayeyi communities to equip them with the necessary tools to seek justice and secure their rights. Paralegal training has proven to be very effective in promoting the socio-economic inclusion of highly marginalized communities. This was highlighted in a long term evaluation of the impact of 12 years of legal empowerment and strategic litigation work in East Africa: this found that strategic litigation and legal empowerment activities carried out in Tanzania and Kenya had served as powerful tools to create opportunities for communities to unite around

## OBJECTIVE 2 – PROMOTING INCLUSION

Efforts by MRG and partners have led to extremely positive steps to ensure that minority and indigenous communities can benefit from sustainable development.

### To 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

shared struggles and make decisions that impacted positively on their collective rights. Notably, this evaluation reported that paralegal training played a strong role in transforming the perspective of communities and empowered them to claim their indigenous rights ([please see full report on our website](#)). Another positive example of how legal empowerment can contribute to challenge exclusion and advocate for human rights was seen in our Mauritania programme. As part of this programme, and following training of local activists, five additional cases concerning slavery and discrimination were selected for follow up by partners with the support of MRG. Combined with a significant and positive judgement from the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) in the Said and Yarg case which found that the State of Mauritania needed

to do a lot more to eradicate ongoing slavery in practice and hold slave owners accountable (December 2017). The pursuit of these additional cases are vital steps to promote the socio-economic inclusion of highly marginalized groups.

### Key achievements of 2017:

- 304 activists trained (including 195 women) to promote the inclusion of their communities;
- 5 new instances of rights claims made to national or international bodies or political mechanisms by MRG, or partners supported by MRG, seeking to address rights violations, discrimination or exclusion.



**“Trainings have been useful to us in our daily lives (...) We got bursaries and we went to train other people in different sectors because they were also not aware of laws defending them. We solved many complaints and problems of people and tried to explain how to solve problems in between themselves.”**

Paralegal Pacifique  
IKIMANITEGETSE



## To improve governance environment and promote the participation of minorities in governance and decision making

An important part of our work in 2017 focused on raising awareness among decision-makers of instances of rights violations, discrimination and exclusion. MRG is achieving this mainly by working closely with decision-makers, to facilitate greater collaboration with CSOs and communities at risk. To do so, we offered opportunities to extremely marginalized communities to engage more systematically with decision-makers throughout 2017: in East Africa, as part of our pilot projects on accountability, three of our partners in DRC, Kenya and Uganda facilitated community members to interact with decision-makers. In Ukraine, three Community Action Groups have been established in the

oblasts of Kirovograd, Zaporizhia and Kharkiv with a view to encouraging greater collaboration between Roma communities and local authorities. Also in Ukraine, an Inter-Ministerial Working Group on the Implementation of the Roma National Action Plan was established by MRG and partner Chiricli and the relevant Ukrainian Ministries.

We also continued to challenge, directly and indirectly, institutional discrimination by advocating for changes at different levels. As such, we launched a new initiative to tackle statelessness and its impact on minorities. The initiative involved research into 12 case studies and the publication of a multimedia pack ([available on our website](#)).

## Key achievements of 2017:

- 6 mechanisms established for improved collaboration between decision-makers and marginalized communities, making decision-making processes more inclusive.
- 2 continued efforts and one new initiative implemented to challenge political systems that directly or indirectly discriminate minorities (including statelessness).

The multimedia pack was taken up widely at the international level with, for example, the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues opting to make the topic of statelessness the focus of his first report.

## To 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

As we support minority and indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making processes, represent their communities and challenge inequality, there is a simultaneous need to tackle existing discriminatory policies and attitudes. As such, MRG continued to work closely with decision-makers to improve policies and practices. This included sensitizing and training decision makers to the extreme exclusion and the needs of marginalized minority and indigenous communities. In Uganda, 8 Members of Parliament (MPs) met and engaged in dialogue with 30 members of 28 indigenous peoples in Uganda and 10 national civil society advocacy groups. Those MPs targeted reported a better understanding of minority and indigenous communities' concerns, and pledged to share their new knowledge with the rest of the Ugandan parliament to develop concrete actions. Similarly, our Macedonia programme enabled various ministries and representatives of state institutions to take part in a collaborative National Advocacy Roundtable in Skopje in November 2017 with Roma mediators

and members of the Roma Advocacy Network. This roundtable was an opportunity for network members to work together on common issues and encourage stakeholders to develop a common action plan to tackle issues discussed. These discussions led to the establishment of a follow-up strategy with decision-makers, including follow-up contacts to ensure that action plans and policy recommendations are acted upon and result in concrete changes in national policy documents, legislation and in the lives of beneficiaries. Sensitization and advocacy efforts are an important step towards the improvement of development policies and practices to address the inequalities experienced by minorities and indigenous peoples. This has been the case in Rwanda where, following local partner WOPU's advocacy campaign (implemented with a small grant from MRG) on Batwa access to education, government representatives in Nyagatare involved in advocacy meetings agreed to include Batwa in the category of Historically Marginalized Peoples so they could benefit from educational support available to this group. Another instance of improved practice

was seen in DRC where partner FDAPID conducted a provincial-level advocacy campaign for the right of indigenous communities to employment. The North Kivu Governor pledged among other things to consider educated indigenous Batwa for jobs available at the province level with the resulting role models encouraging other Batwa to access education. In Uganda, as a result of partner BLG's advocacy and sensitization on women's land and property rights, there is a better enforcement of laws in Kween District with regard to ownership and decision-making in families, as witnessed by a number of cases in court. The majority are related to ownership and control of family property by Benet women.

## Key achievements of 2017:

- 83 decision makers better sensitized to the needs and extreme exclusion of marginalized minority and indigenous communities;
- 3 cases of better enforcement of existing law/practices to include effective measures to address inequality against minorities & indigenous peoples.



**“MRG has led to the visibility of OPDP both nationally and internationally. Also, because of the case we have at the African Commission, we really appreciate MRG. If it wasn't for them, always supporting us, it could have been much more difficult to attain where we are now.”**  
Eunice Chepkemoi, Gender Officer of the Ogiek Peoples' Development Programme

## To 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

Land continued to be a major and successful focus of our work. A highlight of the year in this field included [the landmark judgement of the African Court of Human Rights](#) in the ground breaking case *Ogiek v. Kenya*, which found that the Kenyan government had violated seven separate articles of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, with the violations amounting to a persistent denial of Ogiek land rights and their religious, cultural and hunter-gathering practices. This is one of the African Court's first ever cases and the first decision to consider the rights of indigenous peoples: as such, it not only represents a clear legal victory for the community, but also sets a precedent to inspire a generation of activists across Africa. Improving the legal

recognition of indigenous land rights is at the heart of our strategy and this victory is an important step towards achieving this. In November 2017 the Kenyan government gazetted a Task Force to support implementation of the ruling. While the actual effectiveness of this Task Force is still unclear, it nevertheless signals that our advocacy work following the judgment to push for full and meaningful implementation appears to be moving in the right direction. In addition to this, MRG has remained very active in supporting the participation of indigenous peoples in national dialogues on land rights, notably in Kenya (Community Land Act and 2016 Forest and Conservation Management Act), Uganda and Tanzania (Land Bill).

### Key achievements of 2017:

- Projects in 2 countries with innovative strategies to improve inclusion and to combat hate, and racist & xenophobic discourses;
- Projects in 6 countries using cultural expression to challenge discriminations

### Key achievements of 2017:

- 1 successful judgment which extends and clarifies indigenous peoples' rights to land and natural resources;
- Increased awareness of indigenous communities' rights to land and impact on land law and policy in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.

**“We can apply this knowledge of minority rights for our use in our organisations and local communities as well as in the peace negotiation process and coordination.”**

Anonymous Thai Project Participant

## To increase the public participation and visibility of minority communities, with improved strategies to combat hate speech and racist, sectarian and xenophobic discourses

MRG continued to develop innovative and creative strategies to combat hate speech, racist and xenophobic discourses as part of a number of its projects. These strategies have notably included two innovative activities in Ukraine and in Pakistan. In Ukraine, 12 Community Action Groups (CAGs) have been established in 2017 and have proven to be extremely valuable. Located directly within Roma settlements,

these groups - including partner representatives, Roma mediators and other NGOs - contribute to empowering and fostering direct dialogue between communities and authorities. In Pakistan, MRG and its partners have engaged with six schools through storytelling and art performances, to increase awareness about minority rights and respect between those of different faiths among young people. Schools involved in the project report that teachers and students are now more receptive to tolerance, diversity and peace.

MRG also continued to use cultural expression as a vector of change (targeting different types of audiences). As such, 2017 has seen cultural activities in the Middle East and North Africa, with many of the 13 sub-grantees of the DDD project supported by MRG still active in the field (National Centre for Culture and Arts in Jordan, Beirut DC in Lebanon, Tunisian Association for Children and Youth Theatre in Tunisia, Racines in Morocco and El Medina in Egypt, Clown Me In in Lebanon).

### Conclusion

Much remains to be done as injustice, discrimination, exclusion, persecution and rights abuses continue to characterize the lives of many minority and indigenous communities worldwide. Nevertheless, despite difficult external contexts and deteriorating respect for human rights in many countries, 2017 has been a positive year for MRG's work and for many communities we support. There have been many successes over the course of the year, with most of our targets fully met as well as some key milestones of our overall strategy already in place.

It is important to acknowledge that our work has not been implemented without challenges. In particular, changing political conditions and tightening restrictions on civil society in some regions which have forced

us to adapt our programmes. For instance, the growing difficulties for NGOs operating in Egypt meant that MRG needed to maintain a discreet profile limiting in some cases the extent of the work that we had planned. Similarly clamp-downs by governments and other actors in Cameroon, Iran, Tanzania and Thailand affected our projects. Our work in Botswana throughout 2017 also brought home limited resources and capacity gaps that constrained activities of many partners and activists. In the case of Botswana, we had to modify our paralegal training plans to better reflect the needs of the different communities. Similarly, it became apparent during the planned refresher trainings that some groups trained in the first year of the project had not fully grasped the content and struggled to use it. Some remobilisation trainings were therefore implemented. Throughout the year, we have

worked hard to mainstream the issue of intersectional discrimination in our work. Gender issues are at the heart of all our programme, as evidenced by the systematic mainstreaming of gender, as well as partnership with women's organisations (for example in Rwanda, Tanzania and Ukraine). We are keen to engage further with other forms of multiple discrimination. We have been focusing on issues around discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity linked to or within minority communities as part of our work in Tunisia and a publication on Cuba, as well as through our support during the Forum on Minority Issues to an Afro-Brazilian transgender speaker. We are currently looking at opportunities to further develop work in this area.



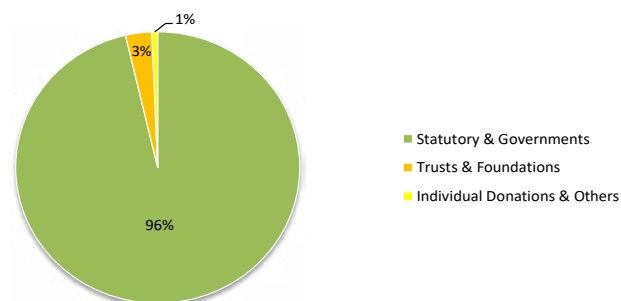
# MRG's Finance

MRG's funding comes from a variety of donations and fundraising activities. Most funds are given by organizations, bodies and individuals, either from the private sector (trusts and foundations), or the public sector (statutory and governments). Overall, in 2017, MRG achieved an income of £2.7m, an increase of just under 23 per cent compared to the previous year (£2.2m in 2016), and an expenditure of £2.4m, a fall of 14 per cent in expenditure compared to 2016 (£2.8m in 2016).

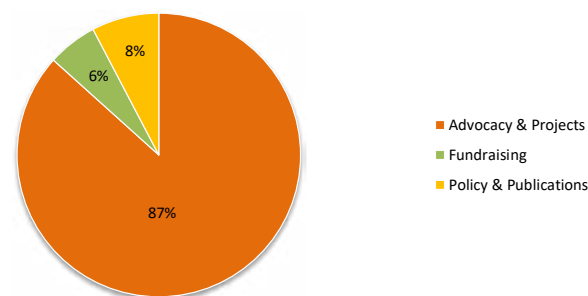
MRG is very grateful to all the partners who have worked with us in 2017, to the decision makers who have listened and taken points on board, to the journalists and editors who have reported news, and last but not least, all the donors – individuals and institutions - who have provided financial support, without which none of this important work could have taken place. For 2017, we wish to give a warm thank you to the following donors who have continued to support us strongly:

- Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Blanes Trust
- DanchurchAid
- Commonwealth Foundation for Democracy
- Ericson Trust
- Eva Reckitt Trust
- Evan Cornish Foundation
- European Commission
- European Cultural Foundation
- F.C.O.
- Freedom Fund
- Garden Court Chambers
- Netherlands Foreign Ministry
- Pilkington Charitable Trust
- Prevo Trust
- Prince Claus Fund
- Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation (SIDA)
- Swedish PostCode Lottery
- Swiss Embassy in Thailand
- T.H. Brunner Charitable Trust
- Unity Theatre Trust
- UNHCR
- US D.R.L.
- VOICE

2017 Donors



2017 Expenditure



## How to support us?

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

### Donate

Make an immediate difference by supporting us, this will allow us to help more persecuted minority and indigenous communities. Donate now!

### Subscribe on our website [minorityrights.org](http://minorityrights.org)

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

### Directory

Visit our online World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples for detailed country specific information.

### Get social

If you like our campaign, please tell your friends on Twitter or Facebook!

**PAGE 10:** *Ogiek people in traditional clothing.* MRG.

**ABOVE:** *Roma woman in Ukraine.* MRG.





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