Introductory Study: Civil Society Actors and the International Protection Regime for Minorities

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Abstract
This article is a first step in a research project that studies the existence, identity and agency of civil society actors that engage directly with the international minority protection regime. It provides a preliminary description and typology of civil society actors focusing exclusively on minority protection and presents a dataset on these actors constructed from a wide range of sources, including the *Yearbook of International Organizations*. It also gives an insight into the agency and influence of civil society actors specialising in minority protection by looking at some of their strategies for norm entrepreneurship, also drawing from the findings of contributors to this special issue. By outlining a research agenda, this article identifies questions that explore the perspectives of civil society actors on the weaknesses and strengths of the current international minority protection regime with a view to identifying potential pathways for its improvement.

Keywords
civil society actors (CSAs); minorities; indigenous peoples; international minority protection regime; norm entrepreneurship; *Yearbook of International Organizations* (YIO)

1. Introduction

The relationship between civil society actors (CSAs) and the international minority protection regime has not yet been documented well. In order to better understand this relationship, we hope this journal issue will be the first step in a wider research project to study the existence, actions, influence and perspective of minority protection CSAs that actively engage with international minority protection mechanisms. Overall, we seek to examine the agency of minority protection CSAs

*) In addition, both editors have worked previously for Minority Rights Group International on global and regional advocacy. The authors would like to thank all of the contributors to this special issue and the reviewers for their support to this project.
vis-à-vis the international minority protection regime. By international minority protection regime we mean the norms, mechanisms and institutions existing at the supra-state level, both globally and regionally, aimed at protecting and promoting minority rights.¹ We hope that better documentation of these factors will give insight into the changes occurring (and possibly needed) in this regime. To this end, we are especially interested in documenting the “norm entrepreneurship”² undertaken by minority protection CSAs. ‘Norm entrepreneurship’ encompasses CSA contributions towards the adherence to existing norms but also includes more critical CSA actions that aim for normative change. These changes can relate to, inter alia, the way norms are framed, the intended beneficiaries of norms, the substance of norms and the monitoring or enforcement mechanisms.

This special issue is also a festschrift in honour of Alan Philips, whose many years of work have been directed towards the establishment of an international minority protection regime that has at its centre minority participation and the representation of minority interests. Alan Phillips is presently an independent expert, who most recently has served as President of the Council of Europe’s Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM). He has previously been the Director of Minority Rights Group International (1989–2000) and was Deputy Director of the British Refugee Council (1981–1988).

Under the directorship of Alan Philips, Minority Rights Group International (MRG) became a visible and influential international non-governmental organisation (INGO). Alan and MRG participated in the shaping of several major international minority protection instruments and mechanisms, including: Chapter IV of the 1990 Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE); the 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (UNDM); the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities in 1992; the UN Working Group on Minorities; and the supervisory mechanism of the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Throughout, Alan worked consistently for the participation of minorities in the shaping of international instruments and mechanisms; this included funding participation and providing training to minority representatives to use these effectively. As the President of the FCNM Advisory Committee, he enabled minorities to participate in the

¹ We include in our framework of ‘minority rights’ standards and mechanisms, those focused on: the protection of national or ethnic, religious and linguistics minorities; indigenous peoples; and addressing racism and related forms of discrimination.