

PREFACE

Although the development and adoption of new international standards concerning the protection of minorities can in many cases be seen as an important political achievement, it is only a small step towards the actual solution of minority problems. The real challenge for the international community, States and minorities lies in the implementation of these international standards in the everyday reality of the minorities in question.

To what extent do minorities benefit from international standards concerning their protection? The question seems simple and obvious, but the answer turns out to be complex and difficult. This study deals with this question by transgressing the dividing line between the law and the reality which underlies it. It gathers information from sources which are familiar to lawyers and legal scholars, such as: international legal documents, national legislation, and policy documents, on the one hand, and, on the other, sources which relate to the 'reality' of minorities, such as: interviews, field reports concerning human rights violations, statistical data concerning sociology and the economy.

This approach made it possible to analyse the whole path of implementation: from the international level to the grass-roots level, and resulted in both practical and more analytical observations and recommendations concerning the improvement of the protection of minorities.

As a matter of fact, this is the way in which legal research should be carried out: looking behind the standards, however important they are, and seeing what happens to them on a day-to-day basis. Isn't this what it's all about? More specifically in this case: to what extent do minorities themselves really profit from all the words devoted to them? The book written by Dr. Anna Meijknecht is, amongst many other things, a great lesson in modesty for all those who think that problems are solved as soon as the 'legislator' has spoken. Chapeau!

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