

Human Rights Council 16th session

Item 8 – follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

Madam President,

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action reaffirms the principles of the universality of human rights and non-discrimination. As a member of the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, ISHR is concerned about the way in which the concept of traditional values has been framed in recent discussions.

Human rights are rooted in deeply held convictions commonly held in different cultures and traditions. Adherence to the human rights framework is a means to affirm these universal values of human dignity, equality, and non discrimination. These universal values must be distinguished from other values found within cultures across the globe that are not compatible with international human rights standards. These values are all too often used to exclude and discriminate against those who do not form part of the perceived mainstream society, including women, racial, ethnic or religious minorities, LGBTI people, and persons with disabilities. In turn these values are used to justify attacks on those who work to defend the rights of those groups and individuals, in particular women human rights defenders who through their legitimate human rights activities can challenge traditional conceptions of gender. This can lead to the exclusion of women from full participation in society.

The VDPA states that 'human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings; their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of governments'. The promotion and protection of human rights should be done by challenging societal attitudes, biases and prejudices that lead to human rights abuses and discrimination particularly against minorities.

The promotion of human rights should also take place through human rights education and dialogue. States have an obligation to develop society's understanding of the meaning of universality of human rights. Education and public awareness can foster respect for human rights, and crucially the defence of human rights, at the national and grassroots level.

At the international level, the Council and its mechanisms, including special procedures, are the appropriate forum for dialogue on thematic issues on all human rights. This has been recently reaffirmed through the review of the work and functioning of the Council. Through these mechanisms the understanding of the concept of sexual orientation and gender identity has been consistently furthered, strengthening a common commitment to universality.

States must redouble their efforts in ensuring this message of the universality of human rights is promoted in unequivocal terms and that the human rights of every person are respected.

Thank you Madam President