

ORAL STATEMENT TO THE 54<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS  
OF WOMEN BY THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN  
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On the fifteenth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, it is more important than ever for Governments and Civil Society to renew their commitment to ensuring women's enjoyment of their full human rights and gender equality. While advances have been made in the adoption and application of international principles and norms, mainstreaming of women's rights is far from a reality

Human rights must be approached in a way that is meaningful and relevant in diverse cultural contexts. Traditions and beliefs have been shaped over the years into a culture which can be traced from a power relations dominated by a patriarchal society. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was therefore conceived and adopted within the context of universality, indivisibility, interrelatedness and interdependence, to promote and protect all humankind without distinction or discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action reaffirms beyond question that human rights are women's rights.

It is therefore essential that cultural relativism should not be an overarching consideration founded on traditional values, practices and cultural beliefs which continue to subordinate and discriminate against women in many parts of the world. Violence against women throughout their lives, from girlhood to adulthood, remains widespread globally, with certain harmful traditional practices and domestic violence being perpetuated in the name of cultural relativism and national values.

In this regard we call attention to the Human Rights Council Resolution 12/21 adopted at its 12<sup>th</sup> Session entitled "Promoting Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms Through a Better Understanding of Humankind. This resolution calls for, *inter alia*, the convening in 2010 of a workshop for an exchange of views on how a better understanding of traditional values of humankind underpinning international human rights norms and standards can contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, with the participation of representatives from all interested States, regional organizations, national human rights institutions and civil society, as well as experts selected with due consideration given to the appropriate representation of different civilizations and legal systems".

We want to underscore along this line to bear in mind that a gender equal lens with a human rights education is necessary if one is to effectively analyse how the phenomenon of traditional values have evolved and developed in a changing society. It is important to trace their historical and religious origins over the centuries which have been predominantly men-led. It is also indispensable to involve the media which has been globalised through the Internet and other forms of new technology.

Finally, in designating participants to the workshop, women from all walks of life especially including from rural and indigenous populations must be involved in this exchange for they are often excluded in such platforms as not being "experts" when in fact they are often victims of harmful traditional practices because of their ignorance of their human rights.