

JOINT STATEMENT TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 13TH SESSION, 1-26
MARCH 2010
Delivered by Conchita Poncini (International Federation of University Women)

ITEM 8. Follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

This is a joint statement of the following NGOs: International Federation of University Women, International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, Zonta International,

We wish to call attention to Resolution 12/21 of the Human Rights Council on Better Understanding of Traditional Values of Humankind Underpinning International Human Right Norms and Standards. While we agree that this resolution has positive points we must also warn against the fact that not all values belonging to culture and civilisations in their traditions, customs and beliefs are common to all and not necessarily based on the Universal Declaration and Bill of Rights. Traditions and beliefs have been shaped over the years into cultures that can be traced to power relations dominated by patriarchal societies, many of which have been interpreted against the rights and empowerment of women and considered as a justification for dominating women and using violence against them. Hence there are many harmful traditional practices which are being perpetuated which should be totally eradicated. This is corroborated by the UN Secretary. General Ban Ki Moon's Statement that (I quote) "There is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: Violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable." (end of quote)- Furthermore, the international community is increasingly aware that allowing violence against women to be excused in the name of 'culture', 'tradition', 'values', 'customs', 'religion' or some other supposedly sacrosanct norms is simply no longer acceptable.

We welcome the convening this year of a workshop for an exchange of views on a better understanding of traditional values underpinning international norms and standards of humankind. In this regard, the Human Rights Council Resolution adopted in Dec. 2007 on Integrating gender equality and women's rights in the whole UN System and in Sept. 2009 on the Elimination of discrimination against women must be at the heart of the discussions in the workshop together with the Convention on the Elimination Against All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. In addition, the workshop should not forget that cultural relativism has often been used to continue to subordinate women and discriminate against them in many parts of the world.

As to the composition of the workshop, it is essential that women of all ages and from all walks of life in different cultures, especially those from rural, indigenous and disabled populations must also be well represented and heard at this workshop as they are often excluded for not being considered "experts". It is also crucial to involve the media which propagates stereotypes and influences public opinion.

Thank you Mr. President