

**United Nations Human Rights Council
22nd Regular Session, 25 February to 22 March 2013
Agenda Item 5**

**ICJ Oral Statement in the General Debate under Item 5: Human rights bodies
and mechanisms**

**THREATS TO THE UNIVERSALITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS BY INITIATIVES ON
TRADITIONAL VALUES**

13 March 2013

Check against delivery

Mr. President,

Human rights are universal. This is the guarantee of Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA) repeatedly emphasizes the universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated nature of rights. This is further reflected in the preambles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Rather than being universal, traditions are local, particular, specific to time and place and culture. The fact that a belief or custom or practice is "traditional" is not what makes it good. The Treaty Bodies and the Special Procedures of this Council have frequently found that some traditional practices and traditional values undermine respect for universal human rights. Their reports show that traditional values may be used to justify caste-based discrimination, slavery and servitude, and different forms of violence and harmful practices against women and girls such as forced and early marriage, honour killings and female genital mutilation.

The study of the Advisory Committee on promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms through a better understanding of traditional values of humankind clearly states that traditional values, rather than being uniform and monolithic, can be both positive and negative. The report cites examples of traditional values being used to justify the subordination of women and other vulnerable or minority groups, both in western and non-western societies.

Throughout the work of this Council and its subsidiary bodies, it must be recalled that traditional values often pose obstacles to the advancement of human rights. Emphasis should always be on the implementation of international human rights law regardless of tradition and culture. The Council must reject efforts to introduce the language of traditional values into the framework of human rights since this undermines the promise of the VDPA, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the UN Charter.

I thank you.

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