



Media Statement

21 May 2010

The following statement has been issued by a group of UN human rights experts to mark World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, 21 May 2010

“Human rights and cultural diversity go hand in hand”, say UN experts

GENEVA – “Cultural diversity can only thrive in an environment that safeguards fundamental freedoms and human rights,” said a group* of UN independent experts on the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. They stressed that defending diversity goes hand in hand with the respect for the dignity of the individual.

“Cultural diversity,” the group said in a joint statement**, “can be protected and promoted only if human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as the freedom of expression, information and communication, the freedom from discrimination of any kind, as well as the ability of individuals to choose cultural expressions, and their right to participate or not to participate in the cultural life of given communities are guaranteed.”

At the same time, the experts noted that an environment conducive to cultural diversity will contribute in a significant manner to the full respect of human rights. “However, no one may invoke cultural diversity as an excuse to infringe on human rights or limit their scope,” they said, stressing that cultural diversity should not be used “to support segregation and harmful traditional practices which, in the name of culture, seek to sanctify differences that run counter to the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights.”

“Universal values of human rights should serve as a bridge among all cultures and should not be subservient to social, cultural or religious norms,” the human rights experts said on the World Day for Cultural Diversity, noting that “cultural rights include the right to question the existing parameters of ‘culture,’ to opt in or out of particular cultural entities, and to continuously create new culture.”

The group also reminded States of their responsibility under international law to create an environment conducive to cultural diversity and the enjoyment of cultural rights, in which “all persons, including national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and those based on other attributes, as well as indigenous peoples, have the right to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice, and particularly in their mother tongue; receive quality education and training that fully respect their cultural identity; and to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practices, subject to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

(*): Farida Shaheed, Independent Expert in the field of cultural rights; Frank La Rue, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Githu Muigai, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; James Anaya, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people; Rashida Manjoo, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences; Vernor Muñoz Villalobos, Special Rapporteur on the right to education; and Asma Jahangir, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

(**): See the full statement on World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development:

http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/cultural_rights/docs/statements/Statement_cultural_diversity21052010.doc

ENDS

Check the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>

Visit the Special Rapporteurs' websites:
Independent Expert in the field of cultural rights:
http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/cultural_rights/index.htm

Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression:
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/opinion/index.htm>

Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/racism/rapporteur/index.htm>

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people:
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/rapporteur/>

Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences:
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/women/rapporteur/index.htm>

Special Rapporteur on the right to education:
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/education/rapporteur/index.htm>

Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/religion/index.htm>
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