



JOINT ORAL STATEMENT TO THE 54TH SESSION OF
THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
Delivered by Louise Croot, President of the International Federation of University Women

It is my honour to present this joint statement on behalf of the International Federation of University Women and eleven other organizations: the African Commission on Health Promoters and Human Rights, Femmes Africa Solidarity, the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices, the International Alliance of Women, the International Council for Social Welfare, the International Movement for Fraternal Union Among Races and Peoples, the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, Solar Cookers International, Women's Federation for World Peace International, the Worldwide Organization for Women, and Zonta International.

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 full enjoyment of their 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 meaningful way to be relevant in diverse cultural contexts. Traditions and beliefs have been shaped over the years into cultures which can be traced from power relations dominated by patriarchal societies. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was thus conceived and adopted in 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 Beijing and Vienna Declarations and Platforms for Action reaffirm beyond question that human rights are also women's rights.

It is 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 old age, remains widespread globally, with certain harmful traditional practices, notably female genital mutilation and domestic violence being perpetuated in the name of cultural relativism and values.

In this regard we call attention to the Human Rights Council Resolution 12/21 adopted at its 12th Session “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. It requires the participation of representatives from all interested States, regional organizations, national human rights institutions and civil society, as well as experts selected with a view to the appropriate representation of different civilizations and legal systems”.

We want to underscore in this context that a gender equality lens and human rights education are necessary if we are to effectively analyse how the phenomenon of traditional values has evolved and developed in changing society. It is important to trace their historical and religious origins over the centuries, which have been predominantly men-led. It is also essential to involve the media which is globalising stereotyped values through the Internet and other forms of new technology.

Women from all walks of life, especially from rural and indigenous populations, must be involved in this global debate, for they are often excluded from such platforms for not being “experts” when in fact they are often victims of harmful traditional practices.