

22nd session of the Human Rights Council
High-level panel discussion to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the
adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA)

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a member of the 90s generation, I would like to start by personally thanking the VDPA and to those of you who were involved in realising it. We have greatly and directly benefited from the path you have opened for us as children, women, disabled people, minorities... Thanks to the VDPA, today's youth also has the chance to relate to participatory democracy, human rights through new mediums for freedom of expression, digital freedom such as social media.

I know that back in those times, there was a sense of pessimism on how successful it would be. The divisions seemed almost impossible to overcome.

However, the agreement on the VDPA came out as a major achievement. I find it striking that it was at all possible to adopt such a declaration with the consensus of the 171 States participating in the Conference. It was a strong message to be conveyed to the international community and civil society that a consensus could be reached on human rights.

VDPA has played a very important role in making "discrimination" unacceptable and shameful at the level of States. Although there may be many difficulties faced in its implementation at the national level, 'respecting human rights' turned into a core value of States and became a condition to be a part of the international community.

In the past 20 years, developments and changes within the international community have strengthened multilateral human rights actors and procedures. Many countries have accepted Human Rights as a less controversial issue on foreign policy agendas. Civil society have become increasingly significant in the political landscape.

However, human rights still provoke political controversy. The record of national practice leaves much to be desired. There have been and are still too many serious human rights violations today that remain inadequately addressed or unaddressed by the international community.

Global economic and financial crises, climate change, poverty, gender inequality, growing power and influence of emerging states are all factors likely to have a deep influence in shaping the future development and implementation of human rights as a global issue.

We have invited the States to think about the implementation of universal human rights at the national level with difficult questions to resolve. However, we can't just leave it to legislation.

Speaking as a lawmaker, I can see a much stronger challenge than changing laws in compliance with the international law. That is the resistance of traditions.

I am very often faced with the underlying thought, deeply embedded in various societies that question fundamental freedoms, saying "instead of freedoms that does not contribute with a meaning to my life, I choose traditions that give meaning to one's life".

I believe this is the main challenge we will be facing in the next two decades; to reconcile freedoms and traditions. It is not the States that need a consensus now; it is cultures and traditions.

For instance, let's look at the ongoing phenomenon of acid attacks against women following rejection of marriage, resisting against sexual abuse or family disputes. In the concerned countries, the lawmakers passed concrete laws and introduced severe penalties to fight against it. However, the numbers of victims either remains the same or increases.

In this case of law enforcement, the cultural willpower acts much stronger than the political or legal willpower.

Elsewhere, child soldiers are recruited, child brides are wed, having been bought from their families. In most cases, there is not much trace of the use of force on the surface, as the families and receivers all seem to be in agreement. Then who do we struggle against? My answer is that we struggle against a "deep culture" which sees this acceptable.

We are still battling with the prejudices, discrimination and hate crimes of the past. Our duty is to remove these burdens from the shoulders of future generations.

We need to focus more on cultural campaigns and maybe make that a benchmark for participatory democracy. Perhaps parliamentarians and governments should be responsible to come up with thorough cultural campaign plans along with human rights related legislation.

In my opinion, we do not need more legal development on the normative side but we should focus on the implementation of what has already been adopted through education and accountability. I think it would be generally accepted that we can use human rights semantic as a reference and structure for standards of behaviour, what should be considered as acceptable treatment of human beings and social / governmental criticism.

As a member of the UN CRPD, I am also proud to be part of the international efforts while our treaty body enshrines concrete recommendations for prompt national level action and monitoring of implementation, addressing specific barriers faced by persons with disabilities to enjoy their human rights. Once again I wish Happy Birthday to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. Thank you.