



31<sup>st</sup> session of the Human Rights Council - Item 3  
Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights



Statement by

**Federatie van Nederlandse Verenigingen tot Integratie van Homoseksualiteit - COC Nederland<sup>1</sup>**

*Delivered by Zuriani Zonneveld*

*Mr. President, Excellencies,*

We warmly welcome this comprehensive report of the Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights on the “Promotion and Protection of all Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, including the Right to Development”, reflecting on the work undertaken by the previous mandate holder and highlighting priority areas for the current mandate holder.

The celebration and enjoyment of cultural rights has the potential to transform hearts and minds in evanescent hatred and prejudice. Through grassroots activities, like open youth mics, theatre presentations, and music performances, we have witnessed fathers soften their hearts towards accepting their gay son, we have seen faith communities come together to fundraise for Syrian refugees, and we have built bridges for dialogue between contending collectivities. In addition, the free practice of cultural rights serves as an effective antidote to radicalism. Artistic expressions, through technology, new media and various forms of art and music, counter radical narratives, and for this reason, freedom of expression and conscience must be unequivocally championed.

*Mr. President,*

Given the cathartic power of cultural expressions and resources, we voice concern about the clampdown on cultural practices, such as Pride Marches, threats towards female cultural performers, and the intentional destruction of cultural heritage sites like Palmyra in 2015 by Daesh. We seek to implore UN Member States to utilize their cultures as vehicles for sustainable development, in accordance with international human rights law.

While cultural rights are rightfully recognized as an integral part of human rights, all too often tradition, religion and culture are used as drivers for the propagation and justification of human rights violations such as harmful cultural practices like female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C) and “honour” killings.

We adamantly affirm that culture should never be an excuse to deny any individual their fundamental human rights.

*Mr. President,*

We look forward to supporting Dr. Karima Bennouna as Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights as she takes on the priorities specified in her report. We welcome the Special Rapporteur’s recommendation which calls on States to ensure the right of *all* persons to access, participate in and contribute to *all* aspects of cultural life, including in identifying and interpreting cultural heritage, and deciding which cultural traditions, values or practices are to be kept intact, modified or discarded altogether and to do so without fear of punitive actions. States should equally ensure this right regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, migrant status, disability or poverty. As the human family, we must strive towards genuine pluralistic societies, in which cultural rights for all are vaunted not repudiated.

*Thank you Mr. President.*

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<sup>1</sup>This statement was drafted in close consultation with the faith-based human rights organization Muslims for Progressive Values.