

Statement at 22nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council

25 February 2013

Item 1: High Level Panel on Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

ACHIEVING PROGRESS AND PREVENTING REGRESS IN THE REALISATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Thank you Mr President.

On behalf of the International Service for Human Rights I would like to reflect on the achievements of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action to date and some of the implementation challenges that remain.

The Vienna Conference contributed to a number of significant international human rights developments, including, famously, the establishment of the post of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the strengthening of Special Procedures.

The Conference also helped to strengthen domestic human rights mechanisms. It precipitated the establishment of many national human rights institutions and led to the elaboration of National Human Rights Action Plans. Properly mandated and resourced, both of these mechanisms can play an important role in contributing to the domestic implementation of international human rights obligations.

Mr President, the VDPA also contributed to the normative development of human rights. It affirmed principles of universality and indivisibility, the rights of equality and non-discrimination, and the equal and inalienable rights of women and girls.

Mr President, this and forthcoming sessions of the Human Rights Council present an opportunity for, but also a test of, the international community's commitment to these norms.

Consistent with the rights to equality and non-discrimination, first set out in the UDHR but strongly reaffirmed in the VDPA, it is crucial that the Council and all Member States explicitly acknowledge and take legislative and other action to prohibit all forms of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Consistent with the principles of universality and indivisibility, the Council and all Member States should also take action to ensure that human rights – particularly women's rights and LGBT rights – are not restricted in the name of protecting so-called "traditional values". The notion of "traditional values" is completely illegitimate so far as it is invoked to restrict the enjoyment of rights guaranteed under international human rights law or standards, or to criminalise or impede activities in defense of them.

Mr President, two decades ago the World Conference declared that the "promotion and protection of human rights is a matter of priority for the international community" and must be "the first responsibility of governments". This session, the strength of the Council's action on country situations such as those in Sri Lanka and Syria will help determine whether, twenty years on, this statement remains rhetoric or becomes reality.

Mr President, Article 38 of the Vienna Declaration explicitly recognises the "important role of non-governmental organizations in the promotion of all human rights." In this regard, we call

on the Council and other UN human rights mechanisms to ensure that they are, and remain, accessible to NGOs and hear and heed the voices of human rights defenders.

Article 38 further provides that human rights defenders should enjoy the rights and freedoms recognized in the UDHR, and the protection of the national law". In this regard, ISHR urges the Council and Member States to take concrete steps and measures to protect human rights defenders from all forms of attack, intimidation or reprisal.

Thank you Mr President.