

[Human Rights Council Advisory Committee discusses mandated study on traditional values](#)

The Human Rights Council Advisory Committee (the Committee) held its 7th session in Geneva from 5 to 12 August 2011. On 10 August, under agenda item 3 dealing with requests from the Human Rights Council (the Council), the Committee considered a request stemming from [Council resolution 16/3](#) 'Promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms through a better understanding of traditional values of humankind'. The resolution requests the Committee to produce a study on 'how a better understanding and appreciation of traditional values of freedom, dignity, and responsibility can contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights'.

Resolution 16/3 was presented to the Council in March 2011 by the Russian Federation. It was adopted with 24 votes in favour, 14 against, and 7 abstentions. The resolution marked another step in the Russian Federation's attempt to legitimise the concept of traditional values within the international human rights discourse.

At the 12th session of the Council in September 2009, resolution 12/21 was adopted, requesting the High Commissioner to convene a workshop that would explore how a better understanding of traditional values can promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. The [workshop](#) was held in October 2010. Several panellists at that workshop warned about giving legitimacy to value systems that are not compatible with international human rights norms.

During the 7th session of the Advisory Committee, the Russian delegation addressed members, and emphasised that its intention in promoting the concept of traditional values is not to undermine the universality of human rights, but rather to use the framework of traditional values to promote human rights.

The difficulty with this approach, however, was made particularly clear at the 17th session of the Council, during the adoption of [resolution 17/19](#) 'Human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity'. During explanations of vote on this resolution, it was evident that several States have a conservative understanding of the universality of human rights, according to which it is not self-evident that universality of human rights means that human rights also apply to all regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. According to Pakistan (speaking on behalf of the OIC) the resolution attempts to establish new rights by misinterpreting the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and in doing so jeopardises the entire international human rights framework. Echoing the point, Nigeria, claiming to speak on behalf of the African Group (despite the fact that the resolution was led by South Africa), stated that the resolution falls outside of international human rights principles.

In this context, a traditional values approach, and the particular emphasis that has been placed on the 'family' as a vehicle for promoting this approach, is extremely worrying. Should it be legitimised as a tool for promoting human rights, it would create a focal point around which opposition to true universality of human rights would coalesce.

NGOs addressed the Committee during the meeting, and reiterated these points, calling on members to clearly set out in their study the risks inherent in a traditional values approach. While members seemed to be receptive to these points, there is still a need to continue to raise these points and ensure that the final report cannot be used to legitimise the concept of traditional values.

In its [decision 7/1](#) the Committee established a ten-person drafting group, with Mr Ahmer Bilal Soofi as the Chairperson and the Russian Committee member, Mr Vladimir Kartashkin as Rapporteur. The drafting group has invited NGOs and other interested stakeholders to submit suggestions relating to the structure of the report, and the substance. ARC International is compiling these suggestions at tradval@arc-international.net for submission to the drafting group by early September.

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