**Input to the Human Rights Council Resolution 29/22 on the protection of the family**

**Presentation**

The Kvinna till Kvinna foundation hereby send our submission to the aforementioned consultation on “protection of the family”.

In this submission we would like to emphasize the importance of a gender perspective when addressing the protection of the family to achieve sustainable development.

1. **The consequences for the work for women human rights and its defenders.**

From a perspective of Women Human Rights Defender’s (WHRD) around the world the resolution, as is its predecessors, is problematic. Traditional values and protection of the family are concepts that are not clearly defined.

In his latest report the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders lists WHRDs as one of the most at risk groups of defenders says that WHRD are explicitly targeted because they are women working for women’s rights.[[1]](#footnote-1) The report also states that WHRDs face specific threats because they work in countries in which the dominant discourse still confines women to the private sphere and it is often in that regard that they come under attack. They are the object of particularly virulent harassment, defamation and stigmatization campaigns on the Internet, in which their respectability and credibility as a woman defender, women, mother, or citizen are derided.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Kvinna till Kvinna has seen that a lot of the threats and abuses directed towards WHRDs borrow the language from the debate around traditional and family values. Many WHRDs believe that due to the current language in the resolutions on protection of the family, the attacks against them will be harsher and that women’s rights will be seen as less important than the rights of the family as an entity.

Working with human rights, and explicitly women’s rights are increasingly seen as being against cultural traditions and moral standards, against “our” culture, family values and even against religion. WHRDs are subjected to violence and some of the violence is gendered or sexualised as to “recast women back into their ‘traditional’ roles”[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. **Ensure human rights for all members of the family**

The state is responsible for guaranteeing that the most vulnerable members of a family are guaranteed fundamental individual rights. Early and forced marriage, domestic and sexual violence, different kinds of genital mutilation, child abuse, marital rape, forced labour and violation of intimacy and personal autonomy are prohibited by international human rights law, regardless eventual family bounds between perpetrator and victim. For many women and girls around the world, the family is a place of little or no security.

Even if the resolution states “that States have the primary responsibility to promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all human beings, and stresses the fundamental importance of full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms of all family members**;”** it still talks about the family as the natural and fundamental group unit of society that is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Gender-based violence is both persistent and widespread, and ranks as top public health crisis for women in the world today.  Women aged 15 through 45 are more likely to be maimed or die from male violence than from cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war combined.[[4]](#footnote-4)

This violence can take many different forms, and is constantly mutating into new forms, be it acid attacks, bride burnings, rape or domestic violence. This violence is often perpetrated by those closest to a woman. Up to 70 percent of female murder victims are killed by their male partners, according to the World Health Organization.

Therefore, there is a need to acknowledge that the family unit not always is a safe place for a woman, and we have to make sure that women’s individual human rights are not forgotten in the name of protecting the family.

1. **Concluding remarks on protection of the family and sustainability**

To make sure that this resolution, and others on family values and traditional values does not do harm it would be important to acknowledge the agreed language from Beijing Platform for Action (1995) that stated that culture, religion and tradition, cannot be used as the basis from which to violate, discriminate, and justify delay on crucial issues related to the rights of women and girls around the world.

When stating “6. *Recognizes* that the family, while respect for the rights of its members is ensured, is a strong force for social cohesion and integration, intergenerational solidarity and social development, and that the family plays a crucial role in the preservation of cultural identity, traditions, morals, heritage and the values system of society;” without acknowledging that concepts like “tradition”, “morals”, “value system” are very ambiguous and have often been used to justify marginalization of groups and gender-based inequalities rather than standing up for all individual’s human rights. It opens up for a wide range of interpretations that might in the end hurt many women and girls around the world, and their possibilities to choose their own life decisions.

When promoting the role of the family and its contribution to realising human rights and sustainable development states also have to effectively prevent the family to be used as a means for oppression of its members.

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1. UNGA A/70/217 Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Report from the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders A/70/217 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (January 2012), “Global Report on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders” page 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.halftheskymovement.org/issues/gender-based-violence [↑](#footnote-ref-4)