**The Impact of Fundamentalism and Extremism on the Cultural Rights of Women: Time to Take a Stand**

**Discussion of the report presented by the**

**UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights**

**26 October 2017, 17:00 – 19:00**

**Conference Room XI, UN headquarters, New York**

**Background**

Rising tides of fundamentalism and extremism, in diverse forms, and whether espoused by State or non-State actors, today represent major threats to human rights, including cultural rights, worldwide. At the heart of the fundamentalist and extremist paradigms are rejections of equality and of the universality of human rights, making unwavering defence of these principles the touchstone of the human rights response.

Fundamentalist and extremist groups often seek to quash the expression of any cultural opposition to their own agenda. Extremists often harass and target members of minority groups, immigrants and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons as they seek to enjoy their equal cultural rights. What such efforts have in common is a mindset based on intolerance of differences and pluralism, and an attempt to stamp out cultural diversity and dissent.

Building on her report on diverse forms of fundamentalism and extremism as threats to cultural rights, presented in March 2017 before the Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Ms. Karima Bennoune, decided to consider more closely the grave impact of these threats on the cultural rights of women. Her current report to the General Assembly ([A/72/155](http://undocs.org/en/A/72/155)) focuses on how fundamentalism and extremism seek to roll back the advances achieved in securing women’s equality, aim to block further advances and try to penalize and stigmatize the women human rights defenders promoting such critical efforts. She calls for the international community to take a stand against all such anti-rights trends, whether on the part of States or non-State actors, at the international or national levels, with a vigorous international human rights-based challenge, which must centre women’s human rights, including cultural rights.

**Objectives of the side event**

The objectives of the side event are:

* To increase attention paid to the impact that diverse forms of fundamentalism and extremism have on cultural rights in general, and the cultural rights of women in particular;
* To attract the attention of governments, United Nations agencies and departments, relevant networks and civil society organisations based in New York to the Special Rapporteur’s report and the importance of adopting a human rights approach to fundamentalism and extremism, which must by fully gender sensitive, centering the cultural rights and equality of women, and defending universality;
* To give the floor to a number of women activists who have experienced the negative impact of diverse forms of fundamentalism and extremism on their cultural rights in diverse regions, who will share their views on the challenges they meet on the ground, explain how they understand the role of cultural rights in the fight against fundamentalism and extremism and how they see the respect, protection and implementation of women’s human rights as an essential part of that fight;
* To encourage discussion of and follow-up to the Special Rapporteur’s recommendations and to provide an opportunity to discuss with interested States, United Nations agencies and Departments, as well as academics and non-governmental organizations, steps that could be adopted to ensure respect for and protection of women’s cultural rights in the face of rising fundamentalism and extremism.

**Organization**

The side event will be organized in the name of the United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights. It will take the form of a two-hour meeting, including presentations and a Q&A segment.

The event will be webcasted live on [webtv.un.org](http://www.webtv.un.org).

**Panellists**

* Karima Bennoune, Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights
* Rafida Bonya Ahmed, author, human rights activists and moderator at Mukto-mona blog; visiting research scholar at UT Austin; widow of Bangladeshi blogger Avijit Roy
* Sheema Kermani, activist, theatre practitioner and dancer; founder of Tehrik-E-Niswan in Karachi, Pakistan
* Wanda Nowicka, Chair of Equality and Modernity Association; Honorary President of Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning
* Wai Wai Nu, Director of Women Peace Network Arakan, Myanmar
* Cole Parke, LGBTQ and Gender Justice Researcher at Political Research Associates, USA
* Video message from Nayantara Sahgal, Indian writer

**Moderator**: Naureen Shameem, human rights lawyer, Coordinator of the Challenging Fundamentalisms Human Rights programme, Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID)