

*International conference "Traditional Values: Facilitating or Obstructing Human Rights?"
Lusaka, 25-27 June*

Excellencys,

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

On behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development I would like to thank **JCTR** and the **Justice and Peace Commission** for this outstanding and important conference.

Because what we debate here is extremely relevant for development cooperation and for Germany as one of the biggest donors worldwide.

So with regard to traditional values and development cooperation I have **three very simple, very basic messages** that I would like to bring to the debate.

FIRST:

1. Development is about values.

Or in other words:

Values are key to sustainable development and peace

I realized this during the last days when I had the chance to participate in the **exposure program**.

For example when we went to the **traditional authority** to pay our respect. I brought him two goats.

When I saw how devote and humble people behaved in his presence I asked myself: Is this maybe one reason why the ruling elite in many African countries is seeing political leadership/governing as the **right to be served** and not as the **duty to serve** – i.e. to serve the people.

During our conference we heard a lot of other examples.

Our **values guide our actions**. And our **actions shape our world**.

So if we want to make our world a more peaceful, healthier and more equitable place for everyone,

if we want to support sustainable development, we **need to take values into account**.

For too long, the international development cooperation focused mainly on technical and financial aspects.

Klaus Töpfer, the former director of UNEP, recently said: We just forgot about the **cultural dimension of sustainability**. Mostly we focus on the economical, ecological and social dimension – but we forget the cultural dimension.

So what we have to realize is this:

Unless we address the issue of traditional values within our development cooperation we will not be able to bring about change!

I think, this has been obvious throughout the conference.

Once again:

Values are key to sustainable development and peace.

And because of that, my second message is:

2. We need a new and honest dialogue on common values.

A dialogue that is free of fear, free of prejudices, free of attacking one another.

And: **Development cooperation should contribute to this dialogue.**

Because development cooperation is about **working together to improve the living conditions** of society. In concrete projects.

So this is the **right place** to have this new dialogue.

Important for such a dialogue is **mutual respect**. People can only have an open conversation if they respect each other and accept each other **as equals**.

What are the values that we all share? What world do we want for our children?

In Germany, our ministry worked with thousands of people from the political arena, civil society and academia to draft a **Charter for the Future**. At times, that process was very difficult. But we all felt that it was worth it.

In that context, we also focused on the **importance of culture, tradition and religion** and their link with human rights.

One meeting was particularly striking for me:

I had the chance to talk to **human rights activists from Pakistan**. They fight for the freedom of religion. I was deeply impressed by their work.

In their work they draw on **local stories** and **long traditions of inter-faith coexistence**. They are trying to sensitize people by **building on traditional values** that people believe in.

This is where development cooperation has a chance to come in. Culture and **traditional values are an important basis** from which people can be **invited to engage in a dialogue** about values.

If traditional values are ignored, the human rights debate remains **a matter for elites**.

Sometimes I come across some **skepticism about the human rights discourse**. *And we experienced this at the opening of our conference.*

Not about the content of human rights as such – everybody likes to freely speak its mind. Everybody values the right to food, water, health and education.

However, the human rights discourse is sometimes criticized. It is said that human rights were an **invention of the West**. They were a **new form of colonialism**, an attempt to interfere in countries' **internal affairs**, an **attack on local culture and traditional values**.

We need to take these **reservations seriously**, even if we do not share them. We have to talk to those people who question the universality of human rights by referring to culture and tradition.

It is not dialogue that is dangerous; it is absence of dialogue.

On the other hand, cultural diversity and traditional values must not be used by governments as an argument for **watering down human rights** and **restrict their application**.

Let me say this very clear – and the German Ambassador also mentioned it:

Human rights are enshrined in **international law**. Governments have to respect, protect and fulfill them regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems.

This is in their own interest. Because human rights is not a threat to cultural diversity. **It is a guarantee for cultural diversity**.

Wherever human rights are violated, cultural diversity is suffering. The most shocking example is the IS terror in Syria and Irak.

I want to be very clear on this: there can be **no "cultural proviso"**, no **"cultural veto"** when it comes to human rights.

Culture, traditional values or religion cannot be an excuse for human rights abuse.

This goes for women, people with disabilities, and also ethnic, religious and sexual minorities.

The international community – and this is not only the Western countries – once more committed itself to the human rights 20 years ago through the **Vienna Declaration**. They again highlighted the **universality of human rights**.

So, human rights are a **guiding principle for Germany's development policy**. They guide my Ministry's goals, programs and procedures.

The most important thing about our human rights-based approach is the **change of perspective**:

Governments have obligations, people have rights.

[Example: Right to clean water/Musulumba]

The German development cooperation wants to support governments to live up to their human rights obligations. And we want to support people to assert their rights.

In that, **civil society – also faith-based organizations – play a crucial role**. They can give voice to the disadvantaged and marginalized.

Once more:

We need a new and honest dialogue on common values.

Development cooperation should contribute to this dialogue.

But, how can we:

(First) pay greater attention to values in development cooperation
and

(Second) support a new dialogue on common values?

For this, we need to have those players on board who have influence on values in their society. We need the **value stakeholders**.

In most societies in the world, **religion is a central source of values**. That is why my final message is:

3. Religion matters!

Let me give you an **example**.

For many years now, we have been working against **harmful traditional practices** such as **female genital mutilation**.

In many cases, FGM is firmly rooted in society. It is considered a **social norm** and often even a **religious commandment**. And yet it is clear that FGM is a **human rights violation**.

In Mauritania and other African countries, it has been possible to get **Muslim and Christian scholars to support the fight against this practice**. If we want to protect women and girls, it is important that religious authorities condemn the practice.

This example shows that we are often **more successful** if we join forces and **work with religious leaders**.

That is why my ministry set up a special **task force on religion and development**.

In future, we want to better **include the potential of religion** for sustainable development.

We also launched a **broad debate** on this within Germany.

And we put this issue on the **international agenda**. Two weeks from now, I will be accompanying our State Secretary to Washington, where we are co-organizing an **international conference** on religion and development together with the World Bank, the United Nations, the governments of the UK and of the U.S., and many NGOs.

Religion has an influence on many people's lifestyles and civic engagement. It has a strong influence on social life. Religion helps people to understand, to build understanding and to change things.

Of course, there is also some **negative potential to religion** – aspects that are a **barrier to development**.

But even then international development cooperation cannot ignore religious actors.

Wherever religion is part of the problem, it must also become part of the solution.

To close my input, I want to come back to **Mr Robson** in the village of **Musulumba**:

The idea of human rights gives **encouragement** to him to fight for clean water – to fight for clean water for more than 10 years now.

By telling his neighbors, his community about human rights he **changed their perspective**.

Even the **women's group** started a protest march to the local chef.

They didn't do this because a western donor or NGO told them to do so. They did it because they know it's their right; because they feel in their hearts that this is the right thing to do.

And this – after all – is the **challenge**: Not just to have human rights as an abstract concept somewhere in our constitution. But to root them in our hearts and live accordingly.