

General Debate on Item 8

Follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

**22 September 2014, Geneva
Statement by Ireland**

Mr. President,

Ireland aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

The importance of the VDPA in renewing and strengthening efforts to respect, protect and fulfil human rights cannot be overstated. It reminds us that, not only are all human rights of equal importance, but that they apply to everyone. In ensuring that is the case, there is no question of additional rights or additional protection for different groups; however, it is clear that in many cases individuals are suffering egregious violations and abuses of their human rights, because of their work, or who they are.

The principle of non-discrimination is at the heart of the VDPA and indeed a cross-cutting principle in international human rights law. It applies to everyone, without distinction of any kind and is prohibited on the basis of a list of non-exhaustive categories, *such as* race, colour, sex, language and so on. Religious or cultural values should never be used as a justification for putting in place laws or policies which allow discrimination and violence to go unaddressed. However, this is clearly occurring when it comes to the human rights of LGBTI persons. Homophobic and transphobic hate crimes occur in every part of the world and are often combined with a lack of adequate legal protection against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

To deny equality is to look another in the eye and proclaim them to be a lesser person. It is to deny the value of one person's humanity over another. Nevertheless some say that sexual orientation and gender identity are sensitive or divisive issues. However, violence and discrimination are not. This Council must speak out, not only because of the legal obligations of States under international human rights law, but because lives are at stake.

Mr President,

While the VDPA recognised the important role of civil society to peace and security, development and human rights, the full enjoyment of human rights by civil society actors is not being realised in many parts of the world. Some are particularly at risk because of their work.

Ensuring a safe and enabling space for civil society to operate, is not about new rights, or additional protection. It is about the fulfilment of existing rights - the rights of peaceful assembly, association, opinion and expression, which enable civil society actors to carry out their work; work which facilitates the achievement of the purposes and principles of the UN. Protecting civil society space is aimed at ensuring civil society actors can enjoy the same human rights to which everyone is entitled. It was in that spirit that Ireland, with a cross regional group, is presenting a draft resolution in this session to address the issue of civil

society space *as a human rights concern*. We look forward to the consensual adoption of this resolution by the Council.

Thank you.