

Traditional Values und Human Rights - International Conference in Lusaka in June 2015

Opening words, Gertrud Casel

Dear excellencies, dear Minister Dr Simbyakula, and Minister Dr Katema, dear participants, colleagues and friends in human rights works,

a warm welcome to everybody on behalf of the German Commission for Justice and Peace and our president Bishop Stephan Ackermann!

We – Leonard Chiti and me – are happy to open now this International Conference on Traditional Values: Facilitating or Obstructing Human Rights?

My colleague, Daniel Legutke has worked for almost one year now to realise this conference from the first idea to concrete plannings and actions. There were many phone calls with Heiner Bielefeldt, with Leonard Chiti, with some of you in Zambia and in Germany, to come up with the right questions. We wanted to ensure, that we have a common understanding of the key concepts such as tradition, value, culture, human rights or religion. Or at least to make sure that we understand how they are used and connotated in our different societies, more or less secularized. There are differences not only between Europe and Africa, but also between men and women, christians and muslims and non religious people. And it was even as important to find out the right actors. Thanks God many of you wanted to join. So here we are: once again welcome!

It was already at the first workshop in our human rights dialogue with African partners in May 2012 in Berlin that traditional values and human rights were one of the crucial findings we agreed to work on. The ambivalence of traditional values and traditional law was discussed. We identified as a task of church, of civil society and of politics to transform traditions where they obstruct the implementation of human rights. In the Hague in February 2014 we close our international Workshop on defending human dignity in human rights by a coming declaration "From dialogue to joint action". Some of you were with us in The Hague and perhaps remember our vital discussions about the International Criminal Court.

Traditional values and human rights are burning issues, not only at UN in Geneva in human right politics for example when dealing with russian orthodox church. But it`s also vital in Germany where religious and church traditions are looked at rather suspiciously Often they are seen more as a risk than a potential for freedom and human rights. In Africa in some areas traditions are still deeply rooted in hearts and minds of people but also in rules and even in local law, although they are sometimes contradicting with human rights.

Yesterday 12 people among us returned from an Exposure and Dialogue program in Monze and They bring back experiences from the grassroots – level of human rights work and traditional values here in Zambia. Surely they will enrich our debate or perhaps bring it back to practical every day life and its challenges.

It`s a pleasure for me now to give the kick off for our conference.

May the holy spirit enlighten us and support mutual understanding across different languages, different cultures and different traditions. May the pentecostal miracle happen again in the days to come and help us to find ways, that traditional values really facilitate human rights here in Africa, in Europe and worldwide.

Bonn, 11.06.2015

Gertrud Casel