



UNESCO: Traditions vs. Animal welfare

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There is a growing global concern about animal welfare and how interactions between human beings and other species affect these ones' needs and interests. From philosophical and ethical approaches, and through the laws which attempt to protect those interests, animal protection entails direct effects on human behaviors, habits and activities related to issues such as consumption, scientific experimentation, entertainment, or the specific one this Committee is dealing with today: tradition preservation.

Peru does not remain indifferent to this concern and dilemma at all. In the last decade this country has witnessed a growth process which, even though the uncertain international context, is expected to be continued, with an increasing per capita GDP and poverty reduction. But progress should not be measured only in terms of economic development, but also considering the improvement on other aspects, such as the protection of human rights, the environmental sustainability, or the awareness of animal welfare, as a mature society which is sensitive to other living beings' suffering and dignity as well.

In accordance with that, in 2000 Peru passed its Animal Protection Law, covering domestic animals and wild animals under captivity. This law declares as a national interest the protection of these animals against any cruelty that is caused or permitted by men in a direct or indirect way, bringing on unnecessary suffering, injury or death. Likewise, this law modified the Peruvian Criminal Code, which penalizes cruel acts against animals, their subjection to clearly excessive work or mistreatment, with or without causing them death.

But animal protection in Peru finds some limitations that are regulated by the aforementioned law, too. On the one hand, scientific research and human consumption - of course, always held according to those procedures that guarantee the less suffering for the animal -. And, on the other hand, traditions.

Together with a great natural and monumental heritage, Peru has got also a very rich intangible cultural heritage, made up of a wide range of folklore, popular art, oral traditions, gastronomy, ceremonies, magic and religious customs, legends, popular celebrations, traditional medicine, knowledge, languages... A living heritage which is transmitted from generation to generation and that is constantly recreated by groups and communities. This heritage provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, and contributes to the promotion and respect of cultural diversity and human creativity.

This is the spirit of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the UNESCO (2003), which was ratified by Peru in 2004. Another sign of Peruvian government's concern and firm commitment with the preservation of cultures and traditions was the creation of the Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Latin America (2006), in cooperation with the UNESCO. Thus, nowadays Peruvian traditions such as the Scissors Dance, the Huaconada, the

Taquile and its textile art, or the oral heritage and cultural manifestations of the Zápara people, are included in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Among other innumerable Peruvian traditions, some entail the participation of animals, with an important symbolic meaning for the community who practices them, for instance, the llama slaughter in Cuzco or the Yawar Party. This kind of celebrations, together with others such as bullfighting or cockfighting, deeply rooted in a part of the Peruvian society and also present in other countries, put on the table the same issue that members of this Commission have been called to tackle: *Traditions vs. Animal Welfare*. A difficult subject considering that traditions and their identity value are a very sensitive issue, especially in a developing country. Any changing strategy related to them must be very carefully thought-out and introduced in a gradual and progressive way.

In that sense, Peru considers that the main tool that countries have got to face the conflict of interests between traditions and animal welfare lies in education. If traditions are living expressions of one community, they can of course evolve with that group and change some of its elements, provided that they still keep the same identity feeling. In fact, the Peruvian Animal Protection Law includes among its objectives the promotion of the respect for animals' life and rights by the education, and it declares the Ministry of Education's special role in this field.

Therefore, within the framework of the UNESCO, the commitment with education in this specific field should mean the development of new plans and programs in order to instill the importance of the respect and animal protection. Besides, a national and international recognition, appreciation and promotion would be required for those expressions of intangible cultural heritage that, without causing suffering to animals, emphasize even more on the importance of values such as the respect for the nature and the other animals that human beings share this planet with.

Countries should be capable of finding the right balance between the preservation of traditions which have been present in their cultures since immemorial time and are an essential part of their current and future identity, and the respect for animal life and welfare, that Peru, so close to nature since its origins, is also aware of. This country declares its wish to cooperate with this Commission to this aim.