

His Excellency Jacob Zuma  
President of South Africa  
C/o Parliament of the Republic of South Africa

South Africa

31<sup>st</sup> October 2009

Dear Mr President,

I am a Member of Parliament in India, and I speak on behalf of all the Members of Parliament.

I hope this message finds you well. I know you are a compassionate leader who is dedicated to working for peace, promoting positive values and ending violence. That's why I am joining concerned South Africans and people around the world in urging you to end the cruel Ukweshwama ritual, which occurs annually in December in KwaZulu-Natal during the First Fruits Festival.

As I'm sure you know, during this cruel ritual, a group of men torture and kill a bull with their bare hands, pulling the terrified and struggling animal to the ground, ripping out his tongue, putting dirt into his bleeding mouth, tearing out his eyes, mutilating his genitals and engaging in other cruel acts until the bull dies. This torture which is unacceptable in any country has been exempted from animal protection laws on the grounds of "cultural liberty".

While I respect culture, this bull-killing ritual causes extreme suffering to an innocent creature and has no place in the modern world. Tradition is not an excuse for cruelty, and many societies have ended or are working to end "traditional" practices – such as slavery, cannibalism, infanticide, female circumcision, foot-binding, bullfighting and fox hunting – that cause animals or humans to suffer. The extremely cruel Ukweshwama ritual must also end. Mahatma Gandhi, who helped initiate the Indian community's struggle for civil rights in South Africa said, "I hold that, the more helpless a creature, the more entitled it is to protection by man from the cruelty of man".

The experience of viciously torturing and killing an animal will psychologically harm the young men who engage in the ritual and those who witness it. According to the humanitarian Dr Albert Schweitzer, "Anyone who has accustomed himself to regard the life of any living creature as worthless is in danger of arriving also at the idea of worthless human lives". Thousands of studies of criminally violent behaviour have shown that people who are cruel to animals often commit violence against their fellow humans as well. Surely, this is not a "value" that you want to instill in the citizens of KwaZulu-Natal.

Traditions change, and societies must evolve. I urge you not to allow South Africa to be seen as barbaric and retrograde by clinging to the cruel ritual of Ukweshwama. There are so many stereotypes of Africa in the Western and Eastern mind. This ritual reinforces

them. South Africa is seen as the most progressive nation, one emerging from the darkness of decades of suffering. It saddens all of us to know that your people who have been innocent sufferers would inflict such terrible pain on an even more innocent victim.

Please let me know your decision. .

Sincerely,

( Maneka Gandhi )