

## **Human Rights Council – 29<sup>th</sup> session – June 2015**

### **PANEL: Realizing the equal enjoyment of the right to education by girls**

#### **Statement by Action Canada for Population and Development**

Action Canada makes this statement in collaboration with the Sexual Rights Initiative.

The right to education is acknowledged in international law and policy as a ‘multiplier right’ and it is widely recognized that good quality education helps promote gender equality and acts as a means to improve health, economic, political, cultural and social development outcomes.

Yet many barriers stand in the way of girls receiving quality education. These include as has been mentioned: child, early and forced marriage, poverty, poor health and nutrition, unpaid care work, early pregnancy, violence in schools, including sexual violence, the cost of education, a lack of sanitary facilities and mandatory pregnancy testing. Many of these barriers are rooted in patriarchy and the desire to control women’s and girls’ sexuality.

Without education, girls have fewer opportunities for social or economic betterment. These barriers, therefore, perpetuate both gender inequality and the cycle of poverty. Yet, when girls are given the opportunity to receive an education, they not only improve their own lives, but those of their families and communities.

A crucial aspect of education that helps in breaking down gender norms and patriarchy is comprehensive sexuality education. Providing such education that is scientifically accurate and evidence based, and includes information on inter alia: biology, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health, relationships, gender-based violence and sexual violence, sexual and gender diversity, consent and human rights, is crucial. Such education empowers children from an early age and enhances their individual autonomy and is critical to empowering girls and young women, and modifying gender norms and stereotypes.

Finally, the deliberate exclusion of girls from education reduces their ability to demand equal access to human rights or to effectively hold duty bearers accountable for human rights violations. As such, barriers to education perpetuate and reinforce the subordinate social status of girls, which persists into adulthood and is often passed on to the next generation. This has to end.

Thank you