

**Human Rights Council – 34th session**  
**Panel Discussion on Preventable Maternal Mortality and Morbidity**  
**& Human Rights**  
**March 9, 2017**  
**Statement by Action Canada for Population and Development**



Thank you Mr. President,

Action Canada makes this statement on behalf of the Sexual Rights Initiative.

We welcome the Council's continued attention to preventable maternal mortality and morbidity and human rights and thank the panelists for their valuable contributions.

The numbers of women and girls dying and suffering injury because of complications related to pregnancy are staggering. And yet, the violations of women and girls' sexual and reproductive rights that lead to these sobering statistics remain largely unaddressed by States in this foremost body on human rights. Denial of safe abortion, lack of comprehensive sexuality education, limited or no choice in contraception, third party authorization for health services, inattention to the sexual rights of adolescent girls, impunity for sexual violence and punishment for the exercise of sexuality outside of marriage, are all symptoms of deeply entrenched gender inequality that prevents progress on eliminating maternal mortality and morbidity and we must name them as such.

A human rights based approach to eliminating preventable maternal mortality and morbidity is built upon the basic understanding that women and girls have the right to have control over all aspects of their sexuality and their body. Our bodies do not belong to the State, to the doctors in the hospital or to the men in our lives. We have the right to decide if, when and with whom to have children and it is the duty of State to respect, protect and fulfill this right, including the right to go through pregnancy safely and with dignity.

We reject attempts to undermine our sexual and reproductive rights in the name of culture, religion or national exceptionalism which only serve to diminish our standing as human beings. We therefore take this opportunity to remind States that women and girls are persons, that we do not give up our human rights when we become pregnant, and that we will not accept platitudes in the place of meaningful change.

We call on all States to respond to the crisis of maternal mortality and morbidity with the urgency it so deserves by challenging the deeply rooted forces of gender inequality which violate the rights of women and girls around the world.

I thank you.