

## **HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL, 31<sup>ST</sup> SESSION MARCH 2016**

Statement by Action Canada for Population and Development

Action Canada makes this statement in collaboration with the Sexual Rights Initiative and in response to the report of the Special Rapporteur on The Situation of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs).

It is important to emphasize that the work of human rights defenders exposes the deficiencies in the efforts and will of States to protect, respect and fulfill the human rights of all people and that there would be no need for HRDs if States were to act accordingly.

The diversity of women HRDs, in particular, needs to be explored further, as women who do not fit the stereotypical definitions of “woman” are further marginalized by the denial of their existence, by the penalties they endure and for the use their bodies. We refer here to transgender women, women seeking abortions, sex workers, women living with HIV, lesbian and bisexual women, as examples. In light of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the UN Declaration of The Right to Development, and in consideration of the attainment of the Agenda 2030, States need to reconsider the importance of the role played by HRDs in addressing violence towards marginalized populations, in their efforts to achieve substantive development for all.

Mr. Rapporteur, your report correctly highlights the challenges of emergency response for HRDs. We therefore recommend that the definition of HRDs be broadened to ensure that it also includes all persons who are publicly visible due to their efforts to defend their own identities, which then makes them even more vulnerable to violence in their communities. This will ensure that all HRDs are able to access such relief without any discrimination or difficulty.

States should endeavor to work hand-in-hand with HRDs, who can play an invaluable role in monitoring the local and national human rights situation, and in so doing, provide the State with vital information to enable the provision of protection for all. States therefore need to view the role of the HRDs not as one that is antagonistic, but rather one that is complementary in its provision of checks and balances of good governance and democratic rule - where HRDs constructively inform the State of shortcomings in its efforts to promote access to rights and services for all its people. This can only aid the State in bettering its delivery in terms of its responsibilities to all its people.

In this period of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Declaration of the Right to Development, the path to development needs to be seen to include the universal access to all rights, and for this to be attainable a strong working relation between States and HRDs need to be forged, nurtured and maintained.