

**Human Rights Council – 28<sup>th</sup> session – March 2015**

**Annual interactive debate on the rights of persons with disabilities**

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

Action Canada makes this statement in collaboration with the Sexual Rights Initiative. We welcome the thematic study on the rights of persons with disabilities to live independently and be included in the community. As stated in the report, “living independently does not mean living alone and in isolation. Rather, it means exercising freedom of choice and control over decisions affecting one’s life with the same level of independence and interdependence within society on an equal basis with others.” This is true in all aspects, including in relation to the sexual and reproductive health and rights of persons with disabilities.

Mr. President, women with disabilities face multiple levels of discrimination on the basis of both their gender and disability, which manifests itself in various forms. For example, the lackadaisical manner in which the judiciary deals with violence, specifically sexual violence against women with disabilities in many countries – without sufficient procedural safeguards to ensure women and girls with disabilities are heard and not persecuted in judicial systems, denial of sexuality education to women with disabilities, and denial of sexual rights - whether it is to marry and bear children or to have relationships.

Sexual stereotypes about women with disabilities persist - that they are either hyper sexual or asexual. Based on these, they are routinely denied autonomy over their own bodies and sexuality, and decisions related to their sexual rights are often taken by others without their participation. Some common examples of this include the involuntary sterilisation of women and girls with disabilities and denial of sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception.

We urge States to pay heed to the thematic study and begin efforts to make the paradigm shift from a medical and charity approach to a social and human rights-based approach. This means acknowledging that women with disabilities are autonomous sexual beings entitled to the realization of sexual and reproductive rights, and that they should be heard regarding their specific needs.

I thank you.