

**43rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council
High Level Panel on the 25th Anniversary of Beijing Conference
Action Canada for Population and Development
25 February 2020**

Thank You Madam President,

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

We welcome the holding of this panel on the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, however, we regret the lack of civil society representation on the panel itself. Feminist activists from around the world fought for every word in the Platform and continue to fight every day to turn those words into actions. Without women human rights defenders and feminist activists, there would be no Platform for Action. We expect and demand better from States, the UN and this Council.

We therefore take this opportunity to highlight one of the critical areas of the Platform that would not have been possible without civil society advocacy and is an essential component of women's human rights within and outside the UN system. Paragraph 96 unequivocally states that the human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely on all matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free from violence, coercion and discrimination. The recognition that sexuality is an integral part of a person's life, is deeply connected to the realization of all human rights and is distinct from reproductive aspirations, was groundbreaking.

We rightly celebrate this achievement but we also know it is not enough. After 25 years, sexual rights are still contested in every fora at local, national, regional and international levels and continue to be used as bargaining chips for trade deals, for promoting nationalism rooted in racism and misogyny, and for tools of pinkwashing. As feminist activists spanning generations, continents and movements, we will continue to resist this instrumentalization of our rights, our bodies and our lives. We also refuse to cede our space within international processes, including the Beijing +25 process, to those who seek to dampen our voices and temper our expectations.

Our question for the panelists - how can the Beijing +25 process move beyond a pro forma exercise to meaningfully address the demands of sexual rights activists?

I thank you.