

44th Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 3: ID with the Special Rapporteur on peaceful assembly and association
Action Canada for Population and Development
10 July 2020

Thank you Madam President.

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

We welcome the Special Rapporteur's report on ten years protecting civic space worldwide. The report rightly highlights the willful and deliberate attempts at curtailing civil society spaces and direct threats to democracy. Civil society is a vital pillar of any democratic country and a threat to its existence is a threat to democracy itself.

As the report highlights, there has been a steady growth in criminalising activism and activists for raising their voices against restrictive, casteist, racist and xenophobic laws and policies. Even while we are in the midst of a global pandemic, governments across the world have been taking advantage of lockdowns and social distancing norms to introduce problematic laws and policies and arresting and jailing activists. Governments are pushing their agendas during the pandemic at the cost of the health and freedoms of persons.

Hostile measures against civil society and the shrinking of civil society space disproportionately impact those at the margins which includes women and girls with disabilities, sex workers, young people, queer persons and gender non-conforming persons. Governments have been redefining 'productive members of society' and the 'legitimate civil society' to exclude those who speak out against human rights violations and challenge unjust state power. Both of these concepts originating in patriarchal and capitalist structures coupled with governments' motivation to consolidate power and profits, has resulted in further entrenching ideas of 'conformity' and rolling back on gains made by social movements across the world.

We stand in solidarity with movements and activists across the globe who despite grave threats to their own lives nevertheless continue to work for social justice. We urge states to recognise and acknowledge the role of dissent, protest and civil society as a fundamental pillar of every society. We recommend the Human Rights Council and the Special Rapporteur apply a gendered lens when discussing the threat to civil society and the impact of the pandemic measures on civil society, recognising that the marginalised are at greater risk than others.