

HRC 45

Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with SR Contemporary forms of Slavery
16 September 2020
Action Canada for Population and Development

Thank You Madam President, Action Canada makes this statement on behalf of the Sexual Rights Initiative and the Coalition of African Lesbians.

Contemporary forms of slavery, as a concept and a reality, is steeped in the history of the TransAtlantic Slave Trade that continues to get treated as a thing of the past, or an issue spoken for race-baiting and politicking . The term 'contemporary forms of slavery' suggests it is possible to draw a distinction between current and past experiences of slavery. This allows states that are deeply implicated in the TransAtlantic slave trade to distance themselves from it, avoid taking real responsibility in the form of reparations or other remedies, and at the same time position themselves as the protectors of victims of these 'new' forms of slavery. Racist and imperialist attitudes and practices of the past are of significance in the present. For instance, the extractive industry is a key driver and beneficiary of the neoliberal racial capitalist project which is linked to land grabs and illicit financial flows by multinational corporations working in cahoots with States.

As noted by the Special Rapporteur, 'people trapped in slavery-like situations, as well as those subject to different human rights violations, discrimination, marginalisation, social and economic inequalities with limited or no social and labour protection' face exacerbated risks and violations due to COVID-19 and measures taken by states to deal with pandemic.

Fragmented, ahistorical, remedial actions to deal with practices defined as contemporary forms of slavery often have the potential to undermine, or exacerbate situations. It is necessary for the Human Rights Council and states to address the multiple and intersecting forms of oppression which create coercive conditions furthering experiences of continued instability, inequality and the vicious cycle of poverty, border control and worker exploitation.

We need to examine problems connected with interpreting contemporary forms of slavery: the forms they take and how they overlap. Past experiences must define the actions of the present. Corporations and states that profited from the trans atlantic slave trade and so-called contemporary forms of slavery - those named as such or just referred to as cost-cutting measures under capitalism - must be held accountable for their actions, including through making reparations, and cancelling foreign debt.

Thank You!