

Human Rights Council 34th session
Item 3 Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights
Statement by Action Canada for Population and Development

Mr President,

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

We welcome the report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights and the comprehensive analysis of the negative impact that the expansion of fundamentalism has on human rights. Likewise, we appreciate the broad range of recommendations contained therein.

Fundamentalism and extremism are threats to human rights. Not only do they reject the principles of equality and universality but such ideologies promote sectarianism and discriminatory attitudes towards those with differing views. Fundamentalism has a specific and negative impact on women as they are often considered the bearers and reproducers of culture and tradition within the community. Fundamentalism therefore demands restrictions to women's rights as autonomous beings, and in particular their sexual and reproductive rights.

We have witnessed a growing trend of states and other actors that use culture and religion as a justification for violence. This violence is often directed towards women, girls and gender and sexually non-conforming persons and other marginalized groups. In the name of culture and religion, fundamentalists and extremists enforce the exclusion and marginalization of many individuals.

As the report notes, cultural rights are critical counterweights to fundamentalism and extremism. Cultural rights calls for free self-determination of individuals, for respect for cultural diversity, for universality of rights and for equality. Yet the reality faced by women, minorities and the marginalized means that they are not allowed to enjoy their cultural rights equally and are punished for exercising these rights in non-traditional ways. States must respond to these violations by protecting and promoting all persons' cultural rights and holding those responsible accountable, including religious and state institutions.

We urge states to provide for and protect the separation of religion and state in order to allow those with different world views, minorities and women to exercise their cultural rights equally and to not be excluded from society. We emphasize that time is critical and we all have to respond effectively to fundamentalism and extremism so as to limit their influence on cultural diversity, universality and equality.

We call on all stakeholders to join efforts in opposing growing fundamentalism and extremism and examining their impact on the human rights of women, girls and all marginalized persons.

I thank you