

Human Rights Council – 36th session

Item 6: Universal Periodic Review Outcomes – United Kingdom

Statement by Action Canada for Population and Development



Thank you Mr President. Action Canada makes this statement in collaboration with Alliance for Choice Northern Ireland and the Sexual Rights Initiative.

We regret that out of the 227 recommendations the UK received to improve its human rights record, it chose to accept less than 100 recommendations - a paltry 42 per cent. This represents a blatant disregard for the integrity of the UPR process and calls into question the UK government's willingness to uphold international human rights laws and norms.

In its national report, the UK proclaimed itself a champion in opposing '*modern forms of slavery*'. However, the continued criminalization of abortion in Northern Ireland and the UK's rejection of recommendations to address this grave human rights situation belies this assertion. The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery has stated that forced '*motherhood*' experienced by women and girls in countries which restrict or deny access to abortion should be classified as a form of '*modern slavery*'.

While access to safe abortion is legally permitted in England, Scotland and Wales, women and adolescent girls in Northern Ireland are denied this very same choice and are forced to travel abroad to access safe and legal abortion, provided they have the means to do so. If they do not have the means, they are forced to continue pregnancies against their will or risk criminal prosecution by seeking out safe but illegal medical abortions.

The criminalization of abortion in Northern Ireland is incompatible with international human rights obligations. It is a violation of the rights to health, to non-discrimination, to privacy, to life, to liberty and to security of the person and to be free from inhuman and degrading treatment.

We call on the UK government to put to one side the politics that have sustained this discrimination, fulfil its obligations as the duty bearer for the implementation of human rights within its jurisdiction as per the Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and devolved administrations, and realise the human rights of all women and girls in Northern Ireland.