

**Human Rights Council – 27<sup>th</sup> session – September 2014**

**Item 6: Consideration of the Democratic Republic of Congo’s UPR Outcome - Statement by Action Canada for Population and Development**

Thank you Mr. President.

Action Canada for Population and Development makes this statement in collaboration with the Sexual Rights Initiative, and our partner in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Si Jeunesse Savait.

We commend the government’s acceptance of recommendations on early marriages, female genital mutilation, young women’s education, sexual and gender-based violence, and gender equality.

In addressing the issue of sexual violence and all other forms of gender-based violence, we urge the government to devote adequate funds to the department responsible for addressing and eliminating sexual violence and to create and implement a plan to monitor the effective utilization of these funds towards defined objectives. We also call on the government to increase its efforts to sensitize and raise the awareness of individuals regarding the laws against gender-based violence and the various legal instruments available to hold perpetrators accountable.

In promoting efforts to ensure gender equality, we urge the government to decriminalize abortion in line with the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. According to the Special Rapporteur on the right to health, “criminal laws penalizing and restricting induced abortion are the paradigmatic examples of impermissible barriers to the realization of women’s right to health and must be eliminated.” Criminalizing abortion drives the market for abortions underground, leading to an increase in unsafe abortions. In 2008, the World Health Organization reported that the rate of unsafe abortion is 36 per 1,000 women aged 15-44 years, which is above the regional average.

Finally, we are concerned with the lack of attention paid to the discrimination facing individuals with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions during the review. We urge the government to reject the proposed bill which would criminalize so-called ‘sexual practices against nature’ and in doing so uphold and promote individuals’ rights to privacy, access to information, liberty, expression and freedom of association.

Thank you.