



**40th Session of Human Rights Council**  
**Item 3: Clustered Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion**  
**or belief**  
**Statement by Action Canada for Population and Development**  
**5 March 2019**

Thank you, Mr. President. Action Canada makes this statement on behalf of the Sexual Rights Initiative.

We appreciate the report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and its analysis on the linkages between this right and the right to freedom of opinion and expression. These rights mutually reinforce each other and the violation of one serves to undermine the other.

However, these rights are often misused by religious groups, including but not restricted to fundamentalists or conservatives, to undermine the full enjoyment of basic human rights, particularly those related to sexuality and gender.

There are many examples on how the freedom of religion, belief, thoughts, expression and opinion, and the linkages between them and with nationalism, tradition, populism, “family values” among other concepts, are used by state and non-state actors to violate the rights of children and adolescents, women, LGBTI persons and other groups. The range of these actions is wide, and includes the exclusion of comprehensive sexuality education from educational curricula yet the inclusion of religious studies as a mandatory subject in public schools, the barriers put in place to access contraception and abortion, the incitement to perform acts of discrimination, intolerance and even violence, intimidation and coercion motivated against LGBTI people and women human rights defenders.

Also, freedom of religion and expression is often used to justify acts of coercion and intimidation against legislators and State officers who are accountable for the implementation of policies on sexual and reproductive health and rights, so as to avoid the adoption or implementation of such laws and policies.

We urge States to acknowledge and implement the principle of the secular state and to take all necessary measures to ensure that the rights to freedom of religion and expression do not obstruct or restrict the full enjoyment of other human rights, particularly those related to sexuality and gender.

Thank you