

Human Rights Council – 33rd session

ITEM 8: 25 September 2016

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

Women human rights defenders are facing state-authorised crackdowns that prevent them from doing their work and puts their safety at risk. These violations are contrary to the letter and spirit of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and have a stagnating effect on the critical work of civil society. Examples of this trend include the ongoing persecution of the feminist collective Nazra for Feminist Studies in Egypt, and particularly of its founder and director Mozn Hassan in the so-called Foreign Funding Case, the freezing of all assets of founder Hossam Baghat of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights and persecution of indigenous peoples who seek to protect their environment from extractive industries particularly in North America. This unwarranted and unjust targeting of human rights defenders endangers the very fabric of democracy and is contrary to everything this Council is supposed to represent.

The discourse of terrorism is increasingly used to justify surveillance, unwarranted detention, racial profiling, restriction of movement and the silencing of civil society. Far from addressing the root of the problem, such as neocolonialism and fundamentalisms, leaders in both the North and the South use the instability caused by inequality and reduced choices to justify curtailing the very freedoms that protect the pluralism of civil society.

For centuries, women's bodies have been subjected to the terrors of female genital mutilations, rape, forced child marriage and forced childbirth. Not once have these practices been deemed acts of terrorism nor has as much money or effort been poured into fighting for the autonomy and freedom that women need and demand. From an intersectional feminist perspective, the different manifestations of violence, such as wars, increasing privatization and harmful cultural and religious practices, work together to maintain the conditions of inequality, fear, and chronic lack, that characterise the lives of the vast majority of the world's population. In light of such an oppressive scenario of domination and subjugation, it is all the more urgent that we actively foster a vibrant civil society and increase all people's ability to exercise their human rights.