

Human Rights Council – 31st session

Panel discussion on the progress in and challenges of addressing human rights issues in the context of efforts to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2030 – 11 March 2016

Statement by Action Canada for Population and Development

Mr. President,

Action Canada makes this statement in collaboration with the Sexual Rights Initiative.

We welcome the holding of this very timely panel to discuss human rights in relation to the HIV response in advance of the high level meeting on HIV and AIDS, and on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the International Guidelines on HIV and Human Rights. While we have witnessed important integration of a human rights-based approach in the HIV response in the past few years, particularly in the form of participation of people living with HIV and AIDS in developing and evaluating national HIV policy, a lot remains to be done. Governments must remove or refrain from enacting harmful laws that criminalize HIV non-disclosure, exposure and transmission, provision or procurement of sexual services, same-sex sexual activity, and drug use. Such laws are discriminatory and stigmatizing, and fuel the HIV epidemic.

Access to treatment for HIV-positive persons is an imperative and requires greater political will in the realms of policymaking, research and programmatic efforts, as well as international cooperation. At the same time, comprehensive prevention efforts need to be greatly intensified, including access to condoms, pre-exposure prophylaxis for those at substantial risk of HIV infection, and comprehensive sexuality education. The integration of a human rights-based approach in the HIV response requires greater focus on empowerment, agency and autonomy. In this regard, we call on governments to:

- ensure universal access to good quality, comprehensive sexuality education, which is a critical intervention to end the HIV epidemic, in addition to being a human right;
- empower young people, particularly girls and young women, to realize their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and transform gender norms and power imbalance; and
- eliminate the stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS, which serves to fuel the HIV epidemic and contribute to human rights violations and abuses.

We would like to ask the panelists to comment on how governments can strengthen their efforts to end the HIV epidemic through an increased commitment to realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Thank you.