

## Human Rights Council – 29<sup>th</sup> session – June 2015

### Item 3: Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development: General Debate

#### Statement by Action Canada for Population and Development

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

Mr. President, in the last few years we have seen a growing trend of state and private actors using culture as an excuse to justify violations committed by those who appoint themselves as the “protectors of their cultures”. Often, this violence is directed towards women, girls and gender and sexually non-conforming persons and other groups on the margins. In the name of culture and religion, patriarchal power is deployed to enforce exclusion and marginalisation. This is not restricted to one culture or context but cuts across all societies.

This Council must recognise that culture is constantly evolving; it is not fixed in any given period of time and must be harnessed as a force for social justice. Women have always been and must continue to be recognised and supported as active agents in shaping a culture which is based on equality, dignity and freedom for every individual in a plurality of families and cultures.

We wish to call attention to the reality faced by many women and other marginalised groups all over the world who remain subjected to deep oppression and patriarchal power that impact on the enjoyment of their human rights. We reassert that neither the state and its institutions, nor social institutions including religious and traditional institutions, or the male relatives of women can own women’s bodies and lives. No-one owns anyone. Women are autonomous beings, capable of and with the right to make decisions about their own bodies and lives. All laws and practices that treat women as minors or property are discriminatory and in contravention of international human rights standards.

It is the obligation of states to adopt measures and establish mechanisms to ensure and be held accountable for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls, be it by state or non-state actors. States cannot be absolved from due diligence standards in regard to violations by religious and traditional leaders, or other private actors, including families. We call upon States to fulfill their obligations and not allow these violations to continue.