



44th session of the Human Rights Council

Annual Full-day discussion on the human rights of women. Panel 2: COVID-19 and women's rights

Thank you, Madam President.

Action Canada makes this statement on behalf of the Sexual Rights Initiative.

Shortly after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is already plenty of evidence of the disproportionate negative impact of the pandemic and the response on women and women's rights worldwide, especially on poor and marginalized women.

As described in this panel, the impact of the pandemic includes an increase in the burden of reproductive labour and unpaid care work on women, rising rates of domestic violence; including sexual abuse against women, adolescents and girls. At the same time, measures taken by some countries to respond to the pandemic directly impact women and adolescents' access to sexual and reproductive health services, particularly access to contraception and safe abortion, including when States fail to recognize abortion as an essential health service. These barriers to sexual and non-reproductive rights result in an increase in forced pregnancies, maternal mortality and morbidity, among other issues and violate women's rights to bodily autonomy and health.

Periodically, health crises, natural disasters and armed conflicts take place in different countries and regions, and in these situations, as is happening now with COVID-19, the systematic violation of women's rights, as well as those of other groups on a global scale, is exacerbated and becomes more visible.

Making these situations visible is essential but is not enough. Viewing the current crisis as being only the result of the COVID-19 pandemic is to ignore the deep-rooted structural drivers of inequality. It is a crisis caused by racial capitalism and the systematic erosion of public health and essential services. Unfortunately, it also demonstrates that the actions taken by member states, multilateral bodies and their mechanisms, including this Council, are not enough and fail to comprehensively address the root causes of inequality.

A deadly combination of disaster capitalism and IMF-imposed structural adjustment policies will result in a further erosion of human rights. States that have turned to IMF loans to address the economic impacts of COVID-19 will be coerced into structural adjustment programs that will further deplete public health systems and the social security net. All of this has a gendered impact, with women and girls having to step into the gaps left by the state without compensation. Without a radical change in approach and actions to ensure women's human rights from a feminist and intersectional perspective, we will continue as we are now: fighting to advance and guarantee the rights of women, making efforts and investing insufficient resources, and repeating the evidence on the impact of the lack of rights on all aspects of women's lives, including in times of crisis.

Thank you.