

Action Canada for Population and Development
46th session of the Human Rights Council
Item 3

Thank you, Madam President. Action Canada makes this statement on behalf of 20 organizations from the following countries: Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands.

As organizations based in the Global North, we are ashamed of our governments' hoarding of COVID-19 vaccines. Addressing COVID-19 effectively requires global solidarity and an end to the global inequalities that exacerbate health crises. COVID-19 has forcefully exposed and exacerbated inequalities between countries just as it has within countries. In moments of humanitarian crisis, rights, and progress risk being suspended and rolled-back. This is especially true as it relates to the realization of gender equality and sexual health and rights.

Feminist movements have long advocated in international and regional human rights systems for the material conditions necessary to exercise reproductive rights because bodily autonomy and the ability to make and act on health decisions depends on many circumstances related to job stability, food security, availability of services in the community, and personal safety, amongst many others. As the COVID-19 pandemic deepens economic and social stress coupled with the imposition of restrictions on movement and social isolation measures, gender-based violence is increasing exponentially while access to key sexual and reproductive health services is further restricted. All of these impacts are amplified in contexts of fragility, conflict, and emergencies where social cohesion is already undermined, and institutional capacity and services are limited. Emergency measures have already taken a drastic toll on access to abortion as well as contraception, testing of Sexually Transmitted Infections, pregnancy care, gender affirming care, HIV medicine and domestic violence services. In addition to COVID-19 exposing and worsening existing inequalities, nefarious forces are using the pandemic to roll back rights in purposeful ways.

COVID-19 has also restricted the ability to advocate for SRHR, including in UN spaces. Not only do we see retrogressions happening across the world but our ability to address them is impacted by travel restrictions, restrictions on gatherings, increased policing, the use of carceral approaches to public health, new protocols in participating in UN spaces, loss of funding for advocacy groups and communities of advocates from the Global South being harder hit by pandemic. Vaccine hoarding will bring on new barriers when those without access to vaccines will be further excluded and policed.

It is therefore unconscionable that countries would take nationalistic approaches to vaccination and to leverage their immense privilege and economic domination to secure vaccine doses. Unless Global North governments act immediately to correct course, the inequalities exacerbated by the global pandemic will persist and deepen with consequences on a global scale. It is a deep injustice that nine out of 10 people in 70 low-income countries are unlikely to be vaccinated against Covid-19 next year because the majority of the most promising vaccines coming on-stream have been bought up by the

West. This is especially true when we consider that half of people dying from the virus have disabilities. Rich countries, with 16% of the world population control 60% of the vaccines. We must support the achievement of universal vaccination and provide resources to bolster global vaccine supplies. Not only have Global North countries like Canada hoarded vaccines, Canada will receive 1.9 million doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from the COVAX program by the end of June. Canada is the only G7 country slated to draw from COVAX's vaccine supply in the program's first allotment. The longer we delay equitable vaccine access by prioritizing narrow national interests, the more we risk COVID-19 mutations and the prolongation of the pandemic which will impact vulnerable populations across the world the hardest.

At the minimum, rich countries' leaders must stop blocking the proposal to suspend the application and enforcement of certain intellectual property obligations under the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement). At the present, the richer of the G20 countries are refusing to agree to a waiver. We are all weakened by the refusal to consider this urgent measure at this pivotal moment in time. There is no better time to question TRIP rules.

It is not possible to tackle a global pandemic in a world marked by the prioritization of profits over human lives and in the context of huge inequalities of wealth and power maintained by a minority. Our work on a pandemic response must be rooted in the recognition of human rights for all, including the right to development and to health, and the tackling of deep-rooted anti-Black racism, ableism, and continued imperialism.

Statement endorsed by:

Action Canada for Population and Development

Associazione Tripla Difesa Onlus

DisAbled Women's Network

Center for Reproductive Rights

CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality

CNCD-11.11.11

Compass Centre for Sexual Wellness

Federación Planificación Familiar Estatal

Fondation Eboko

Gender and Development Network

HIV Legal Network

Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development

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