

Krystyna Kacpura

**Human Rights Council – Agenda Item 6 – Universal Periodic Review – Russian Federation  
Joint statement by Action Canada for Population and Development and Federation for  
Women and Family Planning**

Thank you, Mr. President.

This statement is made on behalf of the ASTRA Central and Eastern European Women's Network for Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Health and the Sexual Rights Initiative.

Women's reproductive rights are restricted in Russia, especially in regard to access to modern contraception and family planning services. Access to contraception is limited by a lack of comprehensive information and subsidization from the state budget. We call upon the government to include the issue of accessible and affordable contraception, as well as comprehensive family planning services, in national health policies in order to fulfill women's rights to health, to self-determination, and to decide freely about the number and spacing of children.

The government has still not amended the laws that introduced mandatory waiting periods for women who want to undergo abortions. These waiting periods put women in situations of serious vulnerability and critically limit their access to timely reproductive health services. This is not in accordance with the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. We therefore urge the government to acknowledge the risk posed to the health of a pregnant woman by such provisions and to align laws with international human rights standards, centered on the woman's dignity, and her rights to self-determination and to make decisions regarding her body and sexuality free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

We appreciate the government's attempts to create legal provisions to protect against discrimination. We are deeply concerned, however, about the content of newly adopted provisions that do not recognize the concept of gender-based discrimination. Additionally, the law does not protect persons from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. We observe with further concern the newly adopted law that limits freedom of speech and contains harmful provisions referring to the concept of "gay propaganda".

We call upon the Russian Federation to amend the law on protection against discrimination by incorporating a gender perspective. Gender inequalities and stereotypes, and attitudes about social roles and norms, have grave consequences for women's human rights. The law on discrimination must also adequately recognize and address the needs of sexuality and gender non-conforming persons who are in an especially vulnerable situation in Russia and who lack equal and appropriate protection from discrimination. We also urge the State to review and amend the law that limits freedom of speech, especially with respect to the rights of sexuality and gender non-conforming persons.

Additionally, we urge the State to review and amend the law regarding the participation of civil society in monitoring and advocacy practices, which is in opposition to international standards and good practices elaborated within the framework of the United Nations Human Rights system. As was clearly stated at the Council last week during the Annual Debate on Gender Integration, non-governmental organizations play a significant role in advancing women's rights within countries. Their voices must be heard and considered as they have specialized knowledge about human rights violations and areas in which the human rights of women are threatened. State authorities, agencies and institutions should use this knowledge and experience when creating policies and legal regulations, and working to advance human rights in general and women's rights in particular.

Thank you.