

Human Rights Council - 39th session
Item 4: UPR Outcomes Cameroon
Action Canada for Population and Development
Speaker: Pooja Badarinath

Thank you Mr. President,

Action Canada makes this statement on behalf of the Sexual Rights Initiative, the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA) and the Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL).

Despite accepting recommendations meant to improve the lives of women and marginalised people during the second UPR cycle, we are concerned by how little progress Cameroon has made in combating violence against women, improving access to health and working towards the realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Gender-based violence, discrimination and harassment of minority groups and violations of workers' rights especially in the informal sector persists. Reproductive health access remains low as illustrated by high maternal mortality rates, low contraceptive access and use due to taboos on sex-related discussions in society.

Women in Cameroon live under and face multiple and intersecting forms of oppression which render some women even more vulnerable than others to violence, discrimination and rights violations. One such group of women who experience multiple forms of violence and discrimination and who are routinely excluded from responses and redress are female sex workers. Sex workers have been at the forefront of demanding that their right to bodily autonomy and agency to choose sex work as a profession is recognised and respected. Globally there is increasing recognition of sex work as work and that sex workers should be consulted while making policies and programmes that affect them.

Mr President, it is concerning that the rights and violations of sex workers have not received specific attention either in the Cameroon national report or through State parties recommendations.

As Cameroon has accepted recommendations concerning violence against women and sexual and reproductive health and rights, it is critical also that the state reviews national health policies, strategies and programmes to ensure that the rights violations of sex workers are documented and addressed - including the structural or social determinants that increase sex workers' vulnerability to gender based violence and HIV. This includes the decriminalisation of all forms of adult sex work, accountability and independent oversight of the police, who often engage in extortion and blackmail of sex workers, as well as the roll out of rights based SRHR and HIV services with the involvement of sex workers in all aspects.

Thank you Mr. President.