

Human Rights Council – Agenda Item 6 – Universal Periodic Review – Azerbaijan

Joint statement by Action Canada for Population and Development and Federation for Women and Family Planning

September 20th, 2013

Thank you, Mr. President.

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

We welcome the efforts by the government to improve the situation regarding women's rights in Azerbaijan. Yet, a lot remains to be achieved.

Gender stereotypes are still very strong in Azerbaijan and are a significant obstacle to the realization of women's human rights. An especially concerning outcome of these stereotypical attitudes is the high rate of kinship marriages. Women in such marriages are subjected to violence, exploitation and an infringement of their right to self-determination.

We are also concerned about the increasing rates of sex-selective abortion. We welcome the recommendation to take all appropriate measures to limit the rates of sex-selective abortions. We call upon the government to address the problem of sex selection in relevant laws and policies by addressing gender-based discrimination, which is the root cause of this practice.

Forced abortion violates women's fundamental rights, such as the right to the highest attainable standard of health – including the right to make an informed decision about any medical procedure – and respect for private and family life. According to CEDAW – every woman has the right to decide freely on the number and spacing of her children. Moreover – every person has the right to decide about matters related to their body and sexuality free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Forcing women to undergo abortion is not only a failure to protect them from violence; it is also a form of torture, and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Such practices should be acknowledged by the State and steps should be taken to prevent and eliminate them in accordance with international human right standards.

Further, we call upon the government to take all necessary measures to enact a comprehensive law on women's reproductive rights which is free from gender and sexual stereotypes and harmful discriminatory attitudes and fully incorporates the concepts of dignity, self-determination and respect for family and private life.

Thank you.