

Statement of Action Canada for Population and Development – Item 6 - Universal Periodic Review – Pakistan – Adoption of UPR outcome on Pakistan – March 15, 2013

Mr. President,

I make this statement on behalf of the Rahnuma Family Planning Association of Pakistan, the MDG 5b Alliance and the Sexual Rights Initiative¹.

We welcome the Government's support for recommendations on early and forced marriage, with a view to specifically eliminating early and forced marriage, to end rape and to end sexual exploitation and forced conversion of scheduled caste girls. We also acknowledge the government's commitment to take necessary measures to end harmful traditional practices against women, sexual harassment in public and work places, and domestic violence.

We urge the Government to take immediate steps to eliminate early and forced marriage as they have a harmful impact on the right to health and well-being of young people. Early and forced marriage is widely practiced across the country and is prevalent in different parts of Pakistan under different names, including in the tribal belt. While the age of first marriage for women overall has been increasing in the country, 13% of girls are still married by the time they reach 15 and 40% by the age 18.² It should be noted that Pakistan still has one of the highest infant mortality (78/1000) and under five mortality rates (94/1000) in South Asia, and this has a direct link to early and forced marriages where young girls are forced into motherhood before they are mentally or physically prepared.

It should also be noted that the law relating to marriage in Pakistan is not consistent and the minimum age for marriage for men is 18, while for girls it is 16. The law also maintains and allows young girls to be married at an even earlier age, which in turn disrupts their education, development and forces them into early motherhood.

We urge the government of Pakistan to make good on its commitment to this Council by eliminating this violation of women's human rights. The first step towards achieving this commitment is by amending the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 and raising the age of marriage for girls to 18, thereby removing any disparity in the law. We also urge the government to ensure that the new law is effectively implemented and recognizes the right of women to choose whom and when to marry, and to make decisions that affect their own life.

Thank you.

¹ The Sexual Rights Initiative is a coalition of organizations comprising of Action Canada for Population and Development (ACPD), Akahata, Coalition for African Lesbians, Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA), Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) and Federation for Women and Family Planning (Federa).

² Age of Marriage: A Position Paper, Khanwar Mumtaz, Sohail Warraich, Shariq Imam et al, Shirkat Gah, 2011