

Human Rights Council 45: Annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective throughout the work of The Human Rights Council

Madam President,

I am honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada.

We convene as the world continues to tackle COVID-19. This pandemic has had a significant impact on women and girls, exacerbating gender inequalities and the intersectional nature of disadvantage they experience.

Measures to contain the virus are putting women and girls at greater risk of gender-based violence and harmful practices, including female genital mutilation, unintended pregnancy and early and forced marriage. COVID-19 has further underscored the urgency of ending violence against women and girls.

COVID-19 threatens decades of progress towards securing universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including adequate maternal care and access to sexual and reproductive health services. This results in millions of unintended pregnancies and inhibits women and girls' bodily autonomy. States must ensure that comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights remain a priority.

The disruption to quality education and prolonged school closures will have a lasting effect on future opportunities for youth, particularly girls. Malala Fund estimates 20 million more secondary school age girls could be out of school after the crisis has passed.

We have an obligation to address intersecting forms of discrimination and violence that impede the full realisation of women and girls' rights. With only 10 years remaining to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, urgent action is needed. We must ensure the full and meaningful participation of women and girls at all levels of decision-making and integrate gender perspectives in COVID-19 responses that consider all dimensions of intersectionality.

We support all efforts by the Council to integrate a gender and intersectional perspective into its work and its mechanisms. Only by taking a holistic approach will the Council be able to tackle gender-based discrimination in all its forms. We ask all governments to join us in putting women and girls' rights at the forefront of their responses to COVID-19.

Thank you.