Human Rights Council: 35th session
Annual Full Day Discussion on the Human Rights of Women

Thank you Mr. President,
I make this statement on behalf of the Sexual Rights Initiative.

We welcome the Report of the High-Level Working Group on the Health and Human Rights of Women, Children and Adolescents as a significant contribution to the 2030 Agenda. Its commitment to an intersectional and human rights based approach to women’s health and rights is a positive step that must be championed at the highest levels. With the publication of this report and the numerous related strategies and commitments, we expect action.

Agenda 2030 calls for the integration of human rights at all stages of development and sets a target of universal access to sexual and reproductive health. A human rights based approach to sexual and reproductive health is built upon the basic understanding that all persons have the right to control all aspects of their sexuality, their life and their body. Access to safe and legal abortion is a key component of this understanding which can no longer be ignored. This has been widely recognized and supported by the treaty bodies, the Special Procedures, in the Working Group’s report and demanded by women as essential to their health and their freedom.

Women’s human rights must be respected, protected and fulfilled at all times, and especially now in light of the rising threats to the human rights agenda worldwide where women’s bodies are the literal and figurative battlefields. Laws and policies guaranteeing women’s human rights, especially sexual and reproductive rights, must be put in place and implemented without delay. Harmful gender norms at the root of attempts to control, victimize and criminalize women must be exposed for what they are. States must be held accountable for their international obligations to women and girls, as there cannot be sustainable development if half the world’s population is unable to make decisions about their own lives and bodies.

We urge States to implement the recommendations of the Working Group’s report along with related commitments to women’s health and rights. We also remind the States that the full realization of women’s sexual and reproductive rights is an essential element of the Sustainable Development Goals and human rights that is not optional, it is a necessity.

I thank you.