

Joint Statement in Response to the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women

– Led by New Zealand (joined so far: Canada, Iceland, Switzerland, Mexico)

We thank the Working Group for their useful stocktaking report. We share many of the concerns the Working Group expressed in the report, in particular:

We are concerned at the persistence of a global discriminatory cultural construction of gender, often tied to religion and harmful social norms, and the continued cultural justifications used by some States for adopting discriminatory laws or for failing to respect international human rights law and standards.

We regret that specious justifications of tradition, culture, religion or State sovereignty are often used to keep women and girls from taking their rightful place in society and family as equals, or from exercising full control over their bodies and their personhood. The resulting instrumentalization and politicization of women's and girls' bodies and health is unacceptable.

The consequence of this discrimination is that women and girls are deprived of their sexual and reproductive health and rights, with tragic consequences: over 800 women still die every day from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, and as a result of unsafe abortions, each year some 47,000 women die each year.

We agree with the Working Group that the right of a woman or girl to make autonomous decisions about her own body and reproductive functions is at the very core of her fundamental right to equality and privacy, involving intimate matters of physical and psychological integrity, and is a precondition for the enjoyment of other rights.

We very much look forward to the further work of the Working Group, in particularly focus area number three on 'how women's sexual and reproductive health and rights can be better protected in times of crisis'. The Human Rights Council resolution on Preventable Maternal Mortality & Human rights at HRC39 will focus specifically on humanitarian settings.

This is directly relevant to target 3.1 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We agree that the goals, targets and indicators of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should be interpreted through the lenses of human rights obligations, and the SDGs should not be used to dilute or deflect from States' human rights obligations.

Could the Working Group give examples of good practice of how States can “promote recognition of the fact that cultural, religious and family values are not incompatible with women's and girls' human rights”