

Human Rights Council – 44th Session

Resolution: Elimination of discrimination against women and girls – tabled amendment L.31

17 July 2020

**Australian Statement: Explanation of Vote**

As a co-sponsor of this resolution, Australia cannot accept amendment L.31. States should promote awareness-raising initiatives on all women's and girls' rights, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Australia is of the firm belief that access to evidence based comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is essential to realising the human rights of women and girls, and to understanding and eliminating gender-based discrimination and violence.

The urgency of ensuring universal access to CSE exists precisely because societal and structural gender inequality limits access to information and services, underpins gender-based violence, and undermines women's and girls' agency and rights. CSE plays an invaluable role in preventing sexual and gender-based violence by promoting values of tolerance, mutual respect and non-violence in relationships. It supports a well-informed understanding of consent. CSE is proven to contribute to the reduction of child sexual exploitation and abuse, and child, early and forced marriage.

Without access to CSE, all people, especially girls, are more vulnerable to reproductive and sexual health issues. CSE empowers people to make informed decisions and to control all aspects of their sexuality, protect themselves from unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion, and sexually transmitted infections. CSE contributes to women's and girls' ability to participate fully and equally in society.

Critically, CSE empowers all people to know their own bodies and emphasises values such as respect, inclusion, non-discrimination, equality, empathy, responsibility and reciprocity.

Amendment L.31 ignores the responsibility of states to support all people, including women and girls, to make lifelong informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive rights, through the provision of universal access to CSE.

Australia will vote against this amendment, and we urge other members of this Council to do the same.