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**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN CANADA
FOR THE 44TH SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

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Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in Canada for the 44th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. Canada is located in North America with a population of approximately 38.2 million people.¹ Of the population, 39% identify as Catholic, 20.3% as Protestant, 1.6% as Orthodox, 6.3% as other Christian, 3.2% as Muslim, 1.5% as Hindu, 1.4% as Sikh, 1.1% as Buddhist, 1% as Jewish, 0.6% as other, and 23.9% as no religion.²

3. Canada's previous review was held on May 11, 2018.³ As a result of the review, Canada received 275 recommendations, 205 of which Canada supported.⁴ Canada supported a recommendation by Norway to “[t]ake action to ensure equal access to abortion”⁵ Additionally, Canada received and supported multiple recommendations from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Serbia, and Thailand regarding human trafficking and implementing measures to reduce trafficking, hold traffickers accountable, and support victims.⁶ Further, despite legalizing euthanasia in 2016, there were no recommendations made to stop this deadly practice. Additionally, there were no recommendations made regarding religious freedom.

Legal Framework

Abortion

4. Under Section 7 of the Constitution Act of 1982, “[e]veryone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.”⁷ Despite these protections for life, abortion was decriminalized in 1988 and, currently, there is no national law restricting abortion. Instead, abortion is now “treated like any other medical procedure and [is] governed by provincial/territorial and medical regulations.”⁸

5. Canada is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).⁹ Article 6 of the ICCPR states that “[e]very human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life”¹⁰

6. Canada is also a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),¹¹ which under Article 6 states:

1. States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.
2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.¹²

7. Canada also has a responsibility to uphold pro-life principles enshrined in other international agreements such as the U.N. Charter, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development.

Human Trafficking

8. Section 279.01 of the Criminal Code states that “[e]very person who recruits, transports, transfers, receives, holds, conceals or harbours a person, or exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of a person, for the purpose of exploiting them or facilitating their exploitation is guilty of an indictable offence”¹³ The penalty for human trafficking is a prison sentence of four to fourteen years.¹⁴ If the trafficker “kidnap[s], commit[s] an aggravated assault or aggravated sexual assault against, or cause[s] death to, the victim during the commission of the offence,” the sentence ranges from five years to life imprisonment.¹⁵

9. Under Article 8 of the ICCPR, “[n]o one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited. No one shall be held in servitude.”¹⁶

10. Additionally, Canada is a party to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.¹⁷ Under Article 9 sec. 1 of this Protocol:

1. State Parties shall establish comprehensive policies, programmes and other measures:
 - (a) To prevent and combat trafficking in persons; and
 - (b) To protect victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, from revictimization.¹⁸

Euthanasia

11. In June 2016, a federal law was passed by the Parliament of Canada to provide for “eligible Canadian adults to request medical assistance in dying” (MAID).¹⁹ Under the law:

241.2 (1) A person may receive medical assistance in dying only if they meet all of the following criteria:

...

- (b) they are at least 18 years of age and capable of making decisions with respect to their health;

- (c) they have a grievous and irremediable medical condition;
- (d) they have made a voluntary request for medical assistance in dying that, in particular, was not made as a result of external pressure; and
- (e) they give informed consent to receive medical assistance in dying after having been informed of the means that are available to relieve their suffering, including palliative care.²⁰

12. However, as a party to the ICCPR and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD),²¹ Canada is required to protect human life. Article 6 of the ICCPR requires that no human being be arbitrarily deprived of his life.²² And Article 10 of the CRPD requires that “States Parties reaffirm that every human being has the inherent right to life and shall take all necessary measures to ensure its effective enjoyment by persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.”²³

Abortion

13. Abortion is one of the gravest of all offenses against human life because it entails the deliberate killing of an innocent life. However, according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, more than 74,000 abortions were carried out in Canada in 2020 alone.²⁴ In 2020, “16.7% of all Canadian pregnancies (excluding spontaneous miscarriages) ended in abortion.”²⁵ Canada lacks a nationwide law on abortion and instead, abortion “falls under provincial health-care systems as a medical procedure, meaning that access to the procedure varies considerably from place to place.”²⁶

14. Canada’s commitment to providing for abortion, despite already having high rates of abortion is in direct contravention to numerous international documents. In fact, since the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development, U.N. Member States have had an affirmative commitment to “reduce the recourse to abortion”²⁷ and to “take appropriate steps to help women avoid abortion, *which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning.*”²⁸ Additionally, the UDHR requires “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of *all* members of the human family [as] the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,” and provides that “[e]veryone has the right to life”²⁹ As stated above, Article 6 of the ICCPR likewise states that “[e]very human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law.”³⁰ Similarly, the preamble to the U.N. Charter states that “the peoples of the United Nations determined . . . to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person”³¹ It is important to note that these important and fundamental human rights instruments require protection of human life and none of them contain a “right to an abortion.”

15. As established above, there is no international right to abortion, and this fact can be practically seen when looking at different countries’ abortion laws. Currently, out of the 193 U.N. Member States, a majority (109) of them have strict limits on abortion.³² Even in the sixty-seven countries that have varying gestational limits for on demand abortions, the majority of these (fifty-two) have a gestational limit of twelve weeks or less, while some allow only up to fourteen weeks, or somewhere in between.³³ Canada is one of only six Member States with no restriction on abortion, making it an extreme outlier among U.N. Member States. To further

demonstrate how extreme Canada's position on abortion is, in 2020, 5.7% of abortions in Canada were performed at twenty-one weeks or later.³⁴

16. Moreover, in addition to the killing of a preborn baby, abortion can cause physical and psychological harm to the mother. It has been well-documented that abortion can result in the perforation of the uterus or the laceration of the cervix.³⁵ Furthermore, abortion deprives women of the health benefits that come from continuing pregnancy, such as the elimination of the protective effect a full-term pregnancy has against breast cancer.³⁶ Abortion can also mask other dangerous symptoms, like an undiagnosed ectopic pregnancy.³⁷ In fact, the World Health Organization even acknowledges the complications of abortion in its recently published 2022 "Abortion care guideline."³⁸

17. Furthermore, women who have undergone abortions have also been reported to experience negative psychological side effects, from shame to drug abuse to suicidal thoughts.³⁹ All of these reasons show why Canada must protect both women and preborn children from the devastating effects of abortion.

18. Despite all of these negative effects that abortion has on both the mother and the preborn child, Canada has expanded access to abortion by investing \$45 million in services such as "abortion travel and educating health care providers on systematic barriers to care."⁴⁰ Clearly, such measures are contrary to the various human rights treaties mentioned above.

Human Trafficking

19. Between 2010 and 2020, police in Canada reported that there were "2,977 incidents of human trafficking," which is defined as "recruiting, transporting, transferring, holding, concealing and exercising control over a person for the purposes of exploitation."⁴¹ The overwhelming majority of victims were women and girls who accounted for 96% of detected victims. Further, "one in four (25%) victims were under the age of 18. Meanwhile, one in five (20%) were aged 25 to 34."⁴² However, in 2021 alone, "there was a combined total of 552 incidents of human trafficking offences."⁴³ However, these numbers do not present the full scope of human trafficking in the country. Combatting human trafficking is difficult because of the "hidden nature of these offences, the reluctance of victims and witnesses to come forward to law enforcement and the difficulty of identifying victims in practice. Moreover, these cases often go unnoticed and unreported due to manipulation, fear, threats from traffickers, shame, language barriers or mistrust of authorities."⁴⁴

20. Sex traffickers in Canada utilize "the country's major highway networks to transport women and girls, taking them to small towns and cities in order to isolate them, avoid police and maximize their financial gain . . ."⁴⁵ One common misconception is that human trafficking is "an issue of kidnapping and abduction."⁴⁶ In reality, the victims "often know their abusers," and in fact, "[i]t might even be someone they loved or trusted, such as a boyfriend, a family member or friend."⁴⁷

21. One victim explained how at the age of fourteen she met a man who for five years "used grooming tactics to build up a rapport of trust and affection."⁴⁸ Then, when she was nineteen years old, that same man "sold her into a network of exploitation – one where she was beaten, raped and made to have sex for money."⁴⁹ According to the victim, she was sold for \$15,000 and "had to bring back \$1,000 a day, working at motels in the Outaouais, but also in other locations in Quebec and Ontario."⁵⁰ She planned her escape when she found out she was being

sent to Calgary.⁵¹ As she recounted, “I threw myself from the back of the van. Again, I was in a very public place, nobody did anything. I told myself in that moment: if I die, I die I hit the ground with my eyes closed . . . Then I got up and ran without ever looking back.”⁵²

22. In May 2022, Toronto police arrested three men in connection with the trafficking of an eighteen-year-old girl.⁵³ According to police, “a 17-year-old girl from Edmonton was recruited and flown to Toronto to work in the sex trade once she turned 18-years old.”⁵⁴ In Toronto, the girl was sexually exploited in hotels and at a house for more than eight days.⁵⁵

23. Since 2018, Canada has dedicated over \$80 million spread across different agencies to combat human trafficking.⁵⁶ Canada used these funds to invest in programs such as the National Human Trafficking Public Awareness Campaign, which “raises[s] awareness among Canadian youth and parents”; the Victims Fund, which “support[s] victims and survivors of human trafficking”; and Public Safety Canada’s Contribution Program to Combat Serious and Organized Crime.⁵⁷ Canada also “[i]ssued over 90 Temporary Resident Permits to foreign national victims and survivors of trafficking in persons and their dependents.”⁵⁸

24. Despite these efforts, Canada must do more to punish human traffickers or human trafficking incidents will continue to increase. According to Canada’s National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking 2019-2024, “[w]hile the number of police-reported incidents of human trafficking increases every year, the number of human trafficking related convictions remains relatively low.”⁵⁹

Euthanasia

25. Since the legalization of MAID in 2016, the number of people killed by euthanasia has increased every year.⁶⁰ In its first year of legalization in 2016, 1,018 people were killed via euthanasia.⁶¹ In 2021, the number increased to a staggering 10,064 people and accounted for 3.3% of all deaths in Canada that year.⁶² Further, from the time MAID was legalized to December 31, 2021, 31,664 people have been euthanized.⁶³ Despite these staggering statistics, in March 2023, Canada’s law regarding MAID is set to extend “eligibility to those with a mental illness.”⁶⁴ This is an alarming fact and requires immediate intervention by the international community.

26. The dangers of euthanasia are highlighted in the tragic story of sixty-one-year-old Alan Nichols.⁶⁵ Nichols “had a history of depression and other medical issues, but none were life threatening.”⁶⁶ In June 2019, he was hospitalized “over fears he might be suicidal” and “he asked his brother to ‘bust him out’ as soon as possible.”⁶⁷ Within a month of being hospitalized, Nichols “submitted a request to be euthanized and he was killed, despite concerns raised by his family and a nurse practitioner.”⁶⁸ On his application to be euthanized, the only medical reason listed was hearing loss.⁶⁹ Alan’s brother expressed his heartache stating, “Alan was basically put to death.”⁷⁰ It is ironic that, on the one hand, psychiatric medicine sought to treat a person with suicidal thoughts so that he could continue his life, and yet the access to euthanasia, on the other hand, actually facilitated bringing the same suicidal thoughts to fruition.

27. In February 2023, a parliamentary committee “called for expanding Canada’s assisted suicide program so that ‘mature minors’ whose deaths are ‘reasonably foreseeable’ be allowed to hasten their deaths without parental consent.”⁷¹ There is no age requirement for the proposal as long as the child has the “requisite decision-making capacity.”⁷² Some recognize that this

standard is flawed since “the ability to balance risks and rewards is one of the last areas of the brain to mature.”⁷³

28. On February 3, 2021, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, and the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, sent a letter expressing their concerns over the expansion of Canada’s MAID law.⁷⁴ In the letter they expressed concern that allowing assisted dying for people with a health condition will imply “that it is better to be dead than to live with a disability.”⁷⁵

29. The practice of allowing euthanasia is in itself a flagrant violation of Article 6 of the ICCPR and Article 10 of the CRPD, both of which require States Parties to respect and protect the lives of all people, without exception. States have an obligation not to take part in an intentional killing by a third person, either by providing the means or by not preventing it when possible.

Recommendations

30. Canada must protect the life of the preborn. To accomplish this, Canada must immediately adopt legislation restricting abortion in order to protect the life of the mother and the preborn child from the dangerous effects of abortion. Canada must join the majority of U.N. Member States who have taken the pro-life position to protect the life of the preborn.

31. Additionally, Canada should continue efforts to raise awareness of human trafficking, punish the traffickers, and provide support for trafficking victims. Further, Canada must ensure that traffickers are prosecuted and convicted.

32. Canada must also reform all its laws to respect and value innocent human life. To do this, Canada must ban the practice of MAID. Canada’s plan to allow MAID to people with psychiatric conditions and expand it to children is even more alarming. It must not go down that road, especially in light of the incongruous fact that the entire field of medicine seeks to treat and protect such people.

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² *Id.*

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⁴ *Canada Infographic 30th*, OHCHR, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session30/CA/CANADA_Infographic_30th.pdf (last visited Feb. 22, 2023).

⁵ OHCHR, UPR of Canada (3rd Cycle – 30th session): Thematic List of Recommendations, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session30/CA/MatriceRecommendationsCanada.docx> (last visited Feb. 22, 2023).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, s. 7, Part 1 of the Constitution Act, 1982, *being* Schedule B to the Canada Act, 1982, c. 11 (U.K.), https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Canada_2011.pdf?lang=en.

⁸ *History of Abortion in Canada*, NATIONAL ABORTION FEDERATION CANADA, <https://nafcanada.org/history-abortion-canada/> (last visited Feb. 22, 2023).

⁹ *Status of Ratification - Canada*, OHCHR, <https://indicators.ohchr.org/> (last visited Feb. 22, 2023).

¹⁰ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 6, Dec. 16. 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171 [hereinafter ICCPR].

¹¹ *Status of Ratification - Canada*, *supra* note 9.

¹² Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 6, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3.

¹³ Canada Criminal Code, R.S.C. 1985, c. C-46 at § 270.01(1), <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/page-39.html#h-120700>.

¹⁴ *Id.* § 270.01(1)(b).

¹⁵ *Id.* § 270.01(1)(a).

¹⁶ ICCPR art. 8, *supra* note 10.

¹⁷ A Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, UNITED NATIONS TREATY COLLECTION, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12-a&chapter=18&clang=_en.

¹⁸ A Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime art. 9 sect. 1, Nov. 15, 2000, 2237 U.N.T.S. 319, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12-a&chapter=18&clang=_en.

¹⁹ *Medical Assistance in Dying*, GOVERNMENT OF CANADA, <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/medical-assistance-dying.html> (last visited Feb. 22, 2023).

²⁰ Canada Criminal Code, R.S.C. 1985, c. C-46 at § 241.2(1), <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/page-33.html#h-119953>.

²¹ *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, UNITED NATIONS TREATY COLLECTION, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-15&chapter=4&clang=_en (last visited Feb. 22, 2023).

²² ICCPR art. 6, *supra* note 10.

²³ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities art. 10, *adopted* Dec. 13, 2006, 2515 U.N.T.S. 3, https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convention_accessible_pdf.pdf.

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²⁶ Marie-Danielle Smith, *Canada Has no Abortion Right Law, Does it Need One?*, CBC (Jun. 28, 2022), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada-abortion-law-1.6503899>.

²⁷ International Conference on Population and Development, *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development*, ¶ 8.25, U.N. Doc. A/CONF/F.171/13/Rev.1, https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/icpd_en.pdf.

²⁸ *Id.* ¶ 7.24 (emphasis added).

²⁹ G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, pmbl., art. 3 (Dec. 10, 1948) (emphasis added).

³⁰ ICCPR art. 6, *supra* note 10.

³¹ U.N. Charter pmbl.

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³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Canadian Abortion Statistics*, *supra* note 24.

³⁵ *Women's Right to Know: Abortion & Pregnancy Risks*, LA. DEP'T OF HEALTH, <https://ldh.la.gov/page/915> (last visited Feb. 22, 2023).

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⁴⁷ *Id.*

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⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *Id.*

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⁵⁵ *Id.*

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⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking 2019- 2024*. PUBLIC SAFETY CANADA, <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/2019-ntnl-strty-hmnn-trffc/index-en.aspx> (July 21, 2022).

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