

**Oral Statement presented to the 42<sup>nd</sup> session of the Commission on Population and Development on the theme: “Health, Morbidity, Mortality, and Development”**

Mr. Chairman,

It is my honor to present this statement on behalf of World Population Foundation and Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

16 years ago, the ICPD Program of Action stated the need for sexual and reproductive health and education services to be universally accessible to adolescents and young people, and the necessity of involving them effectively in the designing of these programs. However, the realities of adolescents and young people today show that this commitment has not been completely achieved, especially with regards to the health of young women and girls:

- Young women commonly face obstacles to accessing contraceptives, such as insufficient knowledge about modern methods, limited access to services, stigmatizing attitude of healthcare providers and weak healthcare systems unable to ensure consistent disbursements of contraceptives.
- Every year, approximately 16 million adolescent girls give birth, representing nearly 11% of births worldwide.
- Young women aged 15 to 19 account for at least one-fourth of the estimated 20 million unsafe abortions and nearly 70,000 abortion-related deaths each year.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.5 million of unsafe abortions occur among women younger than 20 years of age in developing countries, accounting for 14% of all unsafe abortions in developing countries<sup>2</sup>.
- Despite a trend towards later marriage in most countries, expectations show that over the next 10 years, more than 100 million young women will be married before they turn 18<sup>3</sup>.
- There still remain a number of laws that require young women to have written consent from parents or their husbands in order to access HIV testing, contraceptive services, or safe abortion care.

To reduce these numbers and improve the situation actions need to be taken.

- Sexual and reproductive health information, services and supplies, including male and female condoms must be provided, that are accessible and affordable to young people, comprehensive, confidential, non-judgmental and of good quality.
- Service providers need to be trained to provide such sexual and reproductive health information, services and supplies.
- Legal and social barriers to access must be removed to enable young people's full access to sexual and reproductive health information, services and supplies.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Bearinger, LH. et al. 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce, Judith and Shelley Clark. 2004. “The implications of early marriage for HIV/AIDS policy,” brief based on background paper prepared for the WHO/UNFPA/Population Council Technical Consultation on Married Adolescents. New York: Population Council.

- States must provide comprehensive sexuality education to in and out of school children, adolescents and young people, especially to girls and young women since growing evidence shows that providing comprehensive sexuality education can help them develop healthy behaviors and can generate positive sexual and reproductive health outcomes<sup>45</sup>.
- States must involve, empower and equip young people to participate in planning, development, monitoring and evaluation of sexual and reproductive health programs and services.

The internationally agreed goals, particularly those contained in the ICPD Programme of Action, the outcomes of the 21<sup>st</sup> special session of the General Assembly, the Millennium Development Goals, and the recently adopted Addis Call to Urgent Action for Maternal Health and Addis Ababa Statement of Commitment underline these recommendations. Finally, in order to achieve these recommendations, commitments from governments, community leaders, young women and men, donors and the international community, are fundamental to further develop actions that change in fact the reality of young people, particularly young women, towards a world where their human rights are fully respected.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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<sup>4</sup> Bearinger, LH., Sieving, RE., Ferguson, J., Sharma, V. Global Perspectives on the Sexual and Reproductive health of Adolescents: Patterns, Prevention and Potential. *Lancet* 2007: 369 (9568): 1220-31.

<sup>5</sup> Kirby D. The Impact of Abstinence and Comprehensive Sex and STD/HIV Education Programs on Adolescent Sexual Behavior. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 2008: 5(3): 18-27.