



PERMANENT MISSION OF FINLAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS
866 UN PLAZA, SUITE 222, NEW YORK, NY 10017 - TEL. 1-212-355-2100 - FAX 1-212-759-6156

STATEMENT BY

Dr. Janne Taalas

Deputy Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations

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matters: fertility, reproductive health and development

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Mr. Chair, distinguished participants,

At this 44th session of the CPD I would first like to remind you how far we have come. The programme of action of the International Conference on Population and Development was established seventeen years ago. Compared to a human life seventeen years would make the ICPD almost a young adult, still having a lot to learn, yet starting to take responsibility of his/her own action.

Health education, including sexual health, has been taught in Finnish schools since the 1970s. Sexual health services have been provided since 1972. As a consequence, the adolescent abortion rate and teenage deliveries decreased considerably.¹ Then, in the early 1990's cuts were made in the education and health sectors. In 1994 health education ceased to be an obligatory subject in the school curricula. Preventive services such as school health services and contraceptive clinics were severely decreased. As a consequence, the number of adolescent abortions increased by 50 %. In 2006 sexuality education as part of health education became again obligatory. Since then Finland has seen a very positive trend both in decreasing numbers of adolescent abortion and teenage delivery rates.² According to the experience in Finland, reliable and sufficient sexuality education does not promote promiscuity or encourage young people into early sexual encounters. Quite the contrary.

This year in the high school final examination, health education was the most popular subject. Out of the over 40 000 students taking the final examination, over 16 percent participated in the optional health education exam. This made it more popular than history (11%) or geography (7%). One of the questions in the exam was sexual and gender identity from the perspective of mental well-being.

Health education does not only have preventative results, i.e. reducing teenage pregnancies, or increasing the use of contraception. It can also change attitudes and create open discussion on issues concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights. In this respect Finland is looking forward to CPD's next year's theme on youth and adolescents.

The young should not be ignored in this week's discussions. This year the world's population will reach 7 billion, with the largest generation of young people ever in history. In fact 1, 8 billion young men and women are entering into their sexual and reproductive lives this year. This brings us to a whole new level of challenges in terms of fertility, reproductive health and development. One of the most effective means to face these challenges is education.

Mr. Chair and participants,

It has been estimated that one additional year of schooling can reduce female fertility by 5-10%. An educated woman is also more likely to educate her children, and have opportunities to be engaged in paid employment. Employment, in turn, has positive effects on the social and economic development of a community, and on poverty alleviation.

¹ abortions: 20/1000 15-19 year old girls in 1975 to 10,7 in 1994; teenage deliveries from 27.5/1000 to 10

² In 2009 the number of adolescent abortions had gone down to 12,8 per 1000 and the number of teenage deliveries down to 8,5 per 1000 15-19 year old girls

However, this positive cycle is not possible without access to information about sexual and reproductive health and rights. Adequate provision of contraceptives is also essential.

It has been estimated that each dollar used in family planning saves 31 dollars on other sectors. The need for contraception is likely to rise with the growing number of young people. All individuals, including unmarried and young people, have a right to decide freely and responsibly on all matters related to their sexuality and reproduction free of coercion, discrimination, and violence.

Mr. Chair and participants,

Whilst education for men and women, boys and girls is essential in addressing the demographic challenges ahead, there are further commitments to be made.

Firstly, the current demographic climate requires the achievement of the goals and objectives set out in Cairo seventeen years ago. Next year the ICPD will be an 'adult'. Finland strongly supports the reaffirmation of the General Assembly resolution (65/234) to extend the ICPD beyond 2014. Our hope is that you, distinguished participants, will do the same, without reservation.

Secondly, the reaffirmation to ICPD requires not only the commitment of the UN and its member states, but also participation of civil society organizations, including youth organizations in preparing for ICPD at 20 and at the UN Special Session.

The CPD is an important global forum for discussing these issues equitably and in a supportive spirit.