

## 45<sup>a</sup> Session on Population and Development

### “Proposals for improving public policy and investment in risk prevention among adolescents”

Thank you Mr Chairman

The protection of the human rights of adolescents is in line with respect for their dignity as persons and their ability to participate in improving their society. The evidence provided by social research indicates that there is an important link between access to health care and education and economic growth in a country. Investing in human capital to improve access to preventive health care, and educational coverage and quality lead to a more capable and productive adolescent population with greater potential for economic and social development. This type of action reduces the social cost of palliative measures (social rehabilitation centers, costs related to maternal and child health and addictions and low productivity, among others), in addition to reducing poverty and inequality.

Under this context, **Mision Mujer-AXIOS A.C.** in behalf of its experience working with adolescents in Mexico proposes the next recommendations for enhancing public policies and investment in favor of the development of adolescents:

Introduce a **positive image of adolescents**, derived from the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that recognizes them as persons with dignity that constitute the human capital of a country, by promoting successful experiences where they are the protagonists.

Promote and support adolescents in **developing a life plan** in line with their aspirations, needs and environment, offering and connecting them with the opportunities for study, health care, job training and cultural and social development that allow them to enhance their quality of life and shared responsibility in society.

Acknowledge the importance of **adolescent participation and engagement** in various processes, involving them in the design, follow-up, implementation and evaluation of public policies that concern them;

Promote **freedom with responsibility** in a way that recognizes adolescence as a process of ascent through interdependence and autonomy, encouraging adolescents to use their freedom responsibly, making them aware of the consequences of their actions and committing to respect the freedom of others.

Prioritize the creation and operation of **psychosocial risk-prevention programs for adolescents** based on life skills. The World Health Organization itself suggests that such programmes can help promote health and self-care, prevent psychosocial problems, prevention of violence, addictions, (in specific the abuse of alcohol, drug and the implementation of a legislation for the control of arms, that is because these are the main factors that cause death between the youth of Latin America and Caribbean), also the early sexual activity and adolescent pregnancy, among others,

Promote policies that **support for family and school** as necessary forums for the protection and development of adolescents. Several studies on the factors that protect at-risk adolescents from early sex, violence and drug abuse show that adolescents who come from broken homes are more vulnerable to these risks, hence the urgent need to promote actions to strengthen the family as

one of those factors. School also provides an ideal opportunity to protect and gain leverage with adolescents; it empowers the student to know, understand and better himself, and to possess the skills needed to enter the workforce in the near future.

A key element in increasing the effectiveness of these programs is the **activation of networks for the protection of adolescents**, in which families, schools, civil society organizations, businesses, authorities and anyone who is in any way involved with adolescents collaborate on a joint project in order to reduce the risk factors that affect the adolescents in a given community.

Plan strategies to protect **the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents**, where the chief recommendation would be to encourage delaying the start of sexual relations, because during this age there is an increase in the relation between adolescents and STDs and unplanned pregnancies. On this subject, it is important to conduct additional research and raise awareness about the *sexualization of adolescent* women and men in their social context, which has harmful emotional and psychological effects, leads to diminished cognitive abilities and educational performance, harms the development of healthy relationships and incites violence, in particular violence against women, in addition to reinforcing stereotypes that result in low self-esteem and depression.

Pay special attention to the issue of adolescent mental health, given that there is presently great demand for a forum (such as that provided by the Axios Program) where adolescents can be heard and receive psychological care and, in the event that a serious problem is detected, a referral to the relevant entity.

Finally in behalf of all the adolescents that Axios works with we want to insist in the importance of the countries to invest in the prevention of the risk of psychosocial problems during adolescence as a reason to find more effective solutions to the main problems of this age group joined to the idea that it would create a lower economical cost rather than implementing palliative measures.

**Mision Mujer A.C.**