

Statement of Rutgers WPF and CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality on the 45th session of the Commission on Population and Development

Mr. Chairperson, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am a young person reading this statement on behalf of Rutgers WPF and CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality. We call upon all Member States **to stop ignoring and start enhancing investments** in youth and adolescents.

Currently the largest generation of young people is entering sexual and reproductive life¹ and in many parts of the world our sexual and reproductive rights are being denied. We need:

- Rights-based Comprehensive Sexuality Education;
- Youth Friendly Services;
- Freedom to enjoy our sexuality free from stigma and discrimination;
- And to ban early and forced marriages

A good and healthy life begins with being able to make free and informed choices. It is time to realize that youth and adolescents **are** sexually active. We have the right to comprehensive sexuality education. I remember that in high school I got taught how to put on a condom, got information on sti's, and how to say no to peer pressure. Comprehensive Sexuality Education gave me the tools to make informed decisions concerning my own life, relationships and body. **We call upon all Member States to make sure that young people receive evidence and rights-based Comprehensive Sexuality Education, both in and out of school, and that social barriers that restrict our access are lifted.**

We have the right to have access to Youth Friendly Services. Youth Friendly Services are health services that are based upon an understanding of what young people want, rather than what providers believe we need. They are based upon the different realities of young people's daily lives. **We call upon all Member states to ensure all youth and adolescents have access to safe and affordable youth friendly health services.**

Sexual diversity is a reality and not something debatable. And yet the human rights of LGBTQI Youth is being denied, as there are 76 countries in this world where sex between two adults of the same sex is subject to persecution. This means that they have to live their lives in fear, denying who they really are. This also means that access to sexual health services are often denied to them. We support the Secretary-General in his call on March 7th of this year **upon all member states to immediately decriminalize consensual same sex relationships, ban discrimination and to educate the public².**

It is unbelievable that in many parts of the world girls are being forced into marriage, even when they haven't reached the age of 18 yet. This has devastating effects on the development of a young girl's life. They are forced into early sexual relationships, and become pregnant when their bodies and minds are not ready. A majority of them is also denied the chance of a secondary education. With little access to education and economic opportunities, they and their families are more likely to live in poverty. **We call upon all Member States to ban early and forced marriages and to set the minimum age of marriage to 18 for both sexes.**

¹ UNFPA: Dispatch on International Youth Day and Year, August 2010.

² http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtxU9iOx348&feature=player_embedded

So, How do we ensure

- The access of all young people to Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Youth Friendly Services?
- The freedom of all young people to enjoy our sexuality free from stigma and discrimination?
- And bringing early and forced marriages to a definite end?

Only, through meaningful youth participation!

We can only achieve actual improvement of our daily lives - on a country level - when we can co-decide. We need to participate in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs and policies that affect our lives. It is then that they are really effective; when adapted to our needs. **We therefore call upon all Member States to ensure our meaningful participation in decisions that affect our daily lives**

To invest in the sexual and reproductive health and rights and empowerment of youth and adolescents, is to invest in the rights and health of the whole community, and is an investment in a country's development. Sexual and reproductive rights are the basis of development, not the end.

I remain by urging all of us to invest in working together: We call upon all Member States, the UN, Civil society and young people to increase strategic collaboration up to and beyond 2014, to make the PoA a reality on the ground. This needs to happen today, as we won't be young anymore tomorrow.

Thank you