

Statement submitted by Advocates for Youth

Nearly half of the world's population nearly 3 billion people are under the age of 25. About 85% of the world's youth live in developing countries. The Programme of Action recognizes that all individuals have the right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and to do so free of discrimination, coercion and violence. While there has been much progress towards realizing the Programme of Action, the facts tell us that there is still much left to achieve, particularly for young people:

It is estimated that almost half of the maternal deaths due to unsafe abortion in the developing regions are young women aged 24 and under.

Worldwide, approximately 16 million women and girls ages 15 to 19 give birth each year, accounting for approximately 11 percent of all births worldwide. In developing countries, complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death.

Almost 14 percent of all unsafe abortions in developing countries are among women under 20 years of age. In addition to death, unsafe abortion can result in lasting and devastating consequences, including sepsis, perforation of the uterus or intestines, hemorrhage, chronic pelvic infection, and infertility.

Young people, 15 to 24 years old, accounted for 40% of all new HIV infections worldwide in 2008.

Every day about 500,000 young people, mostly young women, are infected with an STI (excluding HIV).

Only 40 percent of all young people have the accurate information to protect themselves from HIV infection.

Therefore, we urge the following actions to be taken immediately:

1. **Youth Empowerment:** Empower young people to demand their rights related to gender equality; rights for women and men to have control over and decide freely and responsibly matters related to their sexuality and reproduction, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, based on mutual consent, equal relationships between women and men, full respect of the integrity of the person and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences.

2. **Comprehensive Sexuality Education:** Acknowledge young people's right to information by promoting evidence-based and rights-based comprehensive sexuality education and counselling, both in and out of formal settings. Effective sexuality education must go beyond biology and include information about sexual and reproductive health, including condoms and other contraceptive services and commodities; gender equality; healthy and positive

aspects of sexuality; relationships; gender-based and sexual violence; gender diversity; healthy emotive processes; human rights; and anti-discrimination. It should reduce barriers & create structured opportunities for young people to explore their attitudes and values, and to practice decision-making and other life skills they will need to be able to make free and informed choices about their sexual lives.

3. Youth-friendly Services: Ensure that youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services safeguard the right of young people to privacy, confidentiality, respect, and informed consent. Such information and services should include access to evidence-based and rights-based comprehensive sexuality education and counselling, and information and services on sexually transmitted infections, sexual abuse, contraception and family planning services and commodities, pregnancy, and safe abortion. Design customized integrated sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS programs and services for youth and adolescents that are based on their expressed needs, especially including youth living with HIV. Eliminate legal, cultural and religious barriers that restrict young people's access to essential services, such as parental and spousal consent, age of consent and issues of confidentiality.

4. Diversity: Acknowledge and respect the diversity amongst young people, including but not limited to sexual orientation and gender identity, ability, education level, and experience. Promote and support youth-specific research, age- and gender-disaggregated data and the development of programs, together with young people, that take these criteria into account. Work to eliminate discriminatory policies and harmful traditional practices against young people, and in particular young women, girls and LGBTQI.

5. Youth Participation: Ensure that young people, including in- and out-of-school, disabled, and displaced youth, are actively involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development activities that have a direct impact on their daily lives. Invest in young people through mentoring programs, capacity-building initiatives and equal youth-adult partnerships while insuring the right to legal protection for youth people to freely express their opinion and organize.

6. ICPD and beyond: Support the initiative made during the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly to further the goals and objectives of the ICPD Program of Action beyond 2014. Participate in the special session during the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly and recommit to these goals and objectives at the highest political level.

These actions are critical to advancing young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights, overall well-being, and are essential to a post-2015 development agenda.

Sources:

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