championing women’s sexual and reproductive rights

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The Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), along with 50 allies and partners across Asia-Pacific and the globe, welcomes the focus on the theme Assessment of the Status of Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. Almost 20 years after the Cairo Agenda, achieving sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all remains a distant dream in the Asia-Pacific region and is further aggravated by poor and uneven progress, thus affecting marginalised communities adversely.

Sexual and reproductive health indicators in the region remain really low with high maternal mortality ratio at almost 220 deaths per 100,000 live births, high adolescents birth rates particularly in Oceania with almost 62 births per 1000 girls aged 15-19, high unmet need for contraception in South Asia at 16%, followed by Southeast Asia at 13%, and women representing almost 35% of people living with HIV in Asia over the past decade. The attainment of SRHR for all is further exacerbated by lack of basic rights, such as achieving food sovereignty, including food and nutrition security, with the Asia-Pacific region hosting the world’s biggest share of the hungriest people at 563 million. SRHR is further affected by cross-region migration with 27.5 out of 214 million international migrants in Asia in 2010. Women constituting a large part of this population are affected with restrictions on mobility, screenings for pregnancies and STIs, including HIV, often without their knowledge or will. The Asia Pacific region also presents great diversity in topography which unfortunately makes the region vulnerable to climate change, thus aggravating the socio-economic divide and leading to food insecurity and gender-power hierarchies and posing increased risk for early marriages, sexual harassment, trafficking, STIs including HIV and AIDS, and rise in gender-based violence. Growth in religious and political conservatism and fundamentalism across countries in the Asia-Pacific region, leading to rolling back of significant policy successes in the SRHR agenda, have also affected women adversely through practices, such as early marriages, often leading to early, unwanted and frequent pregnancies, female genital cutting, and inadequate access to sexuality education and services, including access to contraception and abortion.

In view of the above challenges, we call on governments and the international community to ensure universality of sexual and reproductive rights; strive for universal access to SRHR information and services; ensure sound accountability mechanisms; review and implement laws and policies; generate evidence through gender-sensitive research; and address effects of religious extremism and increased vulnerabilities to climate change, migration, disasters, poverty and food insecurity. These must be done with particular focus on marginalised groups, including women, young people, sexual and gender minorities, people with disabilities, indigenous people, migrants, ethnic and religious minorities, people living in contexts of disaster, war and conflict, sex workers, people living with HIV and AIDS, and displaced persons, in line with existing international commitments and conventions.

References:
3. UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food Programme. State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012.
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LIST OF ENDORSERS

1. Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Asia-Pacific (Regional)/Global South
2. Action Based Community Development, Myanmar
3. All Women’s Action Society Malaysia (AWAM), Malaysia
4. Ambika Varma, Researcher, India
5. ASEAN Youth Movement (AYM)
6. Asia Pacific Council of AIDS Service Organizations (APCASO), Asia-Pacific (Regional)
7. Asia-Pacific Partnership on SRHR and Sustainable Development, Asia-Pacific (Regional)
8. Asia-Pacific Women’s Watch (APWW), Asia-Pacific (Regional)
9. Asia Safe Abortion Partnership (ASAP), Asia (Regional)
10. Beyond Beijing Committee (BBC), Nepal
11. Bihar Technical Assistance Support Team-DFID, India
12. Center for Creative Initiatives in Health and Population (CCIHP), Vietnam
13. Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness (CHETNA), India
14. Committee to Promote Women in Politics (CPWP), Cambodia
15. Diakonia Asia Regional Office, Asia (Regional)
16. Federation of Reproductive Health Associations Malaysia (FRHAM), Malaysia
17. Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), Fiji
18. Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC), Cambodia
19. Housing Rights Task Force (HRTF), Cambodia
20. Kachin Women's Association, Thailand
21. LGBT Centre of Mongolia
22. Likhaan, the Philippines
23. MAP Foundation, Thailand
24. MASUM, India
25. MONFEMNET National Network of Mongolia, Mongolia
26. Narimah Awin, Maternal Mortality Advocate and Researcher, Malaysia
27. Naripokkho, Bangladesh
28. National Alliance of Women Human Right Defenders, Nepal
29. Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER Malaysia), Malaysia
30. Pramada Menon, Queer Feminist Activist, India
31. PT Foundation, Malaysia
32. Regional Youth Moving, Asia (Regional)
33. Reproductive Rights Advocacy Alliance Malaysia (RRAAM), Malaysia
34. Rural Women’s Social Education Centre (RUWSEC), India
35. SAHAYOG, India
36. Shirkat Gah, Pakistan
37. Sisters in Islam, Malaysia
38. Sri Lanka Women’s NGO Forum, Sri Lanka
39. SRHR for All Campaign, Regional
40. Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues (TARSHI), India
41. Tamil Nadu Women's Forum, India
42. Women and Children Crisis Centre (WCCC), Tonga
43. Women's Coalition for Change, India
44. Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture & Natural Resource Management (WOCAN), International
45. Women and Media Collective (WMC), Sri Lanka
46. Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), Nepal
47. World YWCA, International
48. Women’s Health and Rights Advocacy Partnership (WHRAP)-South Asia
49. Women’s Health and Rights Advocacy Partnership (WHRAP)-Southeast Asia
50. Young Women for Change Mongolia, Mongolia