

Statement to the Commission on Population and Development
Acting as Preparatory Committee for the Special Session
of the General Assembly

As written

WOMEN'S COALITION FOR ICPD

**Remarks to the Working Group
Commission for Population and Development
March 26, 1999**

Good afternoon. My name is Vanita Nayak Mukherjee from India. I represent the Women's Coalition for ICPD, a broad-based coalition of 66 non-governmental organizations from every region of the world, both North and South. We come to this meeting of the Commission on Population and Development in a spirit of collaboration and partnership. The Women's Coalition has suggested amendments to the Draft Working Paper and we hope that you will take them into serious consideration.

We are here today to stress three priorities for ICPD implementation. First, the centrality of the human rights framework. Second, sexual and reproductive health. Third, links between health, development and rights.

Our First Priority is the Human Rights Framework.

Governments in Cairo took a very strong stand that population and development policies should give primary importance to respecting and ensuring human rights. This commitment is codified in the ICPD Programme of Action.

Chapter 7 of the Programme of Action strongly affirmed sexual and reproductive health, and reproductive rights, as human rights already recognized in national laws, international human rights treaties and other consensus documents. Chapter 7 also recognized the right to make decisions concerning health and reproduction free from coercion, discrimination and violence.

The Women's Coalition wants to emphasize that the right to sexual and reproductive health must be respected for all groups regardless of age, sex, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, race, marital status, nationality, refugee or immigrant status, or conditions of armed conflict and war.

Our Second Priority is Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

600,000 women die every year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth and 330 million people are infected with STDs every year. It is intolerable for anyone to say that sexual and reproductive health is not a human rights issue.

The Women's Coalition urges all governments to act affirmatively and urgently to end maternal mortality and morbidity. We know how to do it and it does not cost much. Political will makes all the difference. For example, in India, since Cairo, the government is giving more attention to making essential obstetric care, including emergency care, accessible to all women. However, in Argentina, since Cairo, the rate of maternal mortality has increased, because the government refuses to allow access to safe abortion services. Unsafe abortion is the leading cause of maternal deaths in Argentina today.

The Programme of Action calls upon governments, in collaboration with NGOs, to provide adolescents, both male and female, with the full range of sexual and reproductive health information and services, with respect for confidentiality. Nonetheless, as acknowledged frequently in this room, sexually transmitted diseases and infection, including HIV, are increasing dramatically among adolescents.

There are now one billion young people on the planet, many of them sexually active. This is a fact of our world today. Youth representatives are here at the CPD speaking out on their own behalf in a responsible and compelling way. We must listen to them. In their own words, they tell us "sexual and reproductive rights are human rights and therefore also apply to young people."

The Women's Coalition urges governments to give higher priority, and allocate the necessary resources, to meet the needs of all young people.

The Women's Coalition also urges governments to ensure women's right to choose among the widest possible range of contraceptives. Emergency contraception is one of those methods. It is not a form of abortion. The sole purpose is to prevent unintended pregnancy. A woman may need this method for many reasons: because she has been raped; because she fears her contraceptive method has failed; or, because like many refugee women, she has no access to other forms of contraception.

Our Third Priority is Links between Health, Development, and Rights.

For women, good prenatal and obstetric care, safe contraception, protection from **STDs**, and other aspects of health are inseparable from basic needs such as nutrition, education, sanitation, non-toxic environments, and clean water. Rights cannot be divorced from needs. The human **rights** of women, including liberty, security of the person, and development, are only attainable if the rights to decide about fertility and sexuality are respected. Health, empowerment and development are **all** human rights. They form the seamless web of women's realities.

Since ICPD, these realities have become more stark. Globalization has accelerated and the global financial crisis has cast a pall over health and other social sector investments. Failure to reduce or eliminate debt, the negative impacts of structural adjustment policies, military expenditures, and deepening inequalities **within** and across countries have all had devastating consequences for women's health and human rights.

The Women's Coalition calls on developed countries to keep the promises they made in Cairo — to provide their fair share of resources needed to fully implement ICPD. Further, we call on them to take additional concrete steps, such as debt cancellation, taxation of global financial flows, and restructuring international and donor institutions to make them more responsive to human needs.

International donors and the private sector, as well as governments, must be transparent and accountable to the people who are most affected by their policies. They must move from a framework that over-emphasizes growth and profits to one that emphasizes people, human rights, gender equality, and social **justice**.

During our negotiations in this room, we can sometimes forget the realities of women's lives. **It's** in our power to meet the goals set in Cairo. Let us do it — NOW!

Thank you for your attention.

Women's Coalition for the International **Conference** on **Population and Development** (ICPD)
The Women's Coalition for **ICPD** is comprised of 68 **NGOs** from around the **world**.

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