

NEW YORK

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**Re: Oral Statement delivered during the 56<sup>th</sup> Session of the  
Commission on Population and Development**

Thank you Chair.

I am speaking on behalf of the Center for Reproductive Rights which is a global organization that works to ensure that sexual and reproductive rights are protected in law as fundamental human rights for the dignity, equality, health, and well-being of every person.

The right to education is essential for the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity and is essential for the fulfillment of other rights including the right to health. The ICPD Programme of Action calls upon governments to take actions to close the gender gap in primary and secondary education and to provide formal and informal education about health issues, including sexual and reproductive health, to protect and promote the well-being of adolescents. Yet, while the past several decades has seen vast improvements in education worldwide, gender remains a primary indicator of educational attainment, which in turn prevents girls from fully enjoying their rights and perpetuates cycles of inequalities and discrimination. For adolescents to be able to utilize education, it must enable them to make meaningful decisions about their lives and their bodies without undue influence, impediment or coercion: however, several challenges prevent them from making such decisions.

Every year, millions of girls are forced to drop out of school due to pregnancies and the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated this situation. Many countries have policies and practices that mandate the mandatory expulsion of pregnant girls from schools and lack policies and programs that support their re-entry after

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childbirth. Early pregnancy and childbearing can also have social consequence for girls, including reduced status in the home and community, stigmatization, and early and forced marriage.

Comprehensive sexuality education or CSE is a critical component of the rights to education, especially for girls. Evidence indicates that CSE contributes to the prevention of HIV, gender-based violence, adolescent and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortion, and maternal mortality. This information should be accessible to all adolescents including those that are in and out of school. As with any type of education, providing comprehensive and scientifically accurate information at this stage when adolescents experience rapid growth and development has many long-term effects on their social, emotional, and motivational tendencies that extend across the life span. As girls bear the physical burden of unplanned pregnancy, denial of CSE can result in their inability to complete their education, and a violation of their rights. In addition, lack of CSE hinders the realization of their human rights by inhibiting their knowledge about, and thereby access to, essential and life-saving sexual and reproductive health services. Besides lack of information, restrictive legal environments, parental consent requirements, lack of youth-friendly services among others hinder adolescents' access to comprehensive SRH services including contraceptives and safe abortion services. These challenges are heightened when it comes to those that are facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination including those in conflict and humanitarian settings.

We, therefore, call on Member States to protect, respect and fulfill their human rights obligations, including their obligations in regards to sexual and reproductive rights, by taking policy and programmatic measures to facilitate the continued enrollment of pregnant girls and young mothers in formal schools, provide comprehensive and scientifically accurate sexuality education, and universal access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services including contraceptives and safe abortion services.

Thank you.

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