



## Commission on Population and Development – 56<sup>th</sup> Session

### Oral Statement

*Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates*

I make this statement on behalf of Plan International, an INGO that works to advance children's rights and gender equality in over 75 countries.

Right now, 129 million girls are out of school with severe implications for their future. For girls in crisis settings, the situation is particularly dire, with covid having exacerbated this.

Poverty, child, early and forced marriage and unions, unintended pregnancy, sexual and gender-based violence and inadequate menstrual health facilities are key causes of school drop-out, underpinned by harmful social and gender norms which value girls less than boys, reducing adolescent girls to their reproductive ability. Discriminatory school re-entry policies compound the issue with adolescent girls who are pregnant, married or a mother being denied their right to complete their education

Conversely, remaining in school leads to many benefits - for communities, societies and girls themselves. Gender-transformative education systems are key to promoting gender equality, transforming harmful norms and reducing gender-based violence, unintended pregnancy and child marriage. They also promote an easier path to self-employment, greater economic stability and significantly increase economic productivity for countries.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education is a critical component of a gender-transformative education. It helps adolescents and young people make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and rights; ensures the agency of girls and young women over their bodies and lives; triggers positive shifts in norms that underpin violence against girls and women; and reduces rates of unintended adolescent pregnancy and gender-based violence. Positively engaging parents and traditional and religious leaders to support inter-generational dialogue can also create an enabling environment for CSE.

Research shows that CSE does not lead to an earlier onset of sexual activity but can delay the age of first sexual experience and positively impact safer sexual practices.

Plan International's research also found that young people want to receive CSE long before they become sexually active and would like to communicate more with their parents. Young people's demand for CSE was also reflected in the Transforming Education Summit's Youth Declaration.

We applaud the progress that has been made to implement CSE since ICPD in many countries and call on Member States to fully implement their commitments and ensure a focus on investment, accountability and the meaningful engagement of adolescents and young people.

We urge the UN and its Member States to invest in gender-transformative education systems which include CSE and eliminate gendered barriers to education. CSE is necessary in and out of school and in times of crisis. It should be part of the national education system, delivered by trained teachers, based on a quality, inclusive, evidence and rights-based curriculum and linked to healthcare services.

*Thank you.*