

Statement at the Commission on Population Development, 2023

By World YWCA

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights are a basic human right of every girl, young woman and woman. Over 214 million women worldwide want, but lack access to, contraception; more than 800 women die daily from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth and same-sex relationships between consenting adults are still illegal in 76 countries. Gender inequality restricts women and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) with women, young women and girls, and gender diverse people unable to exercise their rights to make decisions about their own bodies, sexuality, and health. In addition, many do not have access to the comprehensive health care, information, and services needed to make those decisions. This all has only worsened recently during COVID-19.

As one of the largest women's rights movement, especially faith-based movement, in the world, World YWCA knows that for gender equality to be a reality, all women, young women, and girls must have the right to be safe and live free from fear and violence in all its forms. Protecting girls and women from psychological violence is a key SDG target (5.2). There are multiple international policy commitments including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women as well as multiple UN Human Rights Council resolutions. At least 155 countries have passed laws on domestic violence but challenges persist in enforcing these laws, limiting women, young women and girls' access to safety and justice. With our presence in more than 100 countries and thousands of communities around the world, we know through several on ground women and young women led initiatives that transformative change can happen when we change the negative narrative around SRHR, mental health and bodily autonomy. In this space, there is immense role that faith-based leaders and movements can play to lead these conversations on ground and make shifts in policy dialogues globally. For this to be a reality, we must:

- Recognize young women, girls and non-binary people in all their diversity as autonomous rights-bearers in order to achieve Agenda 2030. By investing in and building young women and girl's leadership, meaningful participation and access to the design, delivery and review of SRHR and mental health policies/services.
- Strengthen opportunities for young women's participation in all levels of decision-making structures to realize and fulfill their human rights and achieve gender equality. This means power-sharing between and among stakeholders so that young people, particularly young women are partners and leaders, rather than beneficiaries.
- Commit to integrating mental health considerations in SRHR policies, including comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and young women friendly services. This means emphasising the importance of accessible, stigma free programs and services for all.

- Recognize and invest in safe spaces online and offline that will enable women, young women, and girls to feel safe, supported, and empowered. This can be achieved through CSE programs.

Global women's movements and faith-based feminist organisations are key to act as a network for community leaders to work together to transform power structures, for an equitable society. World YWCA, as one of the oldest women's rights movement, urges the Member States to heed stories of impact, statistics and evidence from ground and work with women's rights movements and organisations to learn from experience, especially ones experienced recently during COVID-19 recovery and response. We must build spaces where young women, in all their diversities, facing multiple intersecting forms of challenges must be in the driving seat of decision making. We must build on to ensure women, young women and other marginalised genders are at the table- especially around bodily autonomy- not just for their own rights, but for all issues impacting everyone around the world. An intersectional approach around SRHR and mental health for recovery, is the one that will help create a more just and equitable world.