

A rights-based approach to prevention

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Madam Chair, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Full sexual and reproductive health for all cannot be achieved without respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights. We need to ensure a rights-based approach to sexuality and reproduction of all and to comprehensive prevention.

The rights-based approach recognizes and respects all people as sexual and reproductive beings who have the right to correct information, access to services, supplies and education, but who also need to be protected from STIs/HIV, violence, coercion, discrimination, stigmatization and unwanted pregnancies. A rights-based approach calls for the conditions that make it possible for people to live their lives with confidence, pleasure and safety in all aspects of sexuality.

Today, over 50% of young people worldwide are sexually active by the age of 17. Today's young people are increasingly affected with sexual health problems such as teenage pregnancy, early motherhood, unsafe abortions, STIs including HIV and sexual abuse. In addition, young people's suffer from gender inequality, exclusion for being HIV positive and discrimination based on sexual orientation.

A healthy and enjoyable sexual and reproductive life starts with prevention. Access to sexual and reproductive health services, contraceptives, including the female condom, and safe abortion are crucial for all, especially for young people. But it all starts with knowledge and information.

How can people protect themselves and their partner if they don't have the knowledge to do so? How can people protect themselves and their partner against unwanted pregnancy, HIV infection and other STIs without proper knowledge? They can't: it is as simple as that.

Evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education at a young age, covering all those issues, is therefore urgently needed. Comprehensive sexuality education seeks to assist young people in understanding a positive view of sexuality, provide them with information and skills about taking care of their sexual health, and to help them acquire skills to make decisions now and in the future. It also helps to explore attitudes and develop skills in areas as human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behaviour, sexual health, and society and culture.

Comprehensive sexuality education enables choice and promotes safe, consensual sexual behavior. It has shown to delay sexual activity, to improve the utilization of condoms and contraception when sex does occur. It has also been shown that the number of sexual partners do not increase. It is win, win, win and it needs to be scaled up globally.

The world's governments have since 1995 agreed five times that comprehensive sexuality education and health services must be provided to young people: in the ICPD Programme of Action (PoA) of 1994, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), ICPD+5, the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children and ICPD+10. School-based sexuality and reproductive health education is even declared to be a mandatory part of primary and secondary school curricula worldwide to achieve the MDGs. However, these promises have not been fulfilled.

To conclude, investing in young people's SRHR and prevention is a lot cheaper than financing health problems. We need to ensure a rights-based approach to sexuality and reproduction of all. To achieve the PoA and the MDGs, investments and implementation of the access to sexual and reproductive health services, contraceptives - including the female condom - safe abortion and comprehensive sexuality education, especially for young people, are therefore urgently needed.

Thank you.

For more information: www.wpf.org, Yvonne Bogaarts, Head Advocacy Department: y.bogaarts@wpf.org