

Young Women's Health

Statement by Advocates for Youth

Presented to the 44th Session of the Commission on Population and Development on the theme:
Fertility, Reproductive Health and Development

I am presenting this statement, on behalf of youth led NGOs and young people from around the world.

We are firmly in support and call for the realization of all young people's human rights which include sexual and reproductive rights, that must be respected regardless of our age. With this year being the UN International Year of Youth, and as outlined in international commitments, the human rights of all young people should be the priority for the governments, international agencies, policy makers and communities. That's why we are here to share with you our collective voice and message: **Youth Demand Change**.

Young people, in particular young women and girls, are consistently denied their rights to a healthy life. They are disproportionately affected by inequality, poverty and violence and are still bearing the global burden because of the lack of policy, programmes and services that recognize their rights or address their diverse experiences and needs. Young people accounted for 40% of all new HIV infections among adults worldwide, and in sub-Saharan African 76% of young people living with HIV are female.

Gender inequality and discrimination against young women and girls deprives them of their sexual and reproductive health and rights. In particular most affected young women including young women living with HIV, young woman living in rural areas, LGTBQI young women, young women who use drugs, and young sex workers are denied their rights, face stigma and lack access to services.

The ICPD Programme of Action states the right to accessible Sexual and Reproductive Health services and education for all young people. Young people, in particular young women, are being failed by governments who committed through the Programme of Action to protect young people's rights and health, yet continue to deny them access to safe and affordable sexual and reproductive health services, contraception and access to information and education.

About 16 million young women aged 15 to 19 give birth every year. Complications during pregnancy, unsafe abortion or childbirth are the leading cause of death for young women this age in developing countries. Young women and girls who face early marriage encounter serious complications, like maternal death due to unsafe abortions, particularly among women younger than 24 in the developing world. Many of these deaths can be prevented with access to contraceptive information and services.

- Realising the Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights of young women is essential to development and ensures that all women can enjoy their sexuality and live a pleasurable life free from violence, coercion, and discrimination.
- Governments must promote and guarantee young women and girls human rights, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights, through funding and implementing programmes and policies that empower young women and girls and provide them with the comprehensive package of sexual and reproductive health information and services they need.
- Stakeholders must invest in young women's leadership by utilizing evidence- based strategies so they can be effective actors in programs and policies. Young women, including in- and out-of-school, disabled, and displaced girls and adolescents, must be meaningfully engaged as equal partners at all levels of planning, implementation, and evaluation of development activities that have a direct impact on our daily lives.
- Young women must be given full access to comprehensive sexuality education as well as confidential, non-judgemental, affordable, and accessible sexual and reproductive health

services including: contraception, safe delivery, HIV and STI prevention and treatment, and legal safe abortion services.

Health systems that work for young women work for everyone. To quote UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin "Investing in the health and rights of women and young people is not an expenditure; it is an investment in our future!"

In conclusion, on behalf of young people around the world, we demand that Member States ensure our meaningful participation in decisions that effect our lives, in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the ICPD Program of Action and other international commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals. Whilst we recognise that progress has been made, renewed commitment to SRHR is essential, with young people's rights at its centre. To invest in the sexual and reproductive health and rights and empowerment of young people, is to invest in the rights and health of the whole community, and is an investment in a country's development. Only if these actions are taken, and commitments are met, can young people lead healthy lives of which sexuality is a positive and enjoyable aspect.

Youth Demand Change!