

Honourable chair, esteemed delegates,

My name is Lotte Dijkstra, I am 21 and I am Dutch Youth Ambassador for sexual and reproductive health and rights. I am part of my delegation because my government values the opinion of youth and recognizes the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights for young people.

The theme of this conference, is a theme that very much concerns young people. The post-2015 development agenda offers an opportunity for a better future, a future in which today's young people will live. Young people have a fundamental right to meaningfully participate in all stages of decision-making and programming, particularly when the decisions that are being made affect their lives. This leads to increased accountability and policy that better meets young people's actual needs. I therefore think it is of great value that my government allows me to participate in this discussion, not despite my age, but because of my age.

It is crucial that the rights of young people are reflected in the next steps of the post-2015 development agenda and that they are meaningfully included in the accountability frameworks, development of indicators and means of implementation at international and national level. If there was ever a momentum and an opportunity for this it is now. Young people's right to health and education are violated on a daily basis and in many countries young people, especially those who are not married, are being denied access to youth friendly services and contraceptives. By the time this speech is over, 135 girls will have been forced into early marriage.

It is not just these challenges though, that make embedding the rights of young people so urgent; there are opportunities too. There is an unprecedented number of 1.8 billion young people on this planet and they can contribute to sustainable development if only we create the circumstances for youth to flourish.

Young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights are crucial in this respect. When young women can avoid unintended pregnancy and have control over their own life, their chances to receive education or find a job increase. When young people are free from stigma, discrimination and violence on the basis of their gender identity, sexual orientation and choice of partners their wellbeing increases, enabling young people to achieve their full potential. ICPD has strongly promoted a human rights based approach to these issues, making it all-encompassing for sustainable development.

Young people have a right to information, health and bodily autonomy. Comprehensive sexuality education combines all of these rights. Both my school and my parents have offered me information on sexuality. Thanks to that I know how to keep myself healthy and I am able to decide about my own body, something I desire for all young people. In the Netherlands sexuality education in schools is mandatory. Together with accessible and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, this has led to one of the lowest abortion and unwanted pregnancy rates worldwide.

Another national experience, one we share with all countries, is the reality of gender inequality that becomes most painfully apparent in violence against women. Between the ages of 12-25, 17% of Dutch girls have already experienced sexual violence. I have had friends break down in tears in front of me, telling me their painful story and as much as I would have liked to tell them that it was not going to happen anymore, I couldn't. Because it is still happening, every day, everywhere in the world.

I would like to share my experience as a peer educator. I have often seen young people's relief when their questions regarding sexuality were answered. Partly due to its human rights based approach, comprehensive sexuality education also encourages youth to think

about what issues are important. The questions I heard about this have offered me insight in what topics move youth.

“Why is sexuality shredded in silence? Why do people die of HIV? Why is there sexual violence?”

Many young people will never receive accurate information about sexuality. HIV-related deaths among adolescents are on the rise, in a time when HIV -mortality among other groups is declining. And worldwide, no country being exempt, one in three women will experience physical or sexual violence during her life.

These issues are urgent, and it is time to commit to resolving them. I believe that my peers and I can live to see the day that HIV, unwanted pregnancy and violence against women and girls have become history, if we take action now. I believe that we can boost development, if we connect ICPD and Post-2015, if we commit to comprehensive sexuality education and if we fight for the right of every human being to decide freely over their own body. And I believe that if we as young people are heard in decision making, we can realize the future we want.

Thank you.