



Oral Statement by Imani Marks, Member of the International Youth Leadership Council, Advocates for Youth¹.

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Thank you Mr. Chairman,

With half the world's population under the age of 25, investing in the health and development of the largest generation in history of young people is an urgent priority now more than ever. We would like to take this opportunity to emphasize the importance of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights for all young people and the vital role young people play when meaningfully engaged in all levels of decision-making.

Despite considerable progress since the ICPD, millions of people, mostly women and youth, still lack access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are inalienable human rights, indivisible from others, yet by too many governments, they are not recognized as such. Lack of the recognition of these rights as a crucial part of an individual's well-being and a central feature of human development must end today.

Advocates for Youth recognizes and upholds the right of adolescents and youth around the world to evidence-based and rights-based comprehensive sexuality education, both in and out of school. Effective sexuality education must include information about sexual and reproductive health, including condoms and other contraceptive services and commodities; gender equality; healthy and positive aspects of sexuality; relationships; gender-based and sexual violence; gender diversity; healthy emotive processes; human rights; and anti-discrimination. It should reduce barriers & create structured opportunities for young people to explore their attitudes and values, and to practice decision-making and other life skills they will need to be able to make free and informed choices about their sexual lives.

¹ A non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council

We respectfully call upon Governments to acknowledge and respect the diversity amongst young people, including but not limited to age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability status, education level, and experience. We also call on Governments to promote and support youth-specific research, including age- and gender-disaggregated data, and to involve young people throughout the development, monitoring and evaluation of programs that effect our lives. We call on all Governments to eliminate discriminatory policies and harmful traditional practices, which disproportionately affect young, in particular young women, girls and those with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions.

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development recognizes the right of all individuals to decide freely and responsibly on the number, timing and spacing of their children and to have access to the information and means to do so free of discrimination, coercion and violence. Adolescents and youth face particular social, economic, cultural and legal barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health-related information and services. Governments' refusal to address these barriers and failure to recognize young peoples' sexual and reproductive health and rights is a violation of our basic human rights.

All adolescents and youth have a right to sexual and reproductive health, to live free from violence and coercion and to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights. Youth involvement, comprehensive sexuality education, youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, an enabling legal and sociocultural environment and the recognition of youth diversity are critical to ensuring a world where young people lead healthy lives and where sexuality and reproductive health are positive and enjoyable aspects of being human.

Thank you.