



Finland to the UN Security Council in 2013–2014

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Agenda item 4: General debate on national experience in population matters:
adolescents and youth

Statement by

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The theme for this year's meeting – adolescents and youth – is extremely important and relevant. It encompasses many issues paramount to human rights, development and well-being.

Young people are the most important resource for global development. Enhancing their capacities yields large returns. We need to provide them, especially girls and young women, the education and services they need, and ensure that they are part of society in all aspects. Young people need to know, understand and be able to enjoy their right to healthy life, education, training, and decent work.

The largest generation of adolescents ever in history is now entering sexual and reproductive life. They need adequate and youth-friendly information, education, services and commodities. The needs of young, unmarried people – including their unmet need for contraception and family planning – must be recognised, counted for and acted upon. Information and services for those outside formal schooling and employment is needed. Youth friendly services must be targeted also to those marginalised, and hardest hit by poverty.

Human rights form the basis of Finland's development policy. Equality, human development, and political and economic participation are at its core. In all countries, these are crucial prerequisites for development. Finland continues to promote the rights of adolescents and youth to sexual and reproductive health services. Their full participation in decisions concerning their own well-being and future are essential. Boys and men must be involved in discussions concerning sexual and reproductive health services and rights.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents and youth can be advanced by providing information and services that are appropriate, affordable, accessible, and integrated into a sustainable and comprehensive response. Combined with privacy and confidentiality, they create the framework needed for developing a positive self-image and the life skills to build healthy relationships and families based on respect and responsibility.

Promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights, including maternal and child health services, is a central means in strengthening human development. Preventive health, and strengthening primary health care and health systems is key. They need to be integrated into national policies and programmes, and financial instruments. Health services should be accessible to all, including the poorest and most vulnerable groups.

'Health in all Policies' (HiAP) is our approach. Policies and decisions in all sectors need to consider health impacts. It is good to recognize that providing healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health services, also makes economic sense, by promoting productivity and inclusive economic growth in the long run.

Comprehensive sexuality education and information is crucial for all young people, for making sound choices, and for dispelling myths and sexual stereotypes. It is essential for preventing sexism, and discrimination against people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or living with HIV. It prevents behaviours that lead to gender-based violence, and increases protection against sexual abuse and sexual violence associated with STIs and HIV.

Impact on behaviour is best when comprehensive sexuality education is curriculum-based, and supported by relevant school-wide policies or guidelines.

Comprehensive sexuality education promotes equitable gender norms and the empowerment of young women and men. It is effective beyond the prevention of high-risk behaviours. If it is gender-focused and rights-based, it can improve the general well-being of young people. In Finland we have evidence that giving young people a possibility to take responsibility and make their own informed decisions on their sexual and reproductive health leads to positive results. It does not increase promiscuity or teenage pregnancies. Instead, it leads to decreased numbers in pregnancies and abortions, and raises the age for first sexual encounters.

Finland has been considered a model in reproductive health and education. This is the result of enlightened political decision-making, the integration of reproductive health into general education, and a focus on health services – especially for the young. Investing in young people is one of the most effective and cost-effective ways to promote health. Sexuality education in Finland has been part of the school curriculum since 1970. In addition, reproductive health services for adolescents have been introduced. Most young people have access to school and student health services, and extensive information about sexual health is available. A phone service directed to boys has proved popular.

Non-governmental organisations are important sexual and reproductive health service providers. They have pioneered in innovative ways to provide services for easily marginalised groups, such as sexual minorities. Involving political decision makers and leaders in discussions on population and development, and sexual and reproductive health and rights is important. In our delegation at this session of the Commission on Population and Development we have both civil society and parliamentarians represented.

Investment in young people's education, health and employment helps promote social and economic development and reverse intergenerational poverty. Educating girls and providing services that enable reconciliation of work and family life will have a positive effect on national economies. Improving young people's access to comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services is not only important for their health and well-being – it's also an investment in development.

Finland is committed to the full implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action. Our strong support to the important work of UNFPA, and other organisations working in this field, is a demonstration of this.