

Oral Statement by Ipas
at the 45th Session of the Commission of Population and Development on the theme:
Adolescents and youth
April 2012

My name is Cecilia Espinoza, I am from Nicaragua and I am speaking on behalf of Ipas, an international NGO working with local, national and global partners to ensure that women can obtain safe, respectful and comprehensive abortion care, including counseling and contraception to prevent future unintended pregnancies. Young women especially are often seriously harmed by the lack of such care. I would like to tell you about one of them today.

In 2009, L.C., a 13-year-old girl living in Peru was raped. When she discovered she was pregnant, L.C. jumped from the roof of her house in an unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide. Due to her injuries, she needed surgery, but doctors would not perform it because she was pregnant, nor would they allow her access to a therapeutic abortion, although that would have been legal.

It was only after L.C. had a miscarriage that doctors were willing to give her the surgery she needed. L.C. was operated on nearly three and a half months after her injuries. Due to her condition, she is still unable to attend school.

When the United Nations Committee that reviews CEDAW considered her case, the Committee concluded that the State must establish a mechanism for effective access to therapeutic abortion in a manner that protects the physical and mental health of women and prevents the future occurrence of similar violations.

In 1994, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo established important agreements for human development for young people, especially young women, and further progress is needed to achieve full recognition of the sexual and reproductive rights of young people.

Pregnancy and childbirth-related complications continue to be one of the leading causes of death for women ages 15 to 19 (Rowbottom 2007). The United Nations estimates that more than 14 million young women give birth each year, and over 90 percent of these young women live in developing countries. Prevention of young women's unwanted pregnancies is essential to reduce pregnancy and childbirth complications and death. If contraception were accessible and used consistently and correctly by women wanting to avoid pregnancy, maternal deaths would decline by an estimated 25 to 35 percent (Lule, et al. 2007).

It is important to recognize the progress made over the last decades on comprehensive sex education, access to contraception, and legalization of abortion. But there is still much to do. For this reason, we demand of governments to respect, protect and uphold the sexual and reproductive rights of all young people.

In this regard, governments should promote education for adolescents and young people both in and outside of the school system, and access to science-based information and counseling services to prevent unwanted pregnancies. At the same time, it is essential to support parents so they have the information and communication tools necessary to guide their children during adolescence and youth, while respecting their ability to make decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health.

It is equally important that adolescents and young people have access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care, including safe and legal abortion. The CEDAW Committee recommends that education and training programs for health professionals address attitudes and behaviors, which affect service provision to adolescents. Despite this, adolescents and young people continue facing judgmental provider attitudes. Other barriers to care - including those related to consent by parents or partners - should also be removed in order to expand access to services such as HIV testing, contraceptives and condoms, and abortion. We request of governments to implement youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services that are accessible to all adolescents and young people. Services should be provided in a manner that respects adolescents' and young people's evolving capacities and privacy.

We further ask governments to develop and implement strategies to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as trade and trafficking in children and adolescents. Young people need to develop and live their lives free from psychological and physical consequences.

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, it is critical to hear and include young people's voices in the development of these different strategies. Active and meaningful youth participation helps to ensure that programmes and projects designed for this population will successfully meet their needs.

References

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