



Commission on Population and Development
Forty-fifth session

Item 4
General debate on national experience in population matters:
Adolescents and youth

New York, April 24th 2012

Presented by Mrs. Ursula Funk, Senior Adviser

Mr. President,

The Swiss delegation would like to thank the Secretariat for the excellent reports in preparation of this session.

Adolescents and youth are full of hope, aspirations and energy to contribute to the advancement of our societies. Yet they face many challenges in this period of their lives. Let us do our best to help them develop their potential, become productive, caring and happy adults with good ethical values and capable to show solidarity with the vulnerable and disadvantaged. Priority has to be given to quality education, skills development and universal access to health for **all** adolescents and youth. Let us ensure that young people have professional training opportunities and can find decent work to be able to become economically autonomous and make positive contributions to society. Let us address persisting gender gaps in education, training, employment and remuneration to ensure that girls and young women enjoy equal opportunities and rights along with their male counterparts. As the recent report on gender by the World Bank demonstrated, gender equality is not only a question of social justice, it is also a way to sustainable economic development for all.

Mr. President,

As the reports of the Secretary-General and our experiences in international cooperation have shown:

- with the influence of modernization, many boys and girls engage in sexual activities at an early age;
- many young people do not have access to information about sexuality and methods of contraception;
- many girls, young women and boys are victims of sexual harassment or rape;
- many girls and young women get pregnant without having planned it;
- some parents force girls to marry early, not because of tradition, but because they are afraid that they get pregnant out of wedlock;

The consequences of these facts are that many girls and young women can no longer go to school because of early pregnancy, or undergo unsafe abortions because of forced or unwanted pregnancies, or suffer from fistula or die because they are too young to deliver children safely.

Many girls, young women and boys are dramatized because of these experiences.

We can deny these realities or we can decide to do something to end this unnecessary human suffering.

Ensuring that all adolescents and youth have access to information about sexual and reproductive health, that they have access to youth-friendly health services including counseling and means of contraception, ensuring that adolescent girls and young women can finish their education and professional training, and that they do not have to marry before they want to, is the way to go. Several conventions and international agreements such as the CRC (Convention on the rights of the Child), the ICPD and the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women affirm the human rights of adolescents and youth.

Adolescence sets the course for the development of healthy and responsible behaviors. It is also a period of changing risk-taking and vulnerabilities. In Switzerland these risks concern predominantly the abuse of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and the exposure to sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS. Promoting healthy practices during adolescence, and taking steps to better protect young people from health risks is critical to the prevention of health problems in adulthood and to the future of health and social systems and sustainable development.

As the testimonies of the youths showed yesterday, they need free access to sexual and reproductive health information and services to be able to make informed decisions. According to WHO, the low numbers of adolescents attending family planning clinics and the high proportion of adolescents presenting themselves late for antenatal care, reflects the reality that young people in many countries are deterred from seeking help at health facilities. Young people tend to be socially and economically more constrained than adults from accessing timely and appropriate advice and care. Common barriers that make young people hesitate to visit clinics are lack of privacy and confidentiality, lack of awareness and knowledge, high costs, socio-cultural norms, status requirements such as being married or mature, inconvenient locations and hours, and negative judgmental attitudes on the part of health care providers.

Some of the services adolescents require are different from those provided for adults and should have greater emphasis on information, psycho-social support and promotive and preventive health services. The most effective youth-friendly health services are provided by

technically-competent, non-judgemental staff, who respect their clients' confidentiality and privacy. Youth-friendly services need to be specifically designed to attract young clients, meet their individual evolving needs and have to be affordable.

Mr. President,

Switzerland engaged in a harmonized process to strengthen youth policy development and is on the verge of adopting it into law. Through its development cooperation, Switzerland is committed to contributing to the improvement of the situation of young people with limited prospects in life such as those affected by poverty, violent conflict, infected with HIV or otherwise disadvantaged. In various programs we support formal and informal education and skills development of poor or disadvantaged youth, many in rural areas, with a particular accent on adolescent girls when gender gaps persist. Support is provided to facilitate the training and professional integration of young men and women. Switzerland supports the development of Youth Friendly Health Services, which include the full participation of young people, peer education and life skills-based education. We also support programs to end violence against girls and women including sexual abuse and coercion.

Mr. President

Switzerland regards young people to be actors in their own right and essential partners in development. Young people have their own visions, know what they need and are generally willing to take over responsibility for their lives. Let us do everything possible to avoid suffering and allow them to realize their dreams.

Thank you for your attention