

Your Excellency, President of the General Assembly,

Your Excellency, Secretary General of the United Nations

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear Civil Society Representatives, Good Afternoon

Thank you, Excellencies for extending this invitation to speak during this International Conference on Population and Development Commemoration of 25 years. Thank you also to UNFPA for their support. It is with great pleasure that I stand here to represent the voice of the civil society organizations that have gone against all odds to contribute to attaining the vision of the ICPD Programme of Action.

I was born 25 years ago in a rural village in Nakuru, Kenya, when the 179 Governments committed to the ICPD Programme of Action in Cairo Egypt. I have little knowledge of its conceptualization, but I have lived through its implementation.

I would like to introduce you to my friend Nyaguthii. Nyaguthii was classmate and home mate and we saw each other on a daily basis 15 years ago. She was a bright and ambitious student. Nyaguthii, myself and many young girls did not have access to comprehensive sexuality education. Unfortunately, Nyaguthii was denied her childhood as she was forced into an early unwanted marriage. She did not have access to family planning services and this resulted in an unplanned family which continues to be a toil on her.

Occasionally I visit her, but the bitterness in her heart is evident. She looks at me and imagines how her life would be if someone would have protected her from the child marriage and exposure to sexual and gender based violence. She was Vulnerable, she was a child and her rights were not respected.

Over the last week and this week, I have been attending the High-level Political Forum to review the Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainable Development Goals are central to achieving ICPD Programme of Action, but we must use a multi-faceted approach. We cannot talk about inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all without comprehensive sexuality education. Without this, our young girls are losing out to teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Lack of access to quality, youth friendly services is a key challenge to the current generation of young people. We cannot achieve SDG8 and 10 if our teenagers become mothers and are destined to carry out unpaid work.

Civil society organizations have played a key role in contributing to the ICPD Programme of Action. We celebrate successful programmes such as Eradication of Female Genital Mutilation in Ethiopia and Kenya. However, the shrinking civic space (and by that I mean the freedom to assemble, associate and freedom of expression) in Africa and across the world has become a key impediment in achieving the commitment made 25 years ago.

Today I speak on behalf of Nyaguthii and other young women and girls who yearn to have comprehensive reproductive care, access to family planning, safe pregnancy and child birth services.

As we look towards the ICPD25 Nairobi Summit in November, in my home town, I therefore call upon you - our governments, United Nations, Donors and all partners - to take action now. You, we, must invest in skills based quality education, health, life skills, livelihood skills, access to finance and meaningful participation of young people.

VIVA AFRICA! VIVA WOMEN OF THE WORLD!