

Speech by Ms. Sanne Thijssen, Youth Ambassador for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands during the session of the UN Commission on Population and Development.

3 April 2017, United Nations Headquarters, New York

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Honourable chair, esteemed delegates,

I am honoured to represent the Netherlands, at 22 years of age, in my role as the Dutch Youth Ambassador for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. As one of the youngest in this room, I have spoken to many young people, organizations and civil servants around the world. Surprisingly, it still takes effort to convince some people of the full potential and ability of young people to decide about their own lives, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights. We need to recognize that we have the largest youth-cohort in history today. In 2050, there will be 1.3 billion young people. They cannot be ignored. They need to be able to influence the policies and programs that affect their lives.

Particularly the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people in humanitarian and crisis situations requires attention and investments. Half of the people living in crisis are under 20 years old.

As they fled their homes and countries, many have seen their family networks, educational and Healthcare structures break down. This leaves them vulnerable to for instance early marriages, unplanned pregnancies and STI infections. Young LGBTIQ require specific attention, as they are discriminated against and experience violence due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Upholding **all** young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights without discrimination of **any** kind, and especially of those living in humanitarian and crisis situations means the difference between pain and prosperity.

Therefore, it is key that young people's right to access sexual and reproductive health information, education and services is guaranteed.

I have seen the effects that fear of judgement and discrimination has on young people: from the youth advocates I spoke to in Benin, who mentioned that unmarried girls in their country do not dare to get contraceptives as they may be viewed as promiscuous by their healthcare providers or storekeepers, to my home country where my dutch peers expressed their embarrassment to ask questions about sex to their friends and family, leading them to lack insight on the risky sexual behaviour they may engage in. By integrating youth-friendly services along with comprehensive sexuality education young people's right to access sexual and reproductive health information, education and services can be fulfilled.

In order to make use of young people's potential to contribute to economic growth, young people need to have control over their sexual and reproductive lives, including the decision if, when and how many children to have. In that way, girls can invest in their education and young women can contribute to the labour market. The changing population structures and accompanying processes, such as aging, demographic dividend and urbanization, call for a stronger integration of young people in equal roles so that they are empowered to improve their communities and to cause positive changes to their societies.

Above all the strength of young people does not only lie in their numbers, but more importantly, in their potential.

Thank you.