

REPUBLIC OF MALTA



Statement by

**H.E. Ambassador Carmelo Inguanez
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Malta
to the United Nations**

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Distinguished Chair
Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen

A prosperous future needs to be accompanied by an inclusive society if we are to ensure a just and fair world where no one is left behind. This is only possible with justice and respect for the rule of law which enable people to live a decent life, with dignity and equality. People who live in fear or are oppressed or discriminated against cannot realize their potential.

The 2030 Agenda takes a holistic approach to addressing the challenges of sustainable development, and prioritizes gender equality as a standalone goal and a cross-cutting issue, without which the overarching aims of the Agenda cannot be realized.

Chair,

Gender inequality persists worldwide, depriving women and girls of their basic rights and opportunities. Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls require more vigorous efforts. A step in the right direction is to mainstream gender equality into our priority areas of action at all levels.

At the national level, Malta has instituted the advancement of human rights, equality and the empowerment of women as inherent aspects of Maltese politics, legislation and way of life. We have invested significant efforts, resources and political capital on the priority issues of gender equality and LGBTIQ rights.

Actions under gender equality include a number of policies and initiatives that fall within economic, education and health policies. These actions accentuate the importance of promoting work-life balance, social integration and the empowerment of women and girls.

Chair,

The ICPD Programme of Action was the first time where the international community committed to the goal of universal access to reproductive healthcare and where a clear link between a woman's right to the information and means to make autonomous decisions about her fertility, and the wider empowerment of

women in every sphere of economic, social and political life was made. Providing women with access to reproductive health care is not just an end in itself but can have a transformative effect on women's vulnerability to poverty, hunger and economic and social discrimination.

Nevertheless, lack of access to reproductive health care remains one of the principal barriers to achieving real gender equality and to ensuring that women are empowered to participate fully in the political, economic and social life of their communities and societies.

Malta is fully committed to providing access for women to reproductive health. The ICPD addresses a wide range of issues relating to sexual and reproductive health, including that of abortion. The ICPD Programme of Action underlines two important principles in this regard; first, that abortion should never be used as a method of family planning and second, that the availability or otherwise of abortion is a matter for decision by national governments in accordance with their national legislative frameworks.

Malta is fully committed to upholding these principles. Our starting point as an international community when we debate the issue of sexual and reproductive health and rights must be a clear acknowledgement that it is for individual member states to determine whether abortion should be part of the range of sexual and reproductive health services that are provided at national level.

This acknowledgement is consistent with the current position in international law. In the absence of any internationally recognised or agreed definition of the parameters of SRHR or SRHS, States are free to define SRHR and SRHS under national law. In this context, Malta wishes to put on record that it persistently objects to any interpretation of SRHR or SRHS under international law as including abortion.

Malta does not agree with the interpretation that the right to sexual and reproductive health services includes an intrinsic right to abortion services. On the contrary, Malta believes in the intrinsic right to health, which can only be achieved through having access to health services. In Malta's view, the right to sexual and reproductive health within the context of the right to health does not include the right to abortion as this goes against the right to life, which is paramount.

I wish to reiterate Malta's strong commitment to a rights-based approach to development and women empowerment. Malta's Official Development Assistance policy attaches great importance to efforts and programmes that combat gender-based violence which include sexual violence, sex trafficking, female genital mutilation and forced prostitution.

Although the path to full gender equality is still a long one, we will continue to emphasise the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Only in this way will we reach our aims of achieving sustainable peace, security, development, economic prosperity and growth worldwide.

Thank you.