

Oral statement to be submitted to the Fifty-Second Session of the Commission on Population and Development by Advocates by Youth.

On behalf of Advocates for Youth and the International Youth Leadership Council, a project thereof, I welcome the opportunity to speak as a youth activist at the 52nd Session of the Commission on Population and Development.

The UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights five critical areas of importance: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. We cannot succeed in these areas of importance or achieve all 17 sustainable development goals without achieving goal number 5 -- gender equality.

At Advocates for Youth, we know that providing access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including accurate and comprehensive sexuality education, for all, is a cornerstone to achieving gender equality. Only with these resources and knowledge can adolescent girls and young women have the freedom to control other parts of their lives and contribute to political and economic progress cited in goals 8 and 16.

Protecting human rights is a key component to realizing gender equality, as the rights of women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities. This means fighting for the right of all people, but especially marginalized populations, to exercise autonomy over their bodies, to live in a safe environment free from violence and discrimination, and to work under safe conditions free of coercion and with fair and adequate compensation.

Ensuring gender equality means ending coercive and harmful practices such as child marriage. However, it also means eliminating policies that prevent people from accessing the aforementioned sexual and reproductive health care services. Governments must commit to ending these policies- - the United States, for example, should repeal damaging policies like the Global Gag Rule, which restricts access to these critical sexual and reproductive health services worldwide, and only serves to disempower women and girls.

In summary, access to comprehensive sex and health education is empowering. When women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities have the ability to exercise their right to make their own health decisions, not only are they empowered, but the whole community is uplifted. When more girls are able to attend school, the economy improves, poverty rates fall, and fewer people go hungry. With this improved quality of life for all people, there is now a renewed ability to focus on sustainable development. And with healthier, happier people, there are more innovators who will help us in our fight against climate change. Only with gender equality will we be able to achieve the SDGs and ensure a bright and healthy future for all citizens -- including young women like me.

Thank you.