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## A Letter from the Editor

Today is the second last day of the 44th Session of the Commission on Population and Development, and as negotiations press on, the situation has taken a negative turn for the progressive young advocates here in New York. Each new version of the CPD resolution is creating more distance between the realities, needs and rights of young people and the policies that could address them. More than ever, it is important that young people work collaboratively and strategize together in order to promote clear and strong advocacy messages that address young people's sexual and reproductive rights.

Earlier this week, the Youth Coalition held a Youth Caucus on Sexual and Reproductive Rights in collaboration with Advocates for Youth, CHOICE for youth and sexuality, Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS (GYCA), and YouAct. In addition to developing a youth advocacy strategy for the CPD, a very important output from the Youth Caucus was the preparation of youth statements, which were delivered mid-week to the Chair of the Commission on Population and Development and the country delegations in plenary. The statements are a collaborative effort of the 40 young people who attended the caucus, representing various organizations and countries, including Peru, Costa Rica, Nigeria, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Ecuador and Zambia.

In this edition of The Watchdog, you can find the full text of the youth statements on Young Women's Health and Rights, and on Comprehensive Sexuality Education, and you can also read the reflections of a few of the young people advocating for change here at CPD.

**We want you to realize our rights – we demand change!**

- Youth Coalition's CPD44 Team



## **Youth Oral Statement on Young Women's Health Delivered in plenary at the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the CPD**

*Presented by Meredith Waters, member Advocates for Youth*

I am presenting this statement, on behalf of youth led NGOs and young people from around the world. We are firmly in support and call for the realization of all young people's human rights, which include sexual and reproductive rights, that must be respected regardless of our age. With this year being the UN International Year of Youth, and as outlined in international commitments, the human rights of all young people should be the priority for the governments, international agencies, policy makers and communities. That's why we are here to share with you our collective voice and message:

### *Youth Demand Change.*

Young people, in particular young women and girls, are consistently denied their rights to a healthy life. They are disproportionately affected by inequality, poverty and violence and are still bearing the global burden because of the lack of policy, programmes and services that recognize their rights or address their diverse experiences and needs. Young people accounted for 40% of all new HIV infections among adults worldwide, and in sub-Saharan African 76% of young people living with HIV are female.

Gender inequality and discrimination against young women and girls deprives them of their sexual and reproductive health and rights. In particular most affected young women including young women living with HIV, young woman living in rural areas, LGBTBQI young women, young women who use drugs, and young sex workers are denied their rights, face stigma and lack access to services.

The ICPD Programme of Action states the right to accessible Sexual and Reproductive Health services and education for all young people. Young people, in particular young women, are being failed by governments who committed through the Programme of Action to protect young people's rights and health, yet continue to deny them access to safe and affordable sexual and reproductive health services, contraception and access to information and education.

About 16 million young women aged 15 to 19 give birth every year. Complications during pregnancy, unsafe abortion or childbirth are the leading cause of death for young women this age in developing countries. Young women and girls who face early marriage encounter serious complications, like maternal death due to unsafe abortions, particularly among women younger than 24 in the developing world. Many of these deaths can be prevented with access to contraceptive information and services.

Realising the Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights of young women is essential to development and ensures that all women can enjoy their sexuality and live a pleasurable life free from violence, coercion, and discrimination.

Governments must promote and guarantee young women and girls human rights, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights, through funding and implementing programmes and policies that empower young women and girls and provide them with the comprehensive package of sexual and reproductive health information and services they need.

Stakeholders must invest in young women's leadership by utilizing evidence- based strategies so they can be effective actors in programs and policies. Young women, including in- and out-of-school, disabled, and displaced girls and adolescents, must be meaningfully engaged as equal partners at all levels of planning, implementation, and evaluation of development activities that have a direct impact on our daily lives.

Young women must be given full access to comprehensive sexuality education as well as confidential, non-judgemental, affordable, and accessible sexual and reproductive health services including: contraception, safe delivery, HIV and STI prevention and treatment, and legal safe abortion services.

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Health systems that work for young women work for everyone. To quote UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin “Investing in the health and rights of women and young people is not an expenditure; it is an investment in our future!”

In conclusion, on behalf of young people around the world, we demand that Member States ensure our meaningful participation in decisions that effect our lives, in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the ICPD Program of Action and other international commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals. Whilst we recognise that progress has been made, renewed commitment to SRHR is essential, with young people's rights at its centre. To invest in the sexual and reproductive health and rights and empowerment of young people, is to invest in the rights and health of the whole community, and is an investment in a country's development. Only if these actions are taken, and commitments are met, can young people lead healthy lives of which sexuality is a positive and enjoyable aspect.

**Youth Demand Change!**

## **Youth Oral Statement on Comprehensive Sexuality Education Delivered in plenary at the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the CPD**

*Presented by Rachel Arinii, member of GYCA from Indonesia*

I am presenting this statement, on behalf of youth led NGOs and young people from around the world. We are firmly in support and call for the realization of all young people's human rights which include sexual and reproductive rights, that must be respected regardless of our age. With this year being the UN International Year of Youth, and as outlined in international commitments, the human rights of all young people should be the priority for the governments, international agencies, policy makers and communities. That's why we are here to share with you our collective voice and message: Youth Demand Change.

Today we are more than 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24 in the world.(1) This is the largest generation of young people in history and they will make critical choices daily that will affect their health, well-being and development. Sexual and reproductive health and rights have a direct influence on all aspects of young people's development and must therefore be prioritized in the development efforts. The ICPD PoA was the first time that young people's human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights were recognized as integral to achieving development.

A crucial part of which is young people's right to information and education on matters related to their sexuality. Comprehensive Sexuality Education empowers young people with the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality- physically and emotionally, individually and in relationships. It is evidence-based, gender sensitive, and grounded in human rights with a holistic view of sexuality within the context of emotional and physical development.(2)

The right to education, including comprehensive sexuality education, is a human right that is being denied to young people all around the world. We continue to face unique and significant challenges in accessing the critically needed information necessary for our development and the fulfilment of our human rights.

Take for example that every year approximately 10 million teenage girls marry, a majority of them without completing secondary education or that every year at least 111 million new cases of preventable STIs occur among young people, while an estimated 5.4 million young people currently live with HIV.(3)

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It is time that we acknowledge the reality that young people are sexually active and we have the right to scientific, rights-based and targeted comprehensive sexuality education and counselling, both in and out of school. Effective sexuality education must go beyond biology and include information about sexual and reproductive health, including male and female condoms and emergency contraceptives and sexual and reproductive health commodities; gender equality; healthy and positive aspects of sexuality and relationships; gender-based violence; and human rights.

We demand that member states ensure that integrate CSE into educational policies for all young people and eliminate legal, regulatory and social barriers that restrict young people - especially young women's access to CSE.

In conclusion, on behalf of young people around the world, we demand that Member States ensure our meaningful participation in decisions that effect our lives, in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the ICPD Program of Action and other international commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals. Whilst we recognise that progress has been made, renewed commitment to SRHR is essential, with young people's rights at its centre. To invest in the sexual and reproductive health and rights and empowerment of young people, is to invest in the rights and health of the whole community, and is an investment in a country's development. Only if these actions are taken, and commitments are met, can young people lead healthy lives of which sexuality is a positive and enjoyable aspect.

### **Youth Demand Change!**

1. UNFPA: Dispatch on International Youth Day and Year, August 2010.
2. IPPF framework on CSE, 2006.
3. WHO: Factsheet on Why is giving special attention to adolescents important for achieving MDG 5?, 2008.

### **Youth Reflections on 44th Session of the CPD:**

Mi nombre es Camilo y soy de Colombia, sin embargo vivo en Costa Rica como refugiado desde hace 9 años producto del conflicto colombiano. Soy parte del equipo de incidencia política de personas jóvenes de la IPPF RHO y esta es mi primera conferencia de alto nivel en la ONU. Sin duda ésta ha sido una experiencia asombrosa que yo describiría en una palabra como desafiante, y la razón es que como personas jóvenes no tenemos acceso directo a ciertas instancias de toma de decisiones, lo que nos obliga a buscar la forma de abrirnos espacio para poder incidir en las personas que sí tienen acceso. Desafiante porque muchas de las causas en las cuales creemos tienen poderosos enemigos que constantemente usan sus influencias para evitar el progreso en el campo de la participación juvenil y los derechos sexuales y reproductivos.

Pero bueno, nadie dijo que sería fácil y es por eso que estamos acá personas jóvenes de todas las regiones para hacer oír las voces de las juventudes de todo el mundo!

*-Camilo Saldarriaga, IPPF's young volunteer, Colombia*

Advocates for Youth is attending the 44th session of the Commission on Population and Development with hopes of promoting and advocating for youth-focused and sexual and reproductive health and rights in the outcome declaration. We are working alongside other progressive youth and organizations in order to promote the inclusion of rights-based language that will be respectful and inclusive of the realities young people around the world face. We hope to see the final declaration with the provision of language around comprehensive sexuality education, the rights of women to choose the timing and spacing of their children, access to youth-friendly services, as well as a rights-based approach to young women's health. We know that the voices of progressive youth will stand together in unison while advocating for these issues that affect young people around the world and that the country delegations will hear our message and show their support for youth around the world.

*-Nickie Imanguli and team, Advocates for Youth*

## Let your policies speak to the 1.8 billion young people of the world

2011 marks a progressive step forward in the realm of population and development, marked by the extension of the United Nation's ICPD Programme of Action (PoA). UN General Assembly Resolution A/65/L.39/Rev.2 extends the ICPD PoA beyond 2014. This is particularly important to me because it reaffirms the progressive language of the ICPD PoA that recognizes the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people as vital to the overall development of any given country.

To my fellow sexual rights activists and me, this means we could still pin our hopes to population and development debates and negotiate for policies based on human rights. Having these discussions alongside the commemoration of the International Year of Youth is not a coincidence but a facilitative platform for young people to make their voices heard in the lead up to 2014.

The next three years will be a time of reflection for all the policy-makers, activists, advocates and development professionals working for young people in the world. Did we deliver on the promises that were made to the young people of the world two decades ago? What did we achieve in 20 years and what more can and must be achieved? Where did we fall short on our commitments, resulting in the further marginalization of some young people?

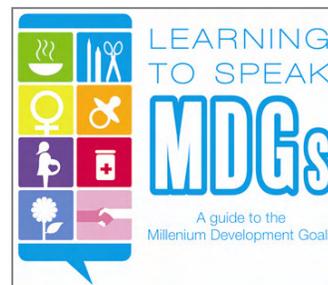
As we say, there has been progress and there has been downturn. What concerns me, however, is that as the number of young people grows in the world, policies related to education, health and employment are not addressing their fundamental rights or the diverse needs and realities of young people. We are told often that young people are a 'cross-cutting' population throughout the development framework. Young people's reproductive health needs are often generalized, and as such, policy responses, especially those directed at young women, don't recognize young people's realities. For example there is a plethora of evidence showing negative implications of not providing comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services on young people's lives throughout the world.

We need to understand that it is during the youthful years of one's life that a human being develops values, attitudes and behaviours related to sexuality. What happens in the later years of a human life is the result of how sexuality is experienced and explored as a young person. Young people need access to comprehensive, accurate, gender-sensitive information about their sexual and reproductive health and rights, it is at this age that we need to provide young people with a complete package of information and services to facilitate the learning process for them to explore their sexuality in a more affirmative and pleasurable way.

These policies will not be able to speak to us, touch us, until they talk about and address our sexual and reproductive health and rights realities!

*-Nida Mushtaq, Pakistan (Nida Mushtaq is on the official delegation of Pakistan to the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the CPD)*

## Publications Available from the Youth Coalition



Learning to Speak MDGs  
2nd Edition



Youth-led Organizations and SRHR:  
A step by step guide to creating sustainable youth-led organizations working on SRHR



*The articles in this newsletter represent the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Youth Coalition.*